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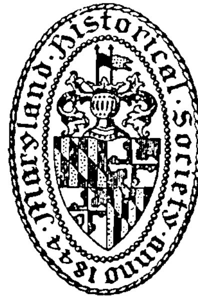

Special Issue: Civil Rights and Race Relations in Maryland

"We Shall Overcome, Someday": The Equal Rights Movement in Baltimore, 1935–1942 261
by Sandy M. Shoemaker

Power from the Pulpit: Baltimore's African-American Clergy, 1950–1970 275
David Milobsky

Civil War on Race Street: The Black Freedom Struggle and White Resistance in Cambridge, Maryland, 1960–1964 291
Peter B. Levy

Research Notes & Maryland Miscellany 319
- Slavery in Worcester County, Maryland, 1688–1766, *by Barry Neville and Edward Jones*
- Rumors of Rebellion: Fear of a Slave Uprising in Post-Nat Turner Baltimore, *by Sarah Katz*
- Serena Johnson and Slave Domestic Servants in Antebellum Baltimore, *by Frank Towers*
- Democracy's Incursion into the Eastern Shore: The 1870 Election in Chestertown, *by C. Christopher Brown*
- An Interview with Gloria Richardson Dandridge, *by Peter S. Szabo*

Book Reviews 359
- Footner, *The Last Generation: A History of a Chesapeake Shipbuilding Family,* by Thomas C. Gillmer
- Dilts, *The Great Road: The Building of the Baltimore and Ohio, the Nation's First Railroad, 1821–1853,* by Harold A. Williams
- Vrooman, *Daniel Willard and Progressive Management on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad,* by Charles W. Cheape
- Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life,* by Edward C. Papenfuse

An Interview with Gloria Richardson Dandridge

PETER S. SZABO

In the summer of 1963, Cambridge, Maryland, made national news headlines when civil rights protests sparked an angry racial conflict. The catalyst for conflict in Cambridge was a black woman, Gloria Richardson. Earlier in the year, Richardson had attended a meeting of the Cambridge City Council. When her turn to speak came, Richardson rose and called for immediate desegregation of public facilities, equal employment opportunities, and the revival of a public housing project in the city's all-black second ward. Words grew heated, and the chamber erupted into a shouting match. Days later, non-violent demonstrations began. Cambridge's spiraling racial conflict was under way.

Gloria Richardson was a forty-year-old mother of two when, in 1962, she assumed leadership of the Cambridge Non-violent Action Committee (CNAC), the organization that had begun to spearhead civil rights activism in Cambridge in 1961. Born in Baltimore in 1922, Richardson grew up in Cambridge in relative affluence, a member of the prominent St. Clair family. Her grandfather, Herbert St. Clair, Sr., was the first black member of the city council, serving from 1912 to 1946. A Howard University graduate in 1942, Richardson recently had divorced and was managing the family drug store when she took over CNAC.

During the summer of 1963, Richardson served as the de facto head of the black community in Cambridge. She organized and led protests, negotiated with political leaders in Cambridge and state government, and brought the demands of the community to the U.S. Justice Department in Washington. In late July, an agreement brokered by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy brought relative peace to Cambridge. Richardson was honored as a Woman of the Civil Rights Movement at the March on Washington the next month. Yet her distance from the mainstream of the Martin Luther King-led civil rights movement was illustrated by her defiant opposition to the September, 1963, referendum on desegregation of public accommodations in Cambridge (she felt blacks should not be voting for rights they already had) and, beginning in November, 1963, by her growing sympathies with Malcolm X, particularly after he left the Nation of Islam.

At the end of summer in 1964, Richardson married Frank Dandridge, a black free-lance photographer who had covered events in Cambridge, and moved to New

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York City along with her two daughters. She then resigned from the chairmanship of CNAC and from the board of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which had helped to organize CNAC.

In New York, Richardson did some part-time work for SNCC and later became an employee at HarYouAct, a Harlem-based organization that administered several programs focusing on youths and poverty for New York City. She went to work for New York City government in the early 1980s and now is an employee of the Department of Aging.

News photographs from the summer of 1963 show her to be slight and graceful. Yet, her deep, dark eyes, permanent scowl, and stiff jaw conveyed the utter seriousness and intellect she brought to the leadership of the Cambridge struggle.

It was that same intensity that I encountered on a cold, rainy February afternoon in 1992 when I interviewed Richardson, then sixty-nine years of age, in her New York apartment. She greeted me with a polite smile and a firm handshake. She wore a white blouse, blue jeans and bright new sneakers. The apartment was neat and modestly sized. I noted a large, framed promotional poster for SNCC, a period piece, on the wall as I sat down. She sat opposite me, I started my tape recorder, and she began to speak. Though she had not lived in Maryland in more than thirty years, her melodious voice still bore easily identifiable traces of a watery, Eastern Shore accent. Throughout the conversation, her cadence would rise steadily and then peak just as she reached something she wanted to emphasize. Interrupted occasionally by an asthmatic cough, Richardson nevertheless exuded energy and punctuated her remarks with animated hand gestures. We spoke for more than two hours.

Excerpts from that interview follow. The transcript was edited down in length so as to provide more focus. Halting words or phrases were removed for clarity.

PSS: *How did you first get involved in the civil rights movement?*

GRD: The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) had come into Baltimore at the request of the NAACP for a direct-action attack on public accommodations in Maryland. In that process, because the governor lived on the Eastern Shore of Maryland in Crisfield [J. Millard Tawes served as Maryland's governor from 1959 to 1967], that Christmas they followed him down the shore all the way into Crisfield and they were coming back. My uncle [Herbert St. Clair] and cousin [Frederick St. Clair] were providing bail bond for those people who were arrested, and that's how they met some of the SNCC people. In the meantime, my cousin told them that Cambridge was pretty bad off in terms of segregation and that they needed to stop there for a while.

So, two of the field secretaries—at that point SNCC had one black and one white—Bill Hansen and Reginald Robinson came and stayed at my uncle's house. I think they had been there almost three or four weeks before I realized they were there, although it was just about a block down the street from me. But I was working,

managing, the drugstore and that was about a twelve-hour day. So, that and running the house, I hadn't really focused on anything else until they came to my door. My uncle told them that if they needed guides . . . my daughter [Donna Richardson] always had a lot of teenagers around. And they came to ask if there were high school students who would be willing to act as guides, which they were. And then they became involved, and they took over the daily picketing—people came in from other parts of the country on weekends. And it pretty much brought the town to, I guess as they say, to their knees.

My oldest daughter was one of the leaders. Parents acted as observers when they went out to demonstrate and what not, and to have some kind of factual base on what was going on. The ministers and the "Negro leadership" at that point decided that, and agreed with the white leadership, that they couldn't negotiate as long as demonstrations were going on and they needed peace. Well, everybody agreed and all the older people that weren't out there at risk proceeded to have peace. And that started lasting one week, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks. The young people got very discouraged. They had been able to plan strategies, have the demonstrations, do the signs, decide where they were going to attack next—and kept their grades up. However, once this happened it was like depression set in and we started sliding. So at that point the people in the community sent me and my cousin's wife [Yolanda St. Clair] down to Atlanta to formalize the relationship between SNCC and Cambridge.

PSS: *Is this when the Cambridge Non-violent Action Committee was formed?*

GRD: Yes, the younger people had become the Cambridge Non-violent Action Committee (CNAC). My cousin [Frederick St. Clair] and Enez Grubb had become chairman and co-chairman. And you had about fifteen people as observers and advisors, adult advisors. Those adult advisors really, once the kids got discouraged, moved in to replace them.

PSS: *So how did you become the head of CNAC?*

GRD: My cousin resigned because he felt it was a conflict between providing bail and being in a leadership position in the movement. And the town got together and asked me to take that position, mainly because they felt that my family could support me and I would not be in that economically vulnerable a position. And I guess that they trusted me. That lasted for almost a year. Enez got sick and had to retire from that position at that point, which left me there. . . .

It was really a community organizing effort. Holding small meetings every week in various places. Organizing the community almost like you would politically, you know, with wards and districts, and this person is the key person in this neighborhood or street and what not. And those people formed what was the executive board of the Cambridge Non-violent Action Committee.

PSS: *Where did the organizational model come from? SNCC?*

GRD: SNCC, yes. Because I don't think we would have been able to do anything. The NAACP, of course, was highly structured. It was then, I assume it is now. And things happened so fast once we started that you would not have been able to sit still and wait until a committee with a lot of people came back with a report, and

wait another month while they acted on it. So there had to be a fluid situation where, yes, you could get input from the community, but yet you could continue to move forward.

PSS: *What were the primary goals of CNAC at that point?*

GRD: Initially it was the public accommodations and recreations facilities, and the pool, and that kind of thing. Over the following—I don't know whether we did that the first thing, I think the second summer—I designed a survey [of the black community] to prioritize what people really needed. And community people and high school students went from door to door with a check off in terms of health problems, jobs, housing, public accommodations also. . . .

Swarthmore students at that time were coming in and out of Cambridge [the connection to Swarthmore was made through Stanley Branche, head of the Chester, Pennsylvania chapter of the NAACP, who was often in Cambridge supporting CNAC], and they took the results and the survey forms back to Swarthmore and the professors there did the correlations and what not. I forget now which was first. What it ultimately meant to us was that we were going to have to attack the whole thing at one time—the housing, the health, because it made very little difference. I think maybe health may have come first and housing second, and schools, but it wasn't that much difference when those compilations came back.

PSS: *Was there any push for voting rights?*

GRD: Well, yes, the first fall we went through a voter registration and education campaign. That was essentially a tactic to show the people in the county and the city, blacks, that it wasn't going to make any difference. They had been voting since the mid-1800s. My grandfather [Herbert St. Clair, Sr.] had been . . . city councilman for about fifty years. . . . In his time I can remember he could get things maybe like parking tickets voided . . . and paroles, and some stop lights, and part of the town paved, and was able because of his relationship with the packing company to see that food came out in the winter when people weren't working. Those kinds of things. And he was a gradualist. So in terms of actually desegregating the schools, and the hospital, and what not, I'm sure it occurred, at least, to argue with somebody, but that was going to take time. . . . And actually there was nobody . . . in north Dorchester [schools]. I think they had one [black] student. . . . All the records that had gone from Maryland up to Washington, I guess from Cambridge to the state, indicated that it was, in fact, desegregated, and it didn't occur to them that it was just desegregated on paper. We had to keep saying, "you go down, you go to schools, you go to places where you see them, blacks, and you don't have any whites." And finally it got through to them that this was just on paper. And they were happy with it on paper, because the burden was on black parents, who worked for the white political people in town, to force the issue of sending their child to another school.

PSS: *In 1963, what role did the U.S. Justice Department play in brokering the agreement to end the June/July stalemate in Cambridge?*

GRD: One of the things that we had was that, because we were close to Washington, that it should be fairly easy, if we could create enough chaos, to attract

their attention and kind of force their hand. . . . And we happily succeeded in doing that.

Robert Kennedy initially, I guess, was probably infuriated. Once he saw the survey and he realized the abject poverty we had, he almost did an about face, and from that time on was very supportive.

PSS: *How was the survey communicated to him?*

GRD: We took it there. And before, people in Cambridge were saying this was a lie. But because the Swarthmore, and I don't remember the names now, the Swarthmore professors were noted sociologists . . . he could not say that this was wrong, and they had validated the instrument in terms of its effectiveness. So, when he looked at the census, of course the census told a different story. The census really wasn't geared to see what a black population [experienced,]. . . it just came out with overall stuff, 9 percent unemployment when actually in the black community it was something like 42 or 43 percent.

Also, [State Adjutant General George] Gelston was in there with the National Guard then and his guardsmen had taken, as he said, they probably weren't integrationists, but they were very annoyed . . . they had to take a lot of punishment from the white community. They threw stones, they spit on them. . . . We felt they were protecting the white community, the white community felt they were protecting us. But in the meantime, because, I guess, of the nature of the older people in the black community, and in the summertime, you know, they would take them lemonade, and cookies, and stuff . . . as long as the guardsmen would maintain their demeanor. . . .

Gelston also became an advocate, and they [the whites] really went to Washington to see if they could get him fired. But they couldn't. Because he was a two-star general in the army and he had relationships with the Kennedys, other Kennedys, and with Sargent Shriver. So, there wasn't anything very much they could do about that. But because of those people, I think, you know, it was very helpful. They'd tell you, "Cambridge was different, it didn't happen like that in the rest of the country," but that is really true.

Gelston did what he had to do and he upheld his end of it, but he also was very fair. And I guess it was like a benevolent take-over.

PSS: *And this was going on one or two months after Birmingham?*

GRD: Yes. Some of it was during Birmingham, because the press . . . would come and ask us, "Why don't you all wait until after Birmingham?" . . . They either covered it or they didn't, you know, I didn't understand what Birmingham did that you would rather move forward or not. And besides, I would think strategically that it would be better for two or three areas to be moving forward at the same time.

PSS: *What role do you think the press played in the Cambridge conflict?*

GRD: Well I think initially they were kind of hostile. . . . So, we went through a process of trying to educate them. Once they started coming in and they began to find out what was really going on, I think their attitude changed so that they delved more into it, and their reporting, even if they didn't agree with how we were doing it, certainly understood that there were problems there that needed to be solved. . . . Also, in the

last year and a half, if they were gonna stay after everything was over they had to stay in the black community. Because they were from the North and they were either Italian or Jewish, or, I guess anything except what they [Cambridge whites] thought they [themselves] were— . . . Anglo-Saxon Protestant. And so they would call them names, all the epithets and what not, and throw things at them too. . . . So now the press is also determined that they're gonna get the story. So they usually were always there, which was really kind of a protection for us, because sometimes they [angry whites] wouldn't do quite the things they had in mind, because they didn't want the cameras to catch them.

PSS: *Was media exposure helpful in raising money, or in getting credibility?*

GRD: We didn't raise that much money. Most of it came from local people. For a while, until I endorsed Malcolm X, we had a little money that came in from a couple of the unions [the Meat Packers and the International Ladies Garment Workers] there that would pay for cleaning and stuff like that. And then they withdrew it because they didn't like my position on that and since I wouldn't go back on it.

We used to have dances in the Elks home. . . . People that did not march or demonstrate would also have suppers and things, or keep people in their house . . . or then they set up their own little spy network. So there were a variety of roles that were not necessarily [high profile]. . . . I think that was difficult at first for the opposition to understand, because they couldn't just go and count the people themselves. They did not realize the network that had gradually been built up.

PSS: *What was the contact with Martin Luther King, if any?*

GRD: It was very little and always negative. Initially when SNCC had first come in . . . we had gone to a meeting and a decision had been made to invite Martin to come to Cambridge to speak and they thought that would be a jumping off point. We wrote, and he sent back that he was very busy, booked for the next couple of years, and that at that time if we still wanted him we would have to have $3,000 . . . which was really a favor as far as I can see now because then we had to do it ourselves, without that prophetic, charismatic . . . leadership. So we did.

About a year and a half later, after the all press got in and Danville [Virginia] also was jumping off [Danville was the scene of a major civil rights fight at that time], he sent word—told the press he was coming in to Cambridge and to Danville to look it over. I don't know what the SNCC people who tried to get along with him said in Danville. . . . But anyhow, I told the press to go back and tell him that I said when he hit the Bay Bridge, not the Bay Bridge, the Emerson Harrington Bridge [now the Frederick C. Malkus Sr. Bridge, which carries Route 50 over the Choptank River near Cambridge], we would be there to turn him back. So he announced he had the flu and he did not come. . . .

By that time everybody in Cambridge . . . realized that he must know this is a small, poor town. And to ask for $3,000 in advance . . . just to come in one day, not to come to organize. And by this time of course SNCC people had exposed themselves, they had gone to jail, they had done a fantastic job also of organizing the northern student movement, and CORE had been in . . . people really respected

the students from SNCC. And they didn't need anything else once the local leadership was developed. Because that was the other thing that SNCC did was to see that local leadership did develop.

PSS: *What were the relationships between the Cambridge movement and the national civil rights organizations?*

GRD: Well, the NAACP was helpful in the beginning. I think my mother [Mable Hayes] and daughter [Donna] and I even have an award from them. In the fall of '61, either the fall of '61 or '62, when we got ready to put black kids in the white high schools and they were supposed to go into federal court and file suit, at about ten o'clock that morning, after those kids were in those schools, they sent us word that the national office told them to stay out. So that was that. We went to Baltimore and convinced the American Civil Liberties Union lawyer that civil rights was not that far from the premises of civil liberties. He agreed to represent us, and at that point we didn't use the NAACP lawyers any more.

That was one break. The second break was when we boycotted the referendum [on the desegregation of public facilities in the fall of 1963]. . . . [The NAACP] sent two field secretaries down here that had already been in to Cambridge to set up whatever they could against the local [black] leadership because they didn't approve of boycotting . . . . And also, SCLC . . . the Cambridge movement wasn't non-violent enough for them.

PSS: *What was the role of non-violence in your thinking at that time?*

GRD: It was purely a tactical thing. There were some people at SNCC that [saw it] really, almost as a religion, and that whole Gandhi concept. I never saw it as that. I saw it as a tactic, because certainly you couldn't start out picking up guns running out in the street or you'd be slaughtered. But, to create as much chaos as you could with it, and if violence was perpetuated against you, that as long as there wasn't a demonstration going on, you had the right to defend yourself. And that is, in essence, what we did. The people that committed themselves to at least tactical non-violence would never fight someone with violence if there were demonstrations. But sometimes it was a fine line, because by the time we would get back, maybe almost into our community, something would break out . . .

PSS: *What was your experience at the March on Washington when you were honored as one of the "Women of the Civil Rights Movement"?*

GRD: Oh, there was a big to-do about that, because they didn't want me there, and then finally, I don't know who, somebody insisted that I would have to be there. . . . The NAACP called me and told me that they didn't want me to wear pants. So I went all over the Eastern Shore of Maryland looking for a jeans skirt—which they didn't have very many of then, though I did manage to find one—and a blouse. [Laughter] I wasn't going to get dressed up.

We got a large group of people that went to Washington. . . . And then when we got up on the stage they had removed my chair. . . . I thought, "I don't even know why I am here." I went in the back because there were some people there and some lawyers that I knew and there were some things we needed done in Cambridge. So I went back to politic. I thought they would just totally forget me, but then somebody

must have said something and they called me [to speak]. . . . I think I opened my mouth, I don't know what I said, but they didn't let me say over five words because somebody from the NAACP took the microphone away from me . . . .

PSS: *What difference did your being a woman and a leader make?*

GRD: [Laughter] I only think about that now. I certainly didn't think about it then. I can remember, I don't even know who they were, people calling me and asking me, "Are you having trouble as a woman?" I thought, "What the hell are they talking about?" And it's not since I had got out of that and came to New York that it began to dawn on me. . . . In Cambridge, because we lived on a day-to-day basis once everything jelled, in a life-and-death, just about, situation, for that period of time at least, gender considerations were not there. . . . I was on a radio show [sometime later] with Roy Innis from CORE, and . . . he said I had castrated him. But that really wasn't true because it was the men that protected the community, and had to lay out in those fields with guns all night. They understood exactly what was going on and so did the women. Those men that thought they could be non-violent enough to go in the marches did. Those that didn't did other things.

PSS: *I want to ask you a little bit about the public accommodations referendum. Why did you choose to oppose the vote?*

GRD: Because I thought that since we were born in this country that we shouldn't have to [vote to obtain rights]. That was the feeling in the community. People liked to say I must be putting these ideas in people's heads, but that really wasn't true. I think it was sort of organic, you know, it was always there. And it came out here. There were Korean and World War II veterans, and they really did not see why they should vote on whether they could go, as they said, into a little greasy restaurant. . . . People really felt that if they were born in this country and they had helped to build the country, they had no business voting on anything—the rights should have been there. It shouldn't have been up for question. The only reason why it was was because of this racist thing. If they [the whites] wanted to vote on it, fine, let them do it. And that, essentially, was what we did.

There were ministers who tried to fight against that, and they said they could bring out the vote. White folks there told people that worked for them, in factories and what not, that if they didn't vote, that they would fire them. So they went, I think, and voted whichever would have been the wrong way.

PSS: *Just before the vote, you resigned and then you withdrew your resignation. What precipitated that?*

GRD: That's because somebody [Reginald Robinson] came up from SNCC and went around to people on my executive board and . . . indicated to them that I was going to go vote. . . . At that particular time, because I was trying not to say what we were going to do, I was trying to let people say what they were going to do. I had not said anything except that, to say that people we aren't going to vote on that. But anyhow he made them believe that. So then they came and they started yelling and screaming at me. I guess I was very tired. I thought, "Well I don't need this either!" And I resigned. Then I found out what happened. And then people started coming asking me not to.

PSS: *What happened in Cambridge after the public accommodations vote?*

GRD: That's when Adam [Clayton Powell] came down and spoke and they put that food and stuff in there over the governor's head between him and the Kennedy administration. The people in Cambridge refused to distribute, so the Guard distributed it. At that time what happened is white folks started calling us on the telephone telling us that they were on welfare and they needed food, but they had told them that if they went out and got any of that food, or if they saw them on the lines, they were either gonna fire them or take them off welfare or whatever . . . and that they couldn't come, and what could they do? CNAC proceeded to get cars and loaded them up with food . . . and went and took the food to them. Subsequently, I think they finally got enough nerve to begin to come out.

While all this was going on and the Guard was there, labor unions were organizing there among blacks and whites. The white community shut them out, so they were meeting in the black rod and gun club right out in the middle of all this shooting and other stuff that was going on.

But that was because black and white people both needed more money and needed a union rather than each of them fighting for the other's job. . . . They were working together and they had to come out to the black community in order to meet. That was the meat packers union, I think. There were two unions in there that came in, the meat packers union and the garment workers.

PSS: *Were they successful?*

GRD: Yes. In that part of it. But what had happened was we had gone to a couple of meetings over on the other side of town where union organizers had come down from New York, and we had gone in to fight for black folk. And then when we got there, we ended up fighting for them all, because while there were some black folks in there to stand up and voice their complaints, the white folks would stand but they would come up and just go, "Would you tell me about that . . . ?" You know, it was weird, it was mind boggling. So then everybody stood up and said, "She's gonna stay." So, it's really very strange because we also were fighting these other things that probably most of them, I would assume most of them, didn't want to go on, in terms of desegregation.

PSS: *Did you travel to other areas of activism around the country in 1963 or 1964?*

GRD: I used to go down to Maryland State in Princess Anne. I went to Chester, Pennsylvania, several times. . . . I would go back and forth to Atlanta. I came to New York a couple of times to support efforts up here, the World's Fair and a school demonstration. We had invitations to go other places, but most of the time there was so much turmoil always there [in Cambridge], and of course the thing was you didn't leave there unless it was more or less calm. . . . I went to California to speak. . . . Howard [University] had a chapter of SNCC and they used to come up from time to time. . . . Also, in Baltimore, another SNCC group. . . . Usually that was in the winter or maybe the early spring . . . but that also was the time that we traveled to Washington, back and forth, and tried to pitch our stories or write letters back and forth building up the plan of what we were going to have to do later on in the year.

PSS: *What was your experience with the FBI in Cambridge?*

GRD: My first husband [Harry Richardson] came to me one time during a demonstration to tell me I should give it up because the FBI had come and told him—whatever they told him he thought he was going to take the children. I couldn't believe that. I thought at first, because there is an expression in the black community, "Oh, the FBI said that," so I thought he was just saying that. But I said, "You mean some people actually came there?" And so, he went, "Yes." So I said, "Well you go back and just tell them I said to go to hell, and you, too."

FBI had the lines tapped so well that even Gelston couldn't get his lines cleared. And there was a period of time where he would send his guy down in a jeep to either hand deliver us an answer, or whatever negotiations that were going on at that time, or to tell us.

PSS: *Eventually, you became more closely aligned with Malcolm X. How did you get to know him?*

GRD: Before I had met him, people in Philadelphia that lived in Cambridge were always coming in and out of Cambridge and talking about Malcolm X. I saw him, I think, on television once or twice, or heard him on the radio. . . . Once he got past that religious thing I thought, "Well you know a lot of that is true." I went to Detroit to a grass roots conference [in November, 1963] that was being held initially in Aretha Franklin's father's church. People came and told me that I was in the wrong place, which I was because SCLC had come up and they were trying to take over and be a northern movement. So I left and went over to Reverend Albert Cleage's church because they said Malcolm was over there. . . . They asked me up on the platform, and I heard him speak, and I met him then. . . . After that when I came to New York and I went to one of his meetings at the Audubon—I don't know whether I spoke or not . . . I know I was on the platform. In and among that time a group of people formed Act. They were more northern but were disappointed with the NAACP and had their own movements in neighborhoods or areas and had formed kind of a loose coalition. Lawrence Landry in Chicago with the schools, Adam [Clayton Powell] was part of that, Malcolm agreed to become part of that . . . .

We had a meeting in Chester, Pennsylvania, and Malcolm came. And that's when he agreed to—the country had not committed itself to certain kinds of things and desegregation policies—to ask people to withhold their vote . . . on the theory that they needed at least 20 or 25 percent of the black vote . . . and anyhow, to just let them fight it out for themselves. And he agreed to do that. Of course he didn't live long enough to do it.

After he came back from Africa, I was up here by that time, I talked to him several times on the phone, and I had agreed at that point to become part of whatever organization he set up here in New York.

PSS: *So, you had discussions about philosophy and tactics with him?*

GRD: Well, not really, I think we understood each other. I mean, I don't even think I said to him, "You know, you really need to get away from Elijah Muhammad" [at that time, head of the Nation of Islam]. But I remember the night he was getting ready to make the announcement, my husband and I were up in a restaurant in

Harlem and he stopped by the table . . . and said, "Listen to the 11 o'clock news, I think you are going to hear something that you will like."

I think people in our part of the movement, unless there was some reason to have a long philosophical discussion, which people certainly did [laughter]—on and on!—I don't think you needed that to know that you thought the same.

PSS: *What were the elements of the thinking that you shared?*

GRD: That blacks certainly were not getting a fair shake in this country. That that could not continue to happen. That, over a period of time, the government had first given and then taken away. That the governmental structure used a lot of black folks that had "made it" as their examples of "see how we're treating everybody." Whereas the majority of grassroots people—as opposed to middle class blacks—were still probably where they were just after the Civil War.

PSS: *How did that thinking differ from what Martin Luther King was talking about?*

GRD: I think Martin Luther King had a more middle-class group. . . . Parts of SNCC believed that you should be totally non-violent and lay down and let them step on you. And other parts didn't. But I certainly didn't believe, I know Malcolm didn't, that you were not supposed to defend yourself. Martin apparently believed you weren't supposed to do that.

I can remember people in Cambridge . . . were putting red pepper in their cuffs, and spreading it around to chase the dogs. Well, you know, they told me, "Oh no, we couldn't do that. That's violence." They carried it really to the extreme. . . . Someone told me at a conference I went to a couple of years ago that Martin really wanted people to love him. It didn't matter, I think, to most of us whether people loved us or not. Respect? Yes. That's a whole different piece that's left up to individuals.

PSS: *So, what Malcolm X was talking about was, on the practical political level, more idealistic. For example, saying "No, this is right and this is what we stand for," rather than, "this is right but we'll take half of it."*

GRD: Yes, you're right. No, we wouldn't take half of it. And I must say, in Cambridge, although some of it continued to happen after I left, but the initial demands, we got. . . . One way they got to build those houses was because they used Cambridge contractors, and we would have preferred them going somewhere else to get contractors. But that was one of the things we had to proceed to agree to to get those houses built. I guess Washington thought that would help ease tension.

PSS: *Let's move a few years ahead, now. How did you play a role in Rap Brown's visit to Cambridge in 1967?*

GRD: My daughter [Donna] was there, and she had called me the night of the fire They told me I'd better get somebody down there quick. . . . What had happened was they had changed the name [of CNAC] to the Cambridge Black Action Federation. Elaine Adams and that group had sent me money and had asked me to ask Rap to come down and speak . . . about black power. . . . And I did that when I saw Rap over at the SNCC fund-raising office around the corner.

At about that time Gelston called me, because he said he wanted to set up something that would contain whatever Cambridge police might try to do, and he

would like to speak with Rap before he went in. So I went to tell Rap. Rap, of course, he was not going to speak to any white man. I said, "Cambridge is very strange, I think you better speak with him." "No," [Brown replied.] So I told him no. In the meantime, Gelston did tell me that if anybody needed him then this is where he would be staying. I initially forgot, because I had not been in any of those places that had been built, any of the hotels and what not, so I had the wrong hotel . . . I had to end up calling his wife, who had just talked to him and everything was quiet . . . I had to finally tell her, "My daughter is there, Miss, she's calling me, the firemen didn't come in, the coals are flying all over," and she finally called him. And then somebody called me from the press and told me that the Guard was on its way. . . .

The government sent in people—that's when [Maryland governor Spiro] Agnew was there—they sent in people to, if we drew up the plans they'd do a proposal. . . . So we were doing parks, we were doing mobile homes, with temporary things 'till stuff was getting built. . . . Anything else that was left over from the two years or three years before—got agreement on it from Washington . . . Agnew stopped it. That was it. They did not control him like they did Tawes, and it fell apart at that point. . . . I think the [federal] government was sincere at that time, but it was just that Agnew said no. He hated Rap Brown. He hated Stokely Carmichael. "These were thugs." . . . He made the mistake of standing up and calling them thugs. That's after they'd been up all night long trying to put out the fires. . . . I think it was finally some people way down, what we consider really racist part of the county, that let them have a fire truck. Because the city wouldn't.

PSS: *Reflecting on your experience and what you have witnessed since, how would you assess the role of violence and non-violence in effecting change?*

GRD: I think you have to have some of both. And I think it has to be in balance. I think the violence can only be in response, because the people that really will move in to try to stamp out something with violence are not going to stop because you are non-violent. They will crush you first. So if there isn't some kind of tension set up so that it will at least hold them off a little, then you are just demolished, especially if you are carrying this out on a day-to-day basis. Maybe it might be different if you were just having a once-every-three-months march, or a once-a-year march, or that kind of thing. But on a day-to-day basis, that tension cannot just be held back by non-violence. I think if they had thought that everybody in Cambridge in the black community was non-violent they would have just rolled right on over us. . . .

Very few young people today know that young people actually started a movement in this country from which the free speech movement came, the women's movement, the peace movement. Young, very young people making decisions and having the courage to go on and be that sensitive to problems of other people, and to mainly poor people.