

Interview with **Maggie Thomas**

Date: October 20, 1988

Interviewer: Jacqueline Shearer

Camera Rolls: 4042, 4040

Sound Rolls: 416

Team: D

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Preferred Citation

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #4042]

[sound roll #416]

00:00:15:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mrs. Thomas.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, Jackie.

00:00:20:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Thomas, so we're back in October 1974. And I want to know if you thought it was strange that the mayor of Atlanta wanted to come and stay in a public housing project for the weekend.

00:00:34:00

Maggie Thomas:

Yes, in the beginning I sure did. *Thought it was very strange. And the strangest thing to me was that they chose me to house him.* And after they did that I told them I didn't mind it but I didn't have any place for him to sleep, me having seven children. And so they said they would arrange that. So I told them it was OK with me that he come and spent the weekend, you know. He would have somewhere to sleep. It was the only thing.

00:01:12:00

Interviewer:

So tell me about that first day when the mayor came.

00:01:17:00

Maggie Thomas:

OK. The first day that he came, I believe it was on Friday, Friday afternoon. And I was at work, *so when I got off from work I came up to the edge of the apartments and I looked down in the court and the court was just full of news, news medias...just full of people.* And...let me back up just a little bit. Would that be all right?

00:01:52:00

Interviewer:

OK. Do you want to cut?

Maggie Thomas:

OK, I was—

Interviewer:

Let's cut for a minute.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

Interviewer:

'Cause I want—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:02:01:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, Jackie.

00:02:03:00

Interviewer:

OK, so, why don't you tell me about that first day?

00:02:06:00

Maggie Thomas:

OK. I, I, I'm going to begin in the morning. I got up early that morning. OK, I seen some strange people you know, kind of hanging around my door. And I found that it was some people, it was somebody from the news media. I was sweeping off the porch, so they asked me could they come in. And I told them, no, they couldn't come in because I was you know, getting ready to go to work. And they asked me, why we can't come. They got smart, you know. But I don't care nothing about that. They got smart and said, Why you won't let us in? You, you haven't cleaned up? And so I said, Well, maybe not. So I just kept sweeping, going about my, you know, activities because I know I had to be to work at seven. So anyway, I slipped out the back door and went to work. So I just left them out there. I don't know where they went to. And then, when I got off from work they...people was still down there and just had the court just cluttered out. So I turned around. ***I know I couldn't go through that crowd, so I turned around and I went all the way down to the back. And I crawled up my back steps to get in my house, to avoid the news media. But when I got in the house, then I seen, you know, the mayor coming. I know I had to open the door then.*** So I opened the door [laughs] and ***it was just a mob, really, just a pure mob, just fell all in the door, standing all up on my furniture.*** So I just went through with that. So when the mayor got in, he told them, you know, to don't, you know, do that to the news people. That's the one I had the problem with, the news media. So after we got settled down, everything got all right. They left. But truly they came back.

00:04:05:00

Interviewer:

Now, where, where did the mayor stay?

00:04:07:00

Maggie Thomas:

Where did the mayor live...stay?

Interviewer:

No. Where did he stay in your apartment?

Maggie Thomas:

Well, he stayed in my living room. Mm-hmm. That's where he slept, you know, during the night. But in the daytime, he would go up and sleep in my bedroom. You know, a lot of people just in and out and he, he really didn't want to be disturbed. So I just let him slept up there during the day, you know, when, when he was asleep. But at night, he would sleep on his rollaway bed. Mm-hmm.

00:04:39:00

Interviewer:

Now, what did you serve the mayor to eat?

00:04:42:00

Maggie Thomas:

You mean the first day? I think we had...the first day we had for breakfast, that was on a Saturday morning, I believe it was bacon and eggs. I'm not sure. But I know the second day we had salmon croquettes and biscuits. And my, my sister came to, you know, help me out because I'm not that good a cook. She is a very good cook. And she came to help me out so that people in the neighborhood was crying, Ms. Thomas had a maid since the mayor came. So, that was just my sister, you know, there to help me out. It wasn't a maid; it was my sister. But I, I know that we had salmon croquettes that Sunday morning and biscuits and grits for breakfast. Now Friday afternoon, I served him, you know, lunch, too, that Friday afternoon. I think we had fried chicken, black-eyed peas, candy yams, and I believe collard greens, mm-hmm, and cornbread.

00:05:58:00

Interviewer:

Now you went to church on Sunday.

00:05:59:00

Maggie Thomas:

Sure we did. We went to church that Sunday. He went with me. And we had a very good time. OK, my, my pastor offered him to sit up in the pulpit but he said he'd rather sit in the audience, you know. So he sat down in the audience with me. So he brought me on, brought us on back home. We was riding in a limousine. [laughs] And when we got back home we had dinner, mm-hmm, because my sister had prepared dinner, you know, for us and we had dinner. And a lot of people was there at the steps. I don't know what nationality of people these were but they was there at the steps, you know, asking him to help them in some kind of way. You know, get some housing or food or something. But he got on the phone and immediately, I think, he got some help for these people. I don't know whether they were...Haitians I believe they were.

00:07:13:00

Interviewer:

OK.

Maggie Thomas:

It was some people of a different nationality.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:07:18:00

Jackie, go ahead.

00:07:20:00

Interviewer:

OK, so Mrs. Thomas, can you tell me about conditions in Bankhead Court before and after the mayor came?

00:07:27:00

Maggie Thomas:

OK. The condition in Bankhead Court at that time, we was having lots of problems with the rodents. That's such as ra...mice, rats and, and roaches. And the sewage problem was bad. So that, I think, I'm sure that's why he came out to live in those conditions, you know, for a short while to really see how they were. And while he was out there, he really found out that we was having those particular problems. And another thing that he found out, that they had false vents up to the wall where the heat, we was having heating problem, too. Where the heat supposed to be coming out but it was no hole back there for the heat to come through. So he just found out it was just some false vents up against the wall. But after he and Arthur Langford, I know the two of them found these things out because we went and seen it. And after he came and left, things got better for a while. It really did. I know the, the rats, the big old rats that would be around the dumpster, we had stopped seeing them because the housing authority was, I, I don't know what kind of system they had, but it was something they would stick in the ground. It was some kind of sound system that would cause the rats to come to the top of the ground. And they would kill them like that. Mm-hmm.

00:09:10:00

Interviewer:

Now, remember you told me about the dedication ceremony for the daycare center—

Maggie Thomas:

Yes.

Interviewer:

—where you thanked the mayor? Could you tell me what you remember about what you said in that speech?

00:09:21:00

Maggie Thomas:

Well, it was more or less thanking him, you know.

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Could you begin by saying, When we dedicated the day care center, I thanked the mayor?

Maggie Thomas:

Yeah. OK. OK, when we dedicated the daycare center, I presented him a plaque from the Tenants Association. And in that speech, I was just more or less thanking him, you know, for the weekend and the patience that he had with us out there at Bankhead...the weekend he spent there at my house, at my apartment. So it was more or less, I just...a thank you token. That's what the plaque was.

00:10:11:00

Interviewer:

And what did you appreciate about his coming out there?

00:10:15:00

Maggie Thomas:

Well, I just appreciate the patience he would...I don't care what time of night somebody would come, the, the, the, the guards or whatever they were, they let it, they would let them in. They wanted to ask him questions. He would sit down and talk with them and answer them as best he knew how. He didn't turn anybody away. I don't care who it was, children or what have you, he would, you know, take time out and try and answer their questions, you know. Or if they had a problem he'd try and resolve it for them.

00:10:55:00

Interviewer:

Now when Maynard Jackson won, what did you think a Black mayor was going to be able to do for Atlanta?

00:11:04:00

Maggie Thomas:

At that particular time I really didn't...although I, I campaigned a lot for him. Simply because I, I—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Maggie Thomas:

—knew his grandfather, Dr. John Wesley Dobbs. And—

00:11:18:00

Interviewer:

OK, I'm sorry. We just ran out—

Camera Crew Member #1:

We ran out.

Camera Crew Member #2:

That's a rollout on camera roll forty, forty-two.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] I want to—

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[cut]

[camera roll #4040]

Camera Crew Member #3:

OK. Camera roll forty, forty continues. We're on sound roll four, sixteen.

[slate]

00:11:39:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, Jackie.

00:11:41:00

Interviewer:

OK, so why don't you tell me what you thought was going to happen with the election of a Black mayor in Atlanta?

00:11:50:00

Maggie Thomas:

OK. At, at that time I didn't think too much of it. I really didn't. But me knowing Maynard's grandfather, I knew him well, Dr. John Wesley Dobbs, and I knew his aunt, Mattiwilda Dobbs I believe it was. I went to a concert. OK. I, I knew him, when I knew him, he was a boy, a little small boy, you know. But I knew Dr. Dobbs. He was a good man and I knew that if he was anything like his grandfather, he would make a good mayor. So I campaigned for him and I also voted and encouraged people out in the neighborhood to vote for him. So he became mayor. And I, I haven't regretted it. I really didn't. I'm enjoying him being mayor. I have really enjoyed it. He's been an inspiration to me and my family, I'll say. He really has been. Mm-hmm.

00:13:05:00

Interviewer:

OK. Cut.

[cut]

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:13:10:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:13:12:00

Interviewer:

So tell me about when you went to dinner with the mayor.

00:13:15:00

Maggie Thomas:

OK. It was, I believe it was on a Thursday afternoon. He had one of his chauffeurs to pick, pick us up. So it was myself, Jacquelyn and James, my two younger children. So I took a friend along with me, he was named Marcus. He had that, he's their age, Marcus Thomas. And first we went to Peachtree Plaza to have dinner with Patricia Harris, the Secretary of HUD, I believe she's dead now. So we had dinner there and after that we went to a restaurant called Ichiban on Harleston Street. OK, I've, I hadn't ever seen anything like this before. The person—the person who had prepared the food, he prepared it right in front of our eyes. Our...his stove was our table, what he's preparing the food on. And I've never seen anybody prepare food like that. We had zucchini, T-bone steaks, mushroom, and just like rice, hot wine and fortune cookies. Just everything we wanted to eat. And we had to eat with chopsticks because I believe this is a Chinese restaurant. So it was just amazing how this man prepared this food. OK, he would throw these things up that he had to peel and partially peel them while they was in the air. He had this sharp knife just...like a potato, he'd kind of throw it up in the air and he'd peel it while it was coming down out of the air. It was really amazing how he prepared that food. And it was really good. We also had shrimps, too. And he prepared it right there in front of our eyes. And when he got through, he fixed our plate. And the stove that he prepared it on, it was our, our table. But it was just amazing. I had never seen anything like that before. So we just had a fun time there trying to eat with those chopsticks. Maynard Jackson, [laughs] he, he didn't try and eat with them but the children did because it was really fun to them. So we just had a good time that particular night out to lunch, so...children, of course, they couldn't eat all that food. But Maynard Jackson ate all of his. And at that time he was on a diet, too. He didn't eat but once a day. But when he ate, he really ate.

00:16:13:00

Interviewer:

OK. Thank you. [laughs] I'm hungry.

Maggie Thomas:

[laughs]

Camera Crew Member #3:

I am—

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:16:18:00

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