



Interview with **Richard Strichartz**

Date: June 5, 1989

Interviewer: Sheila Bernard

Camera Rolls: 2133-2134

Sound Rolls: 263

Team: B

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 #2133]

[sound roll #263]

00:00:11:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:00:15:00

Interviewer:

So, if you could, tell me about Mayor Cavanaugh.

00:00:18:00

Richard Strichartz:

Jerry Cavanaugh was elected at the age of thirty-three. He was a neighbor of mine, lived right across the street. I worked briefly on his campaign but not all that much. And he came in

with the idea that what he wanted to do was to turn the city around. We had had a recession here in Detroit, which had dragged on and on primarily because of what had happened in the automobile industry. With the increase in production, things started to look up. But there was still a need to do a great many things. You didn't have city money to do it. He came in, at that point, there was about a forty-four million dollar deficit. And you don't run a deficit, you see. We're not like the federal government. So, and so what, what he said was, OK, let's find ways of, of getting some money. So, I set myself to the task of identifying federal programs which were in existence and also working with the National League of Cities and especially the US Conference of Mayors on trying to create programs which would meet the needs. Because the whole infrastructure, you know, sewers and roads, the water program, we had a tremendous expansion in the water program to serve all of southeastern Michigan.

00:01:48:00

Interviewer:

OK. Can we stop for a second? We need a little less detail because we can't, because of the way that the program was structured—

[cut]

[beep]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

And if you could also in your answer let us know how—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed.

[picture resumes]

Interviewer:

—how successful in terms of [inaudible]

00:02:02:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

Interviewer:

OK.

Richard Strichartz:

When Jerry Cavanaugh came in as mayor, he wanted to—

Interviewer:

Are you ready?

00:02:10:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah.

00:02:10:00

Interviewer:

OK.

00:02:12:00

Richard Strichartz:

When Jerry Cavanaugh came in as mayor, he wanted to do something to change the face of the city. He wanted to do it in terms of human relations, and he wanted to change the physical program. We did a whole series of programs on juvenile delinquency, urban renewal, housing, waters, sewers, curbs, all the sort of things that were important. And then of course we moved on to the poverty program, Total Action Against Poverty. And then under Johnson, there was the culmination and the Model Cities Program. All of these things were designed to create the ability to change this city so that people felt that they had an opportunity to make a change and to have something to say about their destiny. Those are important kinds of results to achieve.

00:03:10:00

Interviewer:

OK, stop. OK, that was great. That was great. How much money—

[cut]

[slate]

00:03:15:00

Interviewer:

So, it's 1967. You're watching all these cities go up. How did you see Detroit?

00:03:22:00

Richard Strichartz:

Detroit was a success city. Detroit had involved people in the antipoverty program. It was not just a City Hall program. We had done things, opening up the system, appointing people who represented the total community. And this gave you the feeling, if you will, the arrogance, the hubris, that there was no way this was going to happen in Detroit. And it was said after that some people said they could riot in Detroit because they were sure that Jerry Cavanaugh wouldn't let them sh—be shot.

00:04:05:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

That was a nice answer. Now, I wanna ask you to do it again. But, but don't—

Camera Crew Member #1:

This will be take four.

Interviewer:

We have enough of people feeling like they could riot—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Take four.

Richard Strichartz:

OK. Leave that out.

Interviewer:

—because we have that.

[cut]

00:04:19:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:04:21:00

Interviewer:

So, watching all the other cities, did you think it would happen in Detroit?

Richard Strichartz:

We were sure it wouldn't happen in Detroit. The city had opened up. The programs were there.

Interviewer:

Can you start, "We were sure a riot wouldn't happen...?"

00:04:35:00

Richard Strichartz:

OK. OK. We were sure a riot would not happen in Detroit. There was an arrogance, a hubris about the fact that we had done so much to open up the system, to have people involved in the antipoverty program from the community, to have appointments from the total community so there was participation. It was not that there was a feeling that a lot of things had been festering and were building up but that it was happening here in Detroit.

00:05:07:00

Interviewer:

OK, stop.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

OK. And now I wanna move on to that Sunday. And—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Hit it.

00:05:13:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:05:14:00

Interviewer:

So, if you could tell me about Sunday.

00:05:17:00

Richard Strichartz:

Sunday was a sad day. It started out happily enough because—

00:05:22:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Stop.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

We're, we're building a story. You have to start—

[slate]

00:05:27:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:05:30:00

Interviewer:

OK, so if you could tell me about Sunday.

00:05:33:00

Richard Strichartz:

We had just put an offer down on a house in the suburbs. Driving back into the city, I saw some smoke, and then I realized that there was much more than just some smoke. That it appeared as though the city was on fire. There was smoke and haze over the whole sky. I knew at that point that something serious was happening, and I knew that it was probably the riot that we thought would never happen. And frankly, my heart was broken.

00:06:11:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

Interviewer:

OK.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

00:06:15:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:06:18:00

Interviewer:

If you could tell me what it was like at your house.

00:06:22:00

Richard Strichartz:

Well, we didn't let the kids out in the afternoon. And then at night when I put them to sleep, you could hear the gunshots. You could hear the sirens. You could smell the smoke, which filled the air and was acrid and pungent. And they, hearing those, that, that, those bullets going off, even though we were in the northwest section and not really down in the center where so much was going on, they kind of crept into the, into our bedroom and curled up on the floor. They felt more secure. And frankly so did I.

00:07:02:00

Interviewer:

OK, stop.

[cut]

00:07:07:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:07:10:00

Interviewer:

So, how did Washington respond to this disorder?

00:07:13:00

Richard Strichartz:

The response to the riot that came out of the Johnson administration came in the form of a phone call to me saying, The word has come out from the White House, no more grants for Detroit. We don't reward rioters. So, at that point, we took whatever necessary steps there were to try to counter that, and we were successful to a limited extent. Because also Jerry Cavanaugh was against the war in Vietnam and had spoken out during his senatorial race against Soapy Williams for the democratic nomination. And we were already on the special list, called the S list, yeah, and so we were having difficulty anyhow.

00:08:08:00

Interviewer:

OK, stop. What's the S list?

Richard Strichartz:

Shit list. [laughs]

Interviewer:

[laughs]

[beep]

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

00:08:11:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:08:12:00

Interviewer:

So, how did, how did Washington respond to this riot?

00:08:16:00

Richard Strichartz:

The response we got out of Washington was a, in the nature of a phone call from a friend of mine who said, The word has just come out of the White House, no more grants for Detroit. We don't reward rioters. Well, here we were in the middle of all this devastation, the deaths that had occurred, our efforts to pull the community back together again, and no support was gonna come from the area that you would expect there would be.

00:08:45:00

Interviewer:

And how did you feel?

00:08:45:00

Richard Strichartz:

It was devastating. We had to use every possible resource to reverse that position.

00:08:54:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Richard Strichartz:

As a matter of fact, let me tell you about it—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

00:08:57:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:08:59:00

Interviewer:

OK, so if you could tell me about Sunday.

00:09:04:00

Richard Strichartz:

We had gone out to look at a house in the suburbs. We had been looking out there, and the reason was that one, there was a problem with safety. I always like to walk. I couldn't walk in the evening by myself because my wife felt that I would be attacked. Secondly, education, there was a serious problem of the educational deficiencies in the system which were becoming apparent. We went out, we found the house, we were coming back in the city, and here was this pall of smoke over the entire city, and the thing [truck passes] about it was that it was—

00:09:48:00

Interviewer:

OK, stop. There's a truck.

Richard Strichartz:

Yeah.

[beep]

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Hit it.

00:09:51:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:09:53:00

Interviewer:

So, if you could tell me about Sunday. And really let, let people know how you were feeling.

Richard Strichartz:

We had found the house in the suburbs. Driving back in—

Interviewer:

Sorry, I have to stop you. It's not clear that you were looking for, you were looking for—

00:10:05:00

Richard Strichartz:

Oh. Oh, OK. We were looking for a house in the suburbs over time, and we did find one. And when we were driving back, we could see the pall of smoke which at first just seemed to be one house or so. And then all of a sudden, you could see it was over the entire city. And I kn—realized then the, *the city was burning. And all the work that we had done was being destroyed. The distress was more than distress. It was agony, and tears came to my eyes. And it was, we thought we had the answers, and the fact is nobody had the answers.* And I'm not sure anybody has the answers now.

00:10:05:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

[camera roll #2134]

Interviewer:

OK.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Hit it.

[slate]

00:11:06:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible] OK.

00:11:12:00

Interviewer:

OK.

00:11:13:00

Richard Strichartz:

I was driving downtown to police headquarters on Friday afternoon. It was in the early afternoon. And I saw one group of adult Black males after another going down. This was different than any other times that I've done this because I've constantly used that way of just getting downtown when I wanted to. This gave me a sense of apprehension, which I described to my wife when I got home. I said, There, there are too many people not working, not having anything to do, and this bothers me. Worries me. On Sunday, we went out to look for a house. We needed to get one because I didn't feel safe. I felt imprisoned in the city. I couldn't go out walking in the evening, which was a favorite thing, because my wife felt that I—too troubled about my safety. My kids were going to schools, or would have gone to schools, that were inadequate. We had high standards. We found the house, came back into Detroit, saw this pall of smoke, at first just getting the impression it was just one fire. And then realized in an agonizing way what had happened was that there, the city was on fire. What could never happen in Detroit had happened. All the answers we thought we had were not correct. And there were tears in my eyes because I realized the failure, and I was distressed by it.

00:13:08:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut. Thank you.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Richard Strichartz:

I tried to roll a couple of things in.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:13:14:00

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