



Interview with **Herb Boyd**

Date: September 29, 1989

Interviewer: Sam Pollard

Camera Rolls: 2165-2168

Sound Rolls: 277-278

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**

Interview with Herb Boyd, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on September 29, 1989 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

**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 #2165]

[sound roll #277]

[slate]

00:00:12:00

Interviewer:

—sitting in your living room just like you were.

Herb Boyd:

OK.

00:00:16:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:00:14:00

Interviewer:

Just take it easy. First question is, let's say we're going back to 1967. How did the police relate to the Black community in Detroit in 1967?

00:00:26:00

Herb Boyd:

In 1967, you know, you had a situation in Detroit where the police was moving into like a garrison city occupied army situation. It wasn't at all unlike the previous years when you had the Big Four out there, but it was in a transitional period when the Big Three was coming into power. This is when they had three uniformed co-cops patrolling the neighborhoods. What I remember mostly is that police brutality was rampant at that time. We had one incident after another from one end of the city to another. People were, like, being shot down. We had incidents on the east side. There was a couple of incidents on the west side of Detroit at that time. *And it wasn't unusual to see that, the cops coming into neighborhoods and just arbitrarily grabbing people. You know, without any kind of provocation and slam, slam us up against the wall, asking us for our identification, where you going, what you been doing. Any kind of suspicion whatsoever would be cause for them to just go ahead and accost you*, and ask you to show you, show some identification. So, it had kind of an occupied army feel at that time.

00:01:28:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut

[beep]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[cut]

[wild sound]

OK. That was good.

Herb Boyd:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

Don't mention the big three.

Herb Boyd:

Yes. No big four either, huh?

Interviewer:

No, you can talk about the Big Fours, but not the Big Three.

Herb Boyd:

No? OK.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed.

[cut]

Interviewer:

We're going back to '67 in Detroit, early 60's.

Herb Boyd:

OK.

00:01:45:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:01:48:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb, how did the police relate to the Black community when, when you lived in Detroit in the early 60's up to 1967?

00:01:55:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, community relations with the police at that time was very bad. But that wasn't unusual. It had been bad for many years. I had grown up, up at the time when the Big Four was like the force that came in the community. They had pretty much toned down that, and it turned into more or less like patrol officers periodically through neighborhoods and randomly accosting people, slamming you up against the wall, making you show identification. If you looked at all suspicious then you were a prime target for the police at that time. We had a feeling that it was like an occupied army, that it was a garrison city. It was incident after incident all across the city. I mean police brutality was rampant at that time. In the lower east side, there was a couple incidents. In, in June, late, early July, there was a police brutality occasion on the west side of Detroit. So, all of this was in the air by the time the rebellion was in the wind.

00:02:49:00

Interviewer:

Great. Good. Let's cut.

[cut]

00:02:56:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:02:57:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb, tell us, tell us, tell me a little bit about, I mean, the police, the Big Four, for example. What were they like?

00:03:03:00

Herb Boyd:

The Big Four was like four officers in a police car. One uniformed officer that usually normally drove the car, and you had three plain-clothed officers there. They had license to carry out all kind of brutality. I mean, just to say their name was to strike fear into your heart when they came into your neighborhood. Everybody would freeze. The Big Four is coming. Just like they say these days, 50-54. Those days it was the Big Four is coming. Everything was cooled out. They would come in, and when they would just park somewhere and make

their presence known, it was enough to cool out a whole neighborhood. So, they, they were like recognized for their brutality. They was recognized for the kind of force that they would bring. They were also, they had the kind of a free license, you know. They were like the, like the, what do you call, the elite of the police department at that time. And they had the kind of terror and treachery connected with their name to make everybody cool out. You know? Nothing, no activity at all in the neighborhood when the Big Four came on the scene.

00:04:05:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's cut a second.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

Interviewer:

Do we want to do it again, and, and—

[cut]

00:04:11:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:04:14:00

Interviewer:

So, Herb, tell me about the police and how they related to the Black community in Detroit. And starting with the Big Four when you were growing up.

Herb Boyd:

Yes, they always provided, like, sim—

Interviewer:

Herb, include "the Big Four."

00:04:23:00

Herb Boyd:

Yes, the Big, the Big Four was what we recognized as being symbolic of the real terror and the intimidating aspects of the police department that would later on be followed up by the invasion of all of these uniformed officers. You see, the Big Four was just one uniformed cop in a car with three other plain-clothed cops. They had a reputation of taking no crap from nobody. And when you said the Big Four was in the neighborhood, everybody froze. Things were cooled out completely. They were like a harbinger of the kind of garrison city occupied army that would take place later on in the middle 60's right down to the rebellion of '67.

00:05:02:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

Interviewer:

OK.

00:05:11:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:05:14:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about the Big Four and, and, and the police in general in Detroit. And start it, "When I was growing up in Detroit..."

00:05:20:00

Herb Boyd:

When I was growing up in Detroit, the Big Four had a reputation as being head whippers incorporated. They didn't take any jive from anybody. When they showed up, we said big four, we're talking about one uniformed officer who was like a chauffeur for three plain-

clothed officers. When they hit a neighborhood with their big car, everything came to a halt. You know, that was the kind of first vestige we had of, like, you know, this kind of an ever-present police force in our community. Later on, it would have like a garrison city and occupied army flavor with more uniformed cops. But the Big Four was always symbolic of that kind of real brutal terror formi—they, they would grab you, throw you up against the wall, ask for your identification, throw you in the car. They didn't take any crap at all from anybody. They were notorious.

00:06:09:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Yeah. Good.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[coughs]

Interviewer:

Now can you, can you just tell us a little more—

[cut]

Interviewer:

Just take yourself back into the—

00:06:18:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:06:20:00

Interviewer:

Now, back there, you know, you, just tell us how you heard about what was happening on 12th Street, and what did you do? And when you got down there, what happened?

00:06:27:00

Herb Boyd:

It was around ten o'clock in the morning that I first heard about the, the blind pig raid at, on 12th and Clairmount. One of my friends called me up and say, Hey, Herb, there's panic in the street. I didn't live too far from that location, so I quickly got my sons. We jumped in an old Fairlane and headed out for 12th and Clairmount. On the way down there, there was already a lot of motion in the street. I knew something was up. People running—

00:06:54:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut. Let's cut. You, you was really into it wasn't you?

[cut]

[wild sound]

Herb Boyd:

Yes.

Interviewer:

You got, wasn't you, you got into it, I mean—

Herb Boyd:

Yeah.

[cut]

00:07:00:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:07:02:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb, we're back there now—

Herb Boyd:

OK.

Interviewer:

—in '67 man. And you're into, it's like, you know, what happened? How did you hear about 12th Street, and what did you do?

00:07:08:00

Herb Boyd:

It was like about ten o'clock in the morning when I got the word. One of my partners called me up. He said, Hey, man. Hey, Herb. There's panic in the street. Let's hit it. Let's roll. So, I said, OK, let me get myself together, grab the kids, ran out, and jumped in the old Fairlane and headed out for 12th Street. Man, everywhere was people going, you know, pell-mell, helter, helter-skelter. I knew something was up, so I said, Well OK, let's go on over to 12th Street where the thing actually occurred. When we got over there, it was like about two or three hundred people had already gathered. Now, this is like about 11:30 in the morning. A Sunday morning, you know, so you don't expect that kind of a thing on a Sunday morning. I don't think the police department did either. But nonetheless, it was people all over the place. And it, and, and you could feel that there was a tension in the air. But at the same time, there was a certain kind of exhilaration. You know, like, Hey, let's get it on with. Let's go ahead and move and do something. And there was, like, already a couple of stores that had been, somebody had thrown a brick or thrown a garbage can or something through one of the windows over there. So, you can see that it was something was in motion. That there was something in the air, an atmosphere or change and excitement. Mm-hmm.

00:08:11:00

Interviewer:

OK. cut. That was good. That was real good. That was good.

Herb Boyd:

Yes.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

‘Cause you also that people wanted to burn the stores down.

Herb Boyd:

Sure.

Interviewer:

And, and tell why. I mean—

Herb Boyd:

OK, right.

[cut]

00:08:21:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:08:26:00

Interviewer:

So, you were out there on the street, Herb. I mean, and, and, and so people are, 200, 300 people are out on the street. I mean, there was excitement and tension in the air. What did you do next? What was happening? What did you do?

00:08:38:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, well, later on, now, you're moving into the afternoon now. Sunday afternoon around three, four o'clock. I had moved out of the 12th Street, Clairmount area over toward McGraw and Grand River where I knew there was an A&P store. So, we drove over there. When we got there, they had already torn that store apart. Whole, big front windows were out. People were going in there, throwing things out. I pulled over to the curb, popped the trunk open. My sons and I, we got out, and we loaded it up with five-pound bags of Domino sugar, all the canned goods we can gather, closed the trunk, and took off. We came back again. When we got back there, it was just riddled. I mean most of the food was gone. There was people ca— Hey, let's burn this place down now. They were hollering all over the place, Let's torch it. Let's torch it. So, I said, No, don't torch it yet, man. There's a safe in the back. So, these guys went in the back room and found it—

00:09:25:00

Interviewer:

Herb, I don't want you to say [unintelligible]—

Camera Crew Member #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Herb Boyd:

OK. [laughs]

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[slate]

Interviewer:

OK, Herb.

00:09:36:00

Herb Boyd:

Mm-hmm.

00:09:37:00

Interviewer:

Let's go. Tell me what happened after you were out there on the street. What did you do then?

00:09:40:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, late Sunday afternoon, we arrived over at the A&P store there. I knew that would be, like, a good place to gather up some groceries and everything. By the time we got there, the, the whole front windows had been broken out. People were going in and out of there. Goods were flying out of the window. My sons and I, we got out of the car. We loaded up the trunk, and we got all the goods out and hustled on home, dumped that to come back and get a second load. By the time we got back, there was just little to no food left. It was still enough in there to get. And then *the cry in the air was, Let's burn this place down. Let's torch it. This sucker was always ripping us off anyway. You know, they never hired many Black people. You know, so it's kinda, anger and frustration was in the wind.* There was also much discussion about the kind of price gouging that was going on. They always had the prices inflated and everything. We don't care nothing about them. While a few of us was trying to stop them from torching it 'cause there was still some more food in there to get, I think somebody was already moving to put a flame to the place. It was all we could do to stop them because I know that that fire would spread from one building to another. That was the, the basic concern I had about stopping the fire. You know. Mm-hmm.

00:10:42:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's cut. I wanna do it again. I want you to give me a—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Interviewer:

Wait a second.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut.

[cut]

00:10:53:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:10:58:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb, what happened after you were out there on 12th Street?

00:11:01:00

Herb Boyd:

We, we left 12th Street, and it was about three o'clock in the afternoon now. And so we said, Let's go over to A&P, you know. You know, 'cause we knew that that would be a good place, you know, groceries and everything is over there. So, we drove over to, like, A&P was at Grand River and McGraw. When we got there, people were all over the place, going in and out of the store. The front windows had been broken out. People running out with big bags of groceries and everything. So, we got these five-pound bags of Domino Sugar and all the canned goods we could get, and even meats, and filled up the trunk, took off, went home, came back for—to load up again. By the time we got back though, they had pretty much ripped off everything in the store. Now folks were talking about torching the place. We done got everything in here. Let's burn this sucker down. You know, they were always price gouging, and they didn't hire any Black people. And a general kind of anger and frustration was in the air, so people said, Let's burn it. I'm trying to stop them. Don't burn the place down. The flames will go over all the place. There's still some more food in there to get. So, they said, No, no, no, we're torching this sucker. He was, he was no good. He was a racist. He was a racist dog. And so it was all we could do to keep them—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Herb Boyd:

—from not torching the place. We got to keep this place under control. So, at that point, you know, we, they, they cooled out. They came in with us, and we continued to rip off and get the rest of the food that was left there. Mm-hmm.

00:12:11:00

Interviewer:

All right.

Camera Crew Member #2:

It was all we could to keep them from—

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #2166]

00:12:22:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:12:24:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb. What was the feeling on the street on the first day of the rebellion? With the people in the community, with the police being out of the community? Give me a sense of that.

Herb Boyd:

The feeling in the community at that time, because the, the police was not that present, was just wild abandon—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sir, I'm sorry. We have to turn—

Camera Crew Member #3:

Oh, shit. I'm sorry.

Camera Crew Member #1:

—on these lights. That's OK. I'll cut.

[cut]

00:12:45:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Interviewer:

If you could have any stories. Anybody talking and give me a sense of the abandonment—

Herb Boyd:

OK. Sure. Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

—in terms of the police. OK, Herb.

00:12:53:00

Camera Crew Member #3:

And we want some freedom rather than wild abandonment. Yeah.

00:12:55:00

Interviewer:

A sense of freedom. What was the feeling on the street during the first day of the rebellion, among the people in the community with the police being out of the community?

Herb Boyd:

Well, with no police around at that time—

Interviewer:

The, the, the sense on the street.

00:13:06:00

Herb Boyd:

Yes. Yeah, the sense of, the feeling in the streets at that time, you know, with no police present was, was an excitement. You know, it was kind of a festive mood. You know? Freedom, and rebellion, and everything was in the, in the air. And the people are running

helter-skelter. The concern there I think was like, you know, hey, the revolution has come. You know, things are gonna change now. We're in motion. So, it, it was like a really, a lot of, I got caught up in the whole rush of things. It was helter-skelter. Folks were just running pell-mell. They knew they had to do something. It was a lot of energy in the street. That's what I felt. Mm-hmm.

00:13:42:00

Interviewer:

OK. Do it for me again. Give me some more, what that energy meant. What, how they, how did they let that energy out. Just come on, let it go, really let it go this time.

Herb Boyd:

OK.

Interviewer:

What was the sense out there in the street when, when, this first day of the rebellion with the police out of the community?

00:13:56:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, it was like excitement.

00:13:56:00

Interviewer:

I need you to say, "The feeling in the street..."

Herb Boyd:

Yeah, the, the feeling in the street at that time with no police on the—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry I talked on top of you. Can you just say it again?

00:14:02:00

Herb Boyd:

Yes. *The feeling in, in the streets at that time, the kind of sense of euphoria, you know, a sense of freedom and rebellion.* And it, the kind of excitement that was, like, touching everybody. *Everybody felt, like, unified. That, you know, the revolution was right around the corner. Because we had been talking about those things in the community anyway. So, everybody felt that this was the catalyst. This was the charge. This was the igniter.* This was what we've been waiting for. And so it was like a push, a march. You know, people were just gathering all over the place. I got caught up in the picture of things and the, and the full excitement. It was exhilarating. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

00:14:37:00

Interviewer:

Great. cut. All right, Herb. Good.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Three-fifty.

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

00:14:45:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marking.

[slate]

00:14:48:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb, the National Guard's been called, and Romney's called in the National Guard. And they've come out on the street, all these young White men coming into the city of Detroit, the inner city of Detroit. What happened? What was it, how did things change in the city?

00:15:01:00

Herb Boyd:

When the National Guard arrived, the whole mood, the festive mood, like the holiday was over. You know, it was like a tone of repression had settled in again as it was before the rebellion was triggered.

00:15:14:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut a sec.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

Interviewer:

Yeah, I think it would probably be better if you could start it off, I remember when the National—

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—the sense of, but you can include it back in that answer. The sense of, the sense of holiday, the sense of—

Herb Boyd:

Mm-hmm, it's over.

Interviewer:

—freedom was over.

Herb Boyd:

OK.

[cut]

00:15:28:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:15:32:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb, tell me, tell me about how things changed when the National Guard came to the city. I mean, relate that story to me about when you were driving down the street that night.

00:15:40:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, I remember driving around the neighborhood that evening when the National Guard had come into the city, and the whole holiday mood, the festive kind of gala event was all over. It was this kind of a mood of repression had set in similar to what it had, Detr—had been in Detroit before the re—rebellion occurred. So, we were driving around. We went over on LaSalle Boulevard, and we turned the corner there, and up the street, we saw this whole brigade. You know, troops was coming, and tanks, and everything. We quickly chan—changed our path, turned around, and went back around the street. But when we turned around, we heard this here report. You know, like fifty caliber machine guns just tearing out all over the place. So, we drove around the block and came back the other side. By that time, the tanks had moved up the street, and we were in back of them. So, we could come up LaSalle Boulevard and see exactly what kind of damage had been done. And you could see, like, the tank, the tank tracks all across the lawns. And you got close to the buildings, and you could see, like, the 50-millimeter caliber bullet holes pock-marked buildings. They had just indiscriminately sprayed these mansions all up and down the street.

00:16:45:00

Interviewer:

People said it was planned. I mean, the, that there were snipers out there, organized snipers. I mean, tell me about, I mean where did that come from.

00:16:54:00

Herb Boyd:

I'm not sure where that rumor came from, but it was a rumor in the air that it was, an invading force had come across the Detroit River from Canada, and they were largely responsible for igniting this rebellion. That is, that this was a plan. This was not a spontaneous eruption of frustration, frustrated and angered people. That this was a coordinated very deliberate communistic plot that was going on. That there were spies being sent in, that there was like a revolutionary, these were like armed revolutionaries that were

gonna be stationed around the city and be, gonna be snipers shooting at police officers. That word spread all over the community, and that's, I think that forced these, the troops to be even more wary. So at any little incident, if a, if a fire was, somebody lit a cigarette in a window, it would be enough to like cause one of the National Guardsman to aim his rifle in that direction.

00:17:47:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut. I'm gonna ask you that again. And I want you to compress it and say that—

Herb Boyd:

OK.

[cut]

00:17:52:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:17:57:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb. There was, there was the rumors that the, the, that the rebellion was planned. What, tell me a little bit about that.

00:18:03:00

Herb Boyd:

There was all kinda rumors, rumors circulating at that time that the, this, that the spontaneous eruption of the masses of people in there, that it was not a spontaneous eruption, that it was, the masses of people were, excuse me. Let's do that, take it from the top. All right?

00:18:17:00

Interviewer:

All right, let's cut. Let's take a cut. Hold on one second. You want something to drink?

Herb Boyd:

Yes. No, no. Let's, let's go ahead with this one, and then I'll take a break.

Interviewer:

Go ahead, Herb.

00:18:25:00

Herb Boyd:

There was a rumor in the air at that time that this whole rebellion was a part of a, of a coordinated plot by armed revolutionaries. It was even, somebody said they come across the, the Detroit River. This is a whole invasion. They had snipers. They had all kinda plans to just continue this rebellion, to keep it going and everything. It seemed to, to, to deny the fact that this was like this spontaneous eruption of people who had been for generations frustrated, and angered, and embittered by the, the racist conditions that prevailed in the community.

00:19:00:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

Was that a little too hot?

Camera Crew Member #3:

Uh-huh. I mean that's great—

[beep]

[cut]

00:19:05:00

Interviewer:

—to the point they'll try to [unintelligible]

Herb Boyd:

[laughs]

Camera Crew Member #3:

[laughs]

[cut]

Herb Boyd:

Curb your militancy. Yes. [laughs]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marking.

[slate]

00:19:15:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:19:16:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb. People, there was this notion that it was planned. Tell me about that. What, what, what it really was.

00:19:23:00

Herb Boyd:

There was rumors being circulated that this was a plot. That the whole rebellion was a coordinated plot by armed revolutionaries coming into the community. There was even a rumor being circulated, circulated they were coming across the Detroit River to invade the community. That they, once this thing was in motion they were gonna make sure it continued. In other words that, it would deny the fact that you had in that community for a number of years a general frustration of the people. I mean, looking at unemployment, looking at the kind of, you know, like the housing was bad at that time. Police brutality was

all over the place. People were, like, virtually starving. There was no, you know, the prices were sky high. So, I mean, that was what the eruption was all about. It was no coordinated plot as far as we could see. Although that rumor was circulated.

00:20:12:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's cut. All right.

[cut]

00:20:17:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:20:21:00

Interviewer:

Herb, when did you get a sense that the rebellion was ending? And what do you think caused it to, to stop?

00:20:27:00

Herb Boyd:

I think the presence, what was, the, the final thing in ending the rebellion there I think was the presence of the National Guard in full force, along with a number of police officers in the community. Once the curfew was established and this armed presence there, the military, and the police were all over the place, it pretty much put an end to things there. I mean, the looting had, was all over by Wednesday I think of that week. Thursday it was pretty much cooled out. I think they began to move out on Thursday of that week, although the curfew stayed in affect all the way down until that first of August.

00:21:03:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's keep rolling, Bobby.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mm-hmm.

00:21:05:00

Interviewer:

I want you to give me an answer again, but I want you to sort of include what did members of the community realize, what did you realize as a member of community with this kind of force, the direction you should go into?

00:21:14:00

Herb Boyd:

Mm-hmm. Well, at that time in the, in the community—

00:21:16:00

Interviewer:

Start—let's go back again. When did you, when did you think that the rebellion had ended?

Herb Boyd:

Oh, OK. I felt it was all over by Wednesday of that week because at that time—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry.

00:21:26:00

Herb Boyd:

I felt that the rebellion was all over by Wednesday of that week. The, clearly with the presence of the, a number of National Guardsmen and the police force now was, like, reinforced you might say, in the community, that the looting was over. The curfew was in effect. So, it was, the, the motion in the street, that had been cooled out. So, that's when I had a feeling that everything was all over. And then it was time to maybe direct our energies and the kind of frustration and anger we had towards some very positive concerns. It was like foolish and ridiculous to go out there to think we could do anything with that kind of armed presence, that kind of a garrison, that kind of occupational army in our community. Mm-hmm.

00:22:04:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

Camera Crew Member #2:

There's overlap.

Interviewer:

OK, we'll do it again.

[beep]

[cut]

00:22:10:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:22:13:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb, when did you see the rebellion ending, and what do you think caused it to stop? And what direction did, you know, you and other people in the community decide you should take?

00:22:23:00

Herb Boyd:

I believe and felt that by Wednesday of that week that the rebellion was pretty much cooled out. That they had put a cap on things. The, *clearly the presence of a, a large number of National Guardsman and federal troops, along with a, a bolstered police department, they had an armed presence out there. So, the looting was all over. The curfew had been put into effect.* There was literally no motion in the street at that time. My concern at that point was that we begin to take our anger and frustration and channel it in some very positive, towards some very positive objectives and goals. One of the things we did in that community was begin to say, How do we restore our community once this here armed presence has been removed? So, we said political organizations and a certain kind of getting our neighborhood,

establishing police/community relations. Those were some, some of the things that a number of us in the neighborhood began to think about by Thursday of that week. Certain, certainly it was true then. But August the 1st, the curfew was over. People were back in motion again. Mm-hmm.

00:23:25:00

Interviewer:

Let's do it again. But you don't have to give me all that information.

Herb Boyd:

Mm-hmm.

Camera Crew Member #1:

We gotta change rolls. [unintelligible]

Interviewer:

Stand up. Stretch.

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #2167]

[sound roll #278]

00:23:35:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:23:37:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb. When did you see the rebellion ending, and what do you think caused it to stop? What do you think that it was important for the community to do when it did stop?

Herb Boyd:

By Wednesday of that week, I felt that the rebellion had pretty much run its course.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Can you start again, I'm sorry.

Herb Boyd:

OK.

Camera Crew Member #1:

All right. We gonna reslate?

Camera Crew Member #2:

No.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK. Go.

00:24:01:00

Herb Boyd:

By Wednesday of that week, I felt the rebellion had pretty much run its course. It'd kinda run out of steam. The, the armed forces, the federal troops, the National Guards, the police, reinforced cops had pretty much put a cap on things. That was by Wednesday of that week. I felt that it would just be futile to be out there in the streets. I mean, the curfew was already enforced anyway, so it was a limited kind of activity in the street. It was pointless and, and stupid to be out there talking about looting any further. Pretty much all the stores had been ripped off anyway. But that, that kind of armed presence was enough to stifle all kind of activity and the possibility of further insurrection. The other concern I felt at that time was that we begin to channel, personally that I would have to channel this anger and frustration toward more constructive and more positive goals, that we begin to organize this community, begin to do something about the kind of continuing—we know that once the armed presence was gone that some of these same factors would be coming back into force again. That we'd have to deal with unemployment. We'd have to deal with the kind of price gouging that was going on. We'd have to deal with the kind of question of housing in our community. So, it was now time to organize, time to rebuild our community.

00:25:09:00

Interviewer:

OK. cut. Good. Good. Very good.

[beep]

[cut]

00:25:15:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:25:18:00

Interviewer:

Tell us about the, the blind pig incident. What, what you had heard about it.

00:25:24:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, the, what we should understand is that it was a number of raids at that time on the blind pigs. You know, the one at 12th and Clairmount was the one that supposedly triggered the whole rebellion. But there were a number of other raids on blind pigs during that week. That was the fifth one. They went in with the hope of making a real catch. You know, in terms of people who were gamblers, who, who were selling liquor, illegal liquor after hours, and what have you. So, they was like, they figured they'd get 25 or 30 people. But when they got there, what they discovered, there was a smaller number of people. I think it was like 12 people there. In fact ironically it was like a party being given for two returning Vietnam veterans. That was why those people had gathered there for that activity that evening. So, they was somewhat disgusted. And I think that kind of anger and frustration on their part and not getting what they were going after might have, like, incensed them and really led to the kind of police brutality that sprang out of that incident that brought all those people in the street after that.

00:26:24:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut. [pause] We're gonna hold onto this—

[beep]

[cut]

00:26:33:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:26:33:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb, tell us about the, the blind pig incident.

00:26:38:00

Herb Boyd:

Mm-hmm. The raid on the blind pig at the 12th and Clairmount supposedly triggered the whole rebellion of '67. Well, that was the fifth raid that they had carried out that week. They had hit four other blind, blind pig, pigs during that week. Let's take this from the top.

Interviewer:

Yeah, go ahead.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Start from the beginning.

00:26:55:00

Interviewer:

Yeah.

00:26:57:00

Herb Boyd:

That was the, that blind pig raid that occurred at 12th and Clairmount supposedly triggering the '67 rebellion was the fifth blind pig raid they'd that week. When I got my call at 11

o'clock that morning, and I hustled on over there, it was already two or three hundred people like milling in the street. And you could see the kind of feeling of intensity, of, you know, anger that was building up because apparently someone had been arrested. Some woman cried out to me that, you know, her sister-in-law had been hit by a police officer. And it's the same old police brutality that we had been getting all these many months and, and over the last couple of years. So, it was like this anger that was building up out there in the street when I arrived on the scene. And even more people had arrived, you know.

00:27:41:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's cut.

[beep]

[cut]

00:27:46:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

[paper rustles]

00:27:53:00

Interviewer:

OK, just tell us that story again. I mean it's like you roll that story down, we're recasting it now.

Herb Boyd:

OK.

Interviewer:

Later in the day, you went by this A&P, and you saw that—

00:28:01:00

Herb Boyd:

After we left 12th and Clairmount, we drove over to the A&P on McGraw and Grand River. When we got there, they had already torn out the, the big picture window there. I mean somebody had thrown a can through there, so it was shattered all over the place. People were going in and out of the store, carrying all kinda goods. It was just general looting all over the place. This went on for about, oh, a half an hour. You know, I'm watching all this activity go on. So, after they had gathered up all of the food that they could then there was a cry, Let's torch the place. Let's burn it down. So, then I say, Well, loo—I got involved at that point in saying, Look, we should not be burning this place down because this fire will catch on, 'cause there was a lot of adjoining buildings next to the A&P. That meant that the fire would go all up and down the block as it had done, you know, over on the west side where nine homes went up once they torched a gas station over there. So, there was a concern about burning down any building because the fire would spread all over the place. I finally was able to convince two or three of the people who I felt were the ring leaders in that and wanted to torch the store, you know, to say, Look, here, put the torch down. We're gonna, get all the food you want. If you, but don't burn down this building. So, they backed off and, and continued to loot the place.

00:29:13:00

Interviewer:

OK. I want you to do it again there. I want you to get, you know, tell me the fact that you got in there, and you tried to talk to people, but they were tired, they didn't wanna listen because—

Herb Boyd:

OK. OK.

Interviewer:

Go ahead.

Herb Boyd:

Pick it up at that point?

Interviewer:

No.

Herb Boyd:

All the way from the start?

Interviewer:

You had gone by the A&P.

00:29:26:00

Herb Boyd:

Yeah, so we arrived over at the A&P later that afternoon. They had already broke out all the windows there. People were going in, pell-mell, helter-skelter, gathering up all the goods that they could. So, this went on for about a half an hour. Like heavy, heavy looting. And more and more people were coming out of, all over the neighborhood. So, after about a half an hour, there was a cry in the air of, Let's burn this place down. This guy, you know, was always, you know, the manager of the store, he didn't hire any Black people over here. They were, the prices were sky high. You know, they would always have just this general kind of disgust for us. So, so they said, Well, let's burn it on down because they, he didn't mean anything to us anyway, and we done got all the food outta here that we need. So, after they, I tried to, I jumped in at that point and say, Look, if you torch this place, the fire is gonna spread all over the place. So, after about two or three minutes, I was able to prevail. They say, OK, cool. Well, we're gonna go back and clean up the place. And they began to get the rest of the food that was left over in the store.

00:30:22:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut. [pause] How much you got left?

Camera Crew Member #1:

One-fifty.

[beep]

[cut]

00:30:29:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:30:31:00

Interviewer:

Herb, did you think the rebellion in Detroit was a way to make change happen in that city?

00:30:39:00

Herb Boyd:

At the time that it was going on, I felt, like a number of my friends, that the revolution was just around the corner. Being politically active at that time, man, I was hooked up with a number of folks out there. We had been in the street organizing for a number of months. This was nothing new for us. In fact many of us was looking for and waiting for an opportunity to have that kind, have the masses in motion because then we could jump in there and maybe begin to channel and to direct them towards some of the objectives, political objectives that we had, you know, in terms of the organizations I was involved in. And we had police brutality. We had concerns about that. We had concerns about, you know, organizing against the grocers. We had a concern about just a general unemployment picture that was in the city of Detroit. And certainly police brutality was high on our agenda because there had been several incidents leading up to the June sit—July situation of '67. So, that was nothing for me. We felt very good about that. We felt that that was a part of the process of change.

00:31:36:00

Interviewer:

OK. cut. That's good. That's good. Let's go again [unintelligible]

Camera Crew Member #3:

OK.

[beep]

[cut]

00:31:45:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:31:47:00

Interviewer:

Did you feel the rebellion did any good?

00:31:49:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, as we say, hindsight is 20/20. And after, in the midst of all of the rebellion, you, you hope for the best. That this would, like, put some pressure on the various city officials. That this would bring about some notice to the kind of neglect. They ignored the Black community all these years. This was an opportunity to get their attention and focus on some of the needs and demands that we had in that community. So, after it was all over and looking at, you know, forty-three people killed, and looking at the, the devastation that we had done to our own communities and everything, I just felt that it didn't really have the overall impact that I wanted it to have. I think that some of the constructive things that did grow out of it in view of, well, my personal development, becoming more politically active, taking, channeling that frustration toward, you know, taking it to the college campuses as we did at that time, into the union movements. All of those things was an outgrowth of the '67 rebellion. We can't lose sight of that. 'Cause Black studies departments at the various colleges around there all grew out of that. The union movements that developed inside of those plants all came out of the '67 rebellion. A number of community organizations that was created at that time all were a result of the '67 rebellion. So, in a sense, it had some very positive contributions in terms of organizing and raising the conscience, political conscience of the, of the community. I think it had those kinda constructive ends.

00:33:18:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[beep]

[cut]

00:33:26:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:33:27:00

Interviewer:

Herb, if you could tell me that story again about driving down the street that night, and then you saw the National Guard.

Herb Boyd:

Yeah. It was like the Monday evening—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sorry.

Herb Boyd:

Too soon. Too quick. Oh, OK. OK.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Start again.

00:33:38:00

Herb Boyd:

OK. It was Monday evening when I was driving around the community where I lived and went over on LaSalle Boulevard. And we were driving up the street there, and coming directly at us was a whole convoy of troops with some tanks up front. I said, That's a sign for us to turn around. We turned around and went up, back up the other street. And in about, oh, maybe fifteen, twenty seconds later, we heard these large, these loud reports coming from, like, 50-millimeter machine guns. You know, having been in the service, I could recognize that sound. So, we drove around the block, came all the way down Lynwood, come up the street, and in back up this convoy now. And when we drove up the street, we could see what they had left behind was, like, tank tracks going across the lawns. And the whole, this mansion was just pock-marked with bullet, bullet holes where they had just indiscriminately sprayed the whole building there, attempting to demolish the whole mansion.

00:34:35:00

Interviewer:

Yeah. I want you to do it again—

Herb Boyd:

OK.

Interviewer:

—but you gotta tell me you heard loud gunfire—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—'cause they may not know what you mean when you say loud reports.

Herb Boyd:

OK.

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #2168]

00:34:45:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:34:47:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb. You tell us that story again about that night you were driving down the street and saw the National Guard. The reports or I mean the fire.

00:34:55:00

Herb Boyd:

Yes, this, this was like Monday evening, day after the riots had began. We were driving down LaSalle and coming at us was a whole convoy of troops headed up by a couple of tanks. So, we immediately turned and went back up the street. About fifteen, twenty seconds after we turned around, we heard this large, it mean it was like huge fire. I mean gunfire. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. So, we continued on around the block and said, We'll go

down a couple of blocks and come up in back of the convoy and see, what find out what had happened. 'Cause we certainly didn't wanna, we didn't wanna go back the way we had come. So, we went all the way around in back of them, and we were coming up the street to see what kind of things that had, that had happened when we heard the gunfire. We got up the street there. This mansion, first of all, you could see the tank tracks all across the lawn. And then we got closer up to the mansion, and you could see, like, the building was just completely pock-marked. Indiscriminately this fifty caliber gun, gun had just torn all the windows out, and there was just gunfi—gun holes all over the building. And then we just drove on off after that.

00:36:01:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut. That's good for me.

[beep]

[cut]

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #3:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] hour

Herb Boyd:

[laughs] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[beep]

[cut]

00:36:11:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:36:13:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about when the snipers came in. What did the federal troops, what did the National Guard, what did they do?

00:36:18:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, in the evenings when there were reports of rumors that there was a sniper in the neighborhood then the first thing you would hear was this ominous sound in the air of helicopters coming in, like a alien force invading the neighborhood. Spotlights would come out, so they could light up the whole area so they could isolate that sniper. Then the ground forces would move in and set up and kinda cordon off the neighborhood so they could surround the whole building. So, the 'copters, you know, hovering over, the spotlights coming down, the troops on the ground. It was a very ominous kind of feeling in the community at that time.

00:36:50:00

Interviewer:

OK. I want you to do it again.

Herb Boyd:

OK.

Interviewer:

And this time, there was this, I mean, if you could just finish the answer of because there was this rumor of snipers, but it wasn't, it wasn't, and it—

Herb Boyd:

It was a rumor.

[beep]

[cut]

00:37:05:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:37:09:00

Interviewer:

Very ominous feeling that you gave before. What happened when there, when there was rumors of snipers?

00:37:14:00

Herb Boyd:

There was, like, always throughout the four or five days of the rebellion, there was rumors in the air about snipers being present in the community. Unfounded. All of them were unfounded. But whenever they felt that there was a, a sniper in one of the buildings, particularly in the evenings, the helicopters would come in. They would hover over that particular location. Spotlights would stream down on it. They would also be coordinated with troops moving on the grounds. They would surround that whole thing, cordon off the neighborhood. It had a very ominous feeling in the air when that occurred.

00:37:44:00

Interviewer:

OK. cut.

[beep]

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

What, what I did what you to do is still give me the story—

Camera Crew Member #3:

[sneezes]

Interviewer:

—and then take—

[cut]

00:37:51:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:37:55:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb. Tell me about this sense, this, the rumors of snipers and what would happen with the helicopter, when the helicopters would come in.

00:38:00:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, throughout the four or five days of the rebellion, there was like all kinda rumors in the air about, you know, an invading army. That this armed rebellion that was going on, it was coordinated, and there was all kinda plots in the air, and snipers, rumors of snipers all over the place. Particularly in the evening, you know, when there was a report of a sniper being in a particular location, the helicopters would hover in. Their spotlights would stream down on the location. The troops on the ground would be coordinated to come in, cordon off the neighborhood. And they figured they would have this here poor little old sniper isolated. In many instances, it was like a false alarm. You know, there was no, no snipers available. What they were really dealing with is kind of anger and the frustration in a community. That's what was really on the, on the agenda.

00:38:44:00

Interviewer:

OK. cut. OK.

[cut]

00:38:51:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:38:52:00

Interviewer:

OK, Herb. Give me the story about the, the rumors and the helicopters, and what, what the federal troops and the police thought was happening in the city.

00:39:02:00

Herb Boyd:

Well, throughout the four or five days of the rebellion, there were reports, rumors that there was snipers all over the place. You know, that this is kind of an armed plot. They were gonna take over the community and what have you. Whenever there was a rumor or a report that there was a sniper in a particular location, you would have, like, helicopters would be called in. There would be, they would hover over that location. Their spotlights would stream down in order to throw light all over that area. They would be coordinated with the, the ground forces. They would move in, cordon off the neighborhood. You know, prepared to just tear that place apart. These were the kind of rumors that were circulated. So often they were, like, ill founded. There was no sniper available there. There had been, it was a false alarm. But they were so trigger happy that even a little sign of, of a living life there, they would open fire on the place. And so a lot of people, and a lot of innocent people were killed. You know, because they would be hovering down as a result of being called in like this, see.

00:39:57:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut. [pause] OK, I think we—

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:40:03:00

Copyright 2021 Washington University Libraries