

Interview with **Ronald Scott**

Date: October 30, 1988

Interviewer: Judy Richardson

Camera Rolls: 2048-2052

Sound Rolls: 222-224

Team:

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.

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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 #2048]

[sound roll #222]

00:00:12:00

Camera crew member #1:

One.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark one.

[slate]

Ronald Scott:

Want me to speak?

Interviewer:

No, it's OK.

Ronald Scott:

OK.

00:00:18:00

Interviewer:

OK, I want you to go back to 1967. You're twenty years old. I want you to tell me a little bit about the relationship between the police and the Black community, that sense of an occupying force. And if you could give me an example. You talked about that search and seizure when you were a teenager.

00:00:36:00

Ronald Scott:

Well, [clears throat] the Detroit Police Department, you know, [laughs] later on came to be known by many names, you know, folks called them the rollers or whatever the case may be. And generally the, the Detroit Police Department was not viewed as a friend of the Black community. There was a unit called the Big Four and it was comprised of four cops who would ride in a car and, as you know, you know, a lot of guys like—

00:01:09:00

Interviewer:

OK, excuse me. Cut. I need to let you know, which I forgot—

[beep]

Interviewer:

—that they will never—

[cut]

00:01:14:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark two.

[slate]

00:01:17:00

Interviewer:

You had talked about the police as kind of considered as an occupation army by the Black community. Can you talk about that and then the search and seizure example?

00:01:25:00

Ronald Scott:

Well, [clears throat] the, the Detroit Police was primarily comprised of a majority of White officers who, one, did not live in the Black community, who did not seem to generally like especially a number of the young Black males who in many cases, as you know, or as it was customary in those days—

00:01:49:00

Interviewer:

Excuse me, just a second. I know it's easy to say you know—

Ronald Scott:

No, no, as it was customary.

Interviewer:

Yeah, right, OK. [laughs]

Ronald Scott:

OK. [laughs]

Interviewer:

All right.

Ronald Scott:

OK. I'm sorry about that.

[beep]

[cut]

00:01:57:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark three.

[slate]

00:02:01:00

Interviewer:

OK, you had talked about the police as an occupation force. Can you talk about the relationship?

00:02:06:00

Ronald Scott:

The relationship between the Black community and the Detroit Police Department was one that was at best tenuous. It was at worst a continuing conflict, a continuing series of, of conflicts whereby, as was customary in those days and is customary today, a lot of Black guys would stand on the corner, lot of other friends of mine stand on the corner back in those days, in the '50s and '60s, stand on the corner and you'd doo-wop, you know, so forth. But just maybe just standing around would draw what came to be known as the Big Four. It was a group of four police officers, usually White, who would ride around and basically terrorize individuals who were standing on the corner and tell 'em, ride around the block, for instance, and say, We want that corner, and you better not be there when we come back. I mean it didn't matter what you were doing. If they told you to leave, you had to leave. So, when they'd come around the corner, if you weren't gone, usually one person would be singled out, beaten, harassed, maybe taken down or whatever the case may be. And in those days the police department was the, pardon the pun, they were the law. I mean, they didn't have to answer to anybody except their own peers. The community was, the Black community was not represented in the police department to any great degree. When you saw a Black cop it was a unique occurrence. So, generally speaking, the police department, as represented by the Big Four and a, a number of other individual cops. The cops back in those days as individuals all had reputations. There was a guy called Rotation Slim, for instance, who was known as a guy like a cowboy who would come and kick in your door if you did something wrong. You know there were, there was a guy that they called, legendary guy called Chew Tobacco 'cause he chewed tobacco and would walk up on somebody, take their gun, and spit chew tobacco, chewing tobacco in their face. These were the legendary so called tough street cops who would strike fear in the hearts of people in the Black community. My father and other people [coughs] would talk about how these guys were, you know, to be avoided at all cost. And I'll never forget. It was, I was, when I was about eight or nine years old, the guy

who was known as Chew Tobacco was shot by a, a barricaded gunman. And this was in, in a, in, the guy was, it was in a Black neighborhood. Anyway, he walked up to the door and he was gonna kick the door in. As he kicked the door in, the guy, you know, shot buckshot in his face. Now, he even became more legendary after that because, though the buckshot splattered in his face, he still lived and walked in and drug the guy out. Or dragged the guy out, rather. [laughs] So, you know, so these, these guys were, were there, in my opinion, basically to make sure that the Black community and people in my neighborhood never felt that they wanted to do anything that would draw the police into a confrontation with them. People generally, many people generally feared the police, except the guys who normally, a lotta the guys on the street who were involved in, in the life as it were, they didn't really fear the cops that much. I mean, they knew—

Interviewer:

Talk about—

Ronald Scott:

—what was happening, right.

00:05:53:00

Interviewer:

—OK, and talk also about what happened to you.

00:05:57:00

Ronald Scott:

Well, [coughs] when I was, I mean, if you ref—I mean, as I think about the situation when I was about twelve, thirteen years old, there was a crackdown on crime in the city. This was roughly about 1959, 1960. And the then mayor, Louis Miriani, had stated that they wanted a, a crackdown on crime, and this crackdown took place totally in the Black community, the assumption being that there was no crime anywhere else. And I remember on one occasion I was walking down the street with my uncle and the cops came up, stopped us and told us, you know, that we were walking down the street and they wanted to, you know, talk to us. So they got out of the car, came over to us and, you know, wh-which—they were talking to my uncle, asking him, you know, Where he was going, what he was doing in that neighborhood. We were half a block from my house. And as he was explaining that, I just generally asked 'em, I said, Well you know, why, why are you asking us all of this? And so, one of the cops said to me, Well, just shut up and don't even blow your breath in my face. You know. And then to me, as a thirteen-year-old, I, you know, I didn't really, this was like, though I knew about what was happening with the cops before, it was like the first confrontation I had really personally ever had with them. And, you know, 'cause in school in those days the, you were told the police officers were your friend and that these were the guys who kept you from

getting hit by cars and, you know, came and rescued your dog and all that kind of stuff. And I felt that for the first time on a personal level, at that time, that these guys could actually kill you. And, and, you know, it was, it was, it wasn't so much frightenin', it was a combination of fear and anger. And I mean, and I just, I, I mean, I guess somewhere deep down inside of me I remember that. I didn't go around at that time with a vendetta against the cops. But I would suspect there's friends of mine that I knew had had similar things happen to them, and if you talk to other people in Detroit or from Detroit at that particular time, a lot of specifically Black men will go back to that era if, if, if they remember that period, and will point to that as being one of the things that they remember very explicitly.—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Ronald Scott:

—And this was at the same time that the police department, of course—

00:08:49:00

Interviewer:

Excuse me.

Ronald Scott:

Right.

Interviewer:

Cut.

Camera crew member #2:

Rollout.

Camera crew member #1:

Yeah, OK.

[beep]

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm.

[beep]

Ronald Scott:

Is that what you

[cut]

[camera roll #2049]

[sound roll #223]

00:08:57:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark four.

[slate]

00:09:00:00

Interviewer:

Talk a little bit about what it was like being in a home and your father coming back from the factory tired, frustrated, and it not being like Ozzie and Harriet.

Ronald Scott:

Well, my mother remarried, and so my stepfather—

Interviewer:

Sorry, if you could just start with, My stepfather.

00:09:17:00

Ronald Scott:

OK, my stepfather worked in the foundry, worked at Ford Rouge foundry. Ford Rouge is the largest industrial complex in, in America, or was at that time. Henry Ford built a complex whereby you could build a car from start to finish, raw materials. Had a glass plant—

00:09:44:00

Interviewer:

If you could just not worry about that part.

00:09:46:00

Ronald Scott:

OK.

00:09:47:00

Interviewer:

Just start—

Ronald Scott:

OK, fine. OK.

Interviewer:

—OK. Keep going.

00:09:50:00

Ronald Scott:

So, my father worked in a foundry, where most Blacks worked, and because they weren't allowed to work in the, you know, the upper echelon jobs. Upper echelon in, in terms of the industrial world being the glass plant, the frame plant, or shall I say the easier jobs. The foundry was like the coal mine. The foundry is where you turn the, the coke that was used ultimately to build, to make the steel, that was where you shoveled it or did whatever was necessary. My stepfather was a dark, brown-skinned man. When he came home, he would come home looking Black from the, from the coke ovens. And he and his friends I remember used to sit out in their car for hours, drinking, and all the guys worked in a factory, generally worked in the same place. And sometimes when he'd come in he would get hostile, angry, even violent. And at the time I was, you know, really kind of upset and frightened and so forth by it. And he was generally a pretty good guy, I mean, but at the times when he would drink, after, usually after coming home from the factory, which would be two, three in the afternoon, about the time I'd be getting out of school.

00:11:25:00

Interviewer:

Cut just a sec.

Ronald Scott:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Ron, 'cause it's such a good story. If you can—

[beep]

[cut]

00:11:31:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark five.

[slate]

00:11:34:00

Interviewer:

You talked about your father coming home from, from the job and the sense it wasn't like Ozzie and Harriet. Can you talk about that?

00:11:40:00

Ronald Scott:

Well, as I sa—when my father came home, he would sit and drink with his buddies, get drunk, come in the house. And back in the '50s, everybody would watch Ozzie and Harriet, and you see the nice clean neighborhood and so forth. And we had, it was a fairly nice neighborhood, but when he came home, it was not like Ozzie and Harriet. He didn't put on his smoking jacket and come to the table. A lot of times he was drunk, lot of times he was hostile, lot of times he was just downright mad. But it, it made things tough. And when I

think back to those days, I think about, you know, some of the songs in that time. They had this song called "Bad, Bad Whiskey Made Me Lose My Happy Home," and my father used to drink some of that bad whiskey. He used to get very, very tough at times, and I didn't think about it until later, but it was probably the fact that he and his friends worked in, in the coke oven all day long and, and they didn't have any way to deal with the frustration so it came out in the family.

00:12:47:00

Interviewer:

If you can give me that again, but give me a sense that that's where the Black workers were consigned to.

00:12:51:00

Ronald Scott:

OK. When the guys in my stepfather's generation went into the plant, which was roughly in the '50s, '40s and the '50s, they basically, most of them worked in the coke foundries, in the coke ovens or around the coke ovens. They basically, as a result of shoveling the coal and making the coke, worked in the lowest paid, the dirtiest and the hardest jobs. And the only thing they could hope for was to one day end up being a foreman, where maybe they didn't have to work so hard and they didn't have to come home dirty and tired and hurting. And most of these guys were, like, really basically good men, but there wasn't any hope of going any further than where they were.

00:14:04:00

Interviewer:

And how did that make you feel in terms of Ozzie and Harriet, seeing that on television?

00:14:09:00

Ronald Scott:

Well, watching Ozzie and Harriet on television, it just made me feel like that wasn't something that was attainable, not at that time anyway. It made me feel kind of cheated. I didn't think about it in, in that sense at that time, but it made me feel kinda angry, kinda cheated. It made me wonder if the stuff as a child that I wanted to achieve, all the things I thought about achieving, whether or not I could achieve them or not because when you were coming up in Detroit, the only thing that you could really look forward to with, with surety was the fact that you would be able to work in the factory, and that was it. If you were gonna stay here, you'd work in the factory. Maybe the post office. That's it. And I didn't feel like, like that was what I wanted to do, and I felt shortchanged.

00:15:13:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about your feelings about the, the civil rights movement in the South. How did you respond to that?

00:15:19:00

Ronald Scott:

Well, at the time that the civil rights movement in the South was going on, I was growing in consciousness and, like a lotta people here in the North, we read about what was happening or watched it on TV or whatever the case may be. But I and my friends, my friends and I, we, we just did not relate to it in terms of an intensely passionate situation. We, we didn't, of course we felt hurt and concerned about the, the bombing in Birmingham or the dogs, and about the students. We identified with them 'cause we were the same age, but it wasn't personal. It really was not personalized. You know, I had known of guys that I knew, known guys who had been harassed, as I mentioned earlier, by the police, who had been shot, who were in prison, a lotta guys who just wouldn't make it. And it just didn't relate to the particular kinds of things that were happening in our lives. It, it, it, it really didn't.

00:16:37:00

Interviewer:

Did you have a problem with the nonviolence?

Camera crew member #3:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

Cut.

Camera crew member #3:

That answer was great. We need [inaudible] civil rights movement.

[beep]

[cut]

00:16:45:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

00:16:48:00

Interviewer:

How did you respond to the nonviolence of the, of the civil rights movement in the South?

00:16:54:00

Ronald Scott:

In terms of the nonviolence, and which characterized the civil rights movement in the South, it didn't really relate to us at all, in my opinion. We were concerned because we were Black, we were in a similar situation, but it didn't relate. At one time in my life I had lived in a situation where, you know, landlord had, wouldn't fix the plumbing, [laughs] wouldn't deal with the vermin, rats and so forth. And had to confront the guy, almost get in a fight with the guy to make him do something. So it, it didn't relate, it didn't relate because on a day-to-day level, like the police and other kinds of things, there were situations that could lead to a confrontation at any given time, not to mention the conflicts that we had among one another. So, it wasn't the kinda situation that lent itself to nonviolence in the way that the South and the southern movement was charac—in, in the way that it was characterized. As—

00:17:58:00

Interviewer:

How did you respond to, to Rap and Stokely?

Ronald Scott:

That was different.

Interviewer:

If you could start with—

Ronald Scott:

That was different. It was different. Stokely—

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

00:18:06:00

Ronald Scott:

Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown presented a, a whole different perspective in terms of the way we related to the civil rights movement. By about 1964, I and many other young people were beginning to grow in consciousness and, you know, we knew about Malcolm X and other kinds of things like that. I'll never forget the first time that Stokely came here because it was, there was a, a young friend of mine who attended a rally and Stokely said to her, he said, all of the women were wearing then, as many are now, straightened hair, and, so he said to 'em, he said, If you really wanna be Black, take that stuff outta your hair. The girl ran outta the church, came back about twenty minutes later and her hair was standing up on her head. And she said, Stokely! Stokely! I'm Black. [laughs] And so, it, it was, I think that the young people related because, one, Stokely and the people in SNCC and, and I remember people in CORE and so forth were not that much older than them. You know, I attended a thing called a Black Symposium here with Stokely and McKissick and those guys, and what they were talking about related to the frustration that we had. It wasn't a big leap to say, for us, to fight for yourself. My parents told me, even though my mother is a Christian, a very devout Christian, she told me, If somebody hits you, then you fight as much as you need to fight to defend yourself. That was the law, that was the situation that we dealt with every day. And so Stokely and Rap, especially Rap, you know, just spoke to the issues that affected us in a—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Ronald Scott:

—urban situation, I think more so than anyone else.

00:20:08:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Bless you.

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

Whoa! [laughs]

[beep]

Interviewer:

It's just what—oh, honey.

[cut]

[camera roll #2050]

00:20:14:00

Interviewer:

Nonviolence, yeah.

Camera crew member #1:

Speed.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:20:24:00

Interviewer:

You were saying that your mother, she was Christian, but she still raised you to fight back.
Can you talk—

00:20:28:00

Ronald Scott:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, my mother was a, was a tough Christian. [laughs] She, she taught me to do what was necessary to survive in the city. In, on several occasions I had fights, and she told me two things that I remember. She said, If you go out and you lose the fight, then you're

gonna have to fight me when you come back. So I didn't want to fight my mother, I mean, I knew I'd lose it. The second thing was, she said, If somebody bothers you, you fight as hard, pick up anything, do whatever's necessary to win. And that was because the way that kids would fight in a, in a urban situation, I mean, it, it could lead to anything. I mean we used to throw bricks at one another, we used to fight with fists or whatever the case may be. So, in relationship to the nonviolence of the civil rights movement in the South, we just didn't see that if somebody comes up and knocks you upside the head, that you shouldn't knock two or three people upside the head to make sure that never happened again, because it just didn't relate to what we were feeling inside. Though we respected Dr. King and we respected the movement, our feelings, I think, were quite more consistent and congruent with what some of the main spokespersons for SNCC had to say. Stokely Carmichael and particularly Rap Brown, 'cause when Rap came up with this little statement, If America don't come around, burn America down, I mean, everybody could relate to that. They could relate to that primarily because, not necessarily that everybody wanted to go out and throw a firebomb, but the fact of the matter is, is that we had always been put in the situation, we meaning those of us who were feeling consciousness as Black people at that time, had been put in a situation where we always had to react as opposed to be proactive in a situation. And when we got the chance to act and to deal with all the frustration we even saw and felt about why those people, about the situation with people getting beaten and so forth in the South, we, we, we, we dealt with that and we responded to it. And the thing of it is, is that we were asking ourselves, If those dudes are hitting all of those people, they got thousands of people down there, I mean, why don't they just fight back? And that was what we found to be quite strange, and, and, and my training was, is that you do what's necessary.

00:23:22:00

Interviewer:

Cut. That's good. OK.

[beep]

Interviewer:

OK, we're gonna go—

[cut]

00:23:28:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:23:31:00

Interviewer:

OK, you're in the projects in the middle of the riot. What is happening now with the tank going outside your house and shooting?

00:23:42:00

Ronald Scott:

In the summer of 1967, in July of 1967, about maybe two, three days, you begin to lose track after a number of years, but it's roughly about the middle of the riot, the rebellion really. And during that situation, a neighbor of ours, in public housing projects the way that it's set up on a floor there are about eight apartments, and we knew each other real well, so a lotta times we'd leave our doors open. In this particular occasion, everybody had closed their doors because they didn't really know what was going on outside. National guardsmen were across the street from this fourteen-story unit. They were across the street maybe two hundred yards. They had a machine gun setup and—

00:24:42:00

Interviewer:

Cut. [Coughs] Sorry.

[beep]

[cut]

00:24:47:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:24:49:00

Interviewer:

OK, if you can talk about the sniping incident while you were living in the projects.

00:24:56:00

Ronald Scott:

I lived on the fourteenth floor, a fourteen-story building, and down the hall there was a friend of mine that I'd known, oh, I guess for five or six years. He had previously been an alcoholic. His family had also been involved in alcohol abuse. On this particular day in the middle of the rebellion, July 25th, 26th, something like that, he apparently—and this is what everybody had heard about—apparently had brought a rifle into the house, and we heard several shots, and heard it coming from his apartment. And the next thing we knew, as we looked out of the window, we were trying to see where the shots were coming from. As we looked out of the window and my mother, myself, my five-year-old sister, two-year-old brother were there, we looked out of the window and the next thing we saw were maybe about thirty rounds of M si-M-60 machine gun bullets coming at the apartment or shooting past the apartment. They didn't hit the building, but we saw the rounds being shot, lighting up the area. We fell on the floor, turned out the lights, and the next thing we heard, the shots stopped both inside the building and outside. Next thing we saw were a group of national guardsmen coming to the door, banging on the door, kicking on the door, opened the door and said, Who's shooting in here? And I wa-walked to the door and I said, Well, no one's shooting in here. And they said, they said, Somebody shot up here. Said, So we're gonna come in and see. And just then, before they walked in, somebody, one of the other guardsmen said, The shooting came from down here. They ran down to the guy's apartment where the shooting had taken place and dragged him out. As they were dragging him out a couple of them hit him upside the head a couple of times. Dragged him on the elevator. And my little sister was there and, you know, everybody was there and we were just really in a state of shock because if they had decided they wanted to come into that apartment, this is what were thinking, that it could've been me or it could've been anybody else. And it was just, it was just rough.

00:28:14:00

Interviewer:

Cut please.

[beep]

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

00:28:19:00

Camera crew member #1:

Speed.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:28:21:00

Interviewer:

OK. Starting with being in the project and hearing the fire. You don't know at this point where the sniping is coming from.

Ronald Scott:

Right.

Interviewer:

OK.

00:28:33:00

Ronald Scott:

We lived on the fourteenth floor of a fourteen-story building in the Jeffries Housing Project. And on this particular night in the middle of the rebellion, my mother, five-year-old sister, my three-year-old brother were there. And we heard shooting. We heard like, [snaps] crack, crack, crack. And we were just sort of looking outta the window, at least I was looking outta the window. And my mother and my brother and sister were in another room. And the next thing we know, there is a blast of machine gun fire coming past the building. We fall on the floor and turn out the lights. Next thing we hear about two, three minutes later a group of— there was this, this knock pounding, pounding, pounding, pounding on the door. And I opened the door, some national guardsmen standing at the door. And they said, We heard some shooting coming outta here. There was some shooting coming outta here. And I said, Well, there was no shooting in here. And he said, Well, we're gonna come in and see. We, we thought that there was shooting coming outta here anyway. And, by that time another guardsman down the end of the hall said, No, the shooting was coming outta this apartment here. My sister, my brother were standing there, and my mother, and everybody's just paralyzed and we were standing there. They go down to the end of the hall. By this time they grab this friend of mine who lived down at the end of the hall and they said, This is the guy that's doing the shooting. They pull him towards the elevator and they hit him a couple of times, drag him off. The only thing I could think about was the fact that I was glad that none of us had been killed, I was glad that my sister, my brother, my mother hadn't been hurt in the situation. And to tell you the truth, it's just like other things, I was really, really, really,

really, really kinda angry by the situation that, here I was in a situation I couldn't do anything about it. And even now when I talk about it, it, it really bothers me a lot because—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Ronald Scott:

—it's just, it's just tough. And I, and I never want to be in that situation again where I can't do anything about it.

00:31:48:00

Interviewer:

We're cutting.

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #2051]

[sound roll #244]

00:31:55:00

Camera crew member #2:

Rolling and marker.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark eleven.

[slate]

00:32:02:00

Interviewer:

If you can go back to that and start with the National Guard coming to the door, and give me a sense of the powerlessness and nowhere to turn.

00:32:12:00

Ronald Scott:

The national guardsman came to our door. They beat on the door, it was loud. We were inside, my mother, my brother and sister, and myself. And I walked to the door, and you gotta understand they weren't just knocking on the door, they were knocking like they were gonna cave the door in. I walked to the door, it's a national guardsman, a White guy standing there saying, We heard somebody shooting in here. And we wanna come in. And I said, Nobody was shooting in here. He said, Yeah, we heard somebody shooting in here. And I was standing there, in front of my mother and everybody else, and my first instinct was to do something. These guys had rifles, bayonets and the whole shot. There was nowhere to get out of the apar-the apartment unless you jumped fourteen stories out of the apartment. I felt like there was nothing I could do. I guess the reason why, when I talk about it today, I feel [pause] I, I, I, I, it, it bothers me so much is because, if I had had a chance to do anything about that situation, I might have been just like my friend who was dra-who was dragged later out of, when the, when the national guardsman heard down the hall that, one of the guardsman said, The shooting came from this apartment, not from that one. When they walked out, they dragged my friend down the hall out, hit him upside the head a couple of times and dragged him on the elevator. And I'd wondered where the shooting was coming from and why he would shoot, but at that very moment I was frightened, but I was so doggone angry, I was so angry until, if I had had an opportunity when we were standing there just like rats in a hole, and here's this guy in my house, pushing up, us up in a situation where there's nowhere to go, if I had an opportunity, I probably woulda grabbed him right there, and I might not be living today. But the point of it is, is that he walked into my house, and there was nobody there to defend anything or coulda defended anything. And when I look back at that today, I think that one of the worst things about anybody that ever has to go through a situation like that is feeling that you're helpless, is feeling that there's nothin' that you can do and that you might die any moment. That's—so.

00:35:14:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[beep]

[cut]

00:35:20:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark twelve.

[slate]

00:35:24:00

Interviewer:

OK. From the time the National Guard bangs on that door, tell me what happened.

00:35:33:00

Ronald Scott:

On my side of the door, I'm standing there, I'm wondering exactly what's gonna happen when I open that door. ***And I open the door and there are about four or five national guardsmen. All young, all White, looking around, with rifles and bayonets.*** They come in the apartment, my sister is five years old, my brother is three, my mother is standing there. They come in our house, in our living room, they're standing there. And, by this time, in the three, four days of the rebellion, there've been people killed. You know, there've been people shot on the street for no reason whatsoever. By this time, I'm angry, I'm fearful of what's happening. ***And this one guy*** that's looking at me as he comes in, ***he says, We heard some shooting here.*** And I said, There was no shooting here. He says, Yeah, we heard some shooting here. And this guy is standing, looking at me, at any moment that he can blow my head off, my sister or my brother's. And I know he didn't come there just to make a courtesy call. He's come in there because he assumes I had a gun. ***And everybody who had been shot up to this point that we'd heard about, they all said that they had a gun and that they were shooting at the police. That became the line, This guy was a sniper, he was shooting at the police. And I knew that if I was shot, if my family was shot, that they could have closed the door in this apartment and nobody woulda ever known what happened.*** And when I looked in his eyes and he looked at me, it looked to me as if, it looked as if he wanted to kill somebody. And when I think back at that situation, and I think about the circumstances and I think about what I felt, I felt helpless, I felt angry, and I felt that my whole family and me could die at any minute and nobody would be able to do anything about it. And I thought about the fact that there were a lotta people out there just like us, who didn't have any other choice. And when I think back about it, to this day, if I could have done anything at that moment to strike back, to do something about that situation, that I might not be here today, because my little brother and sister, to this day, when I look back and think about the fact that some guy from outside of Detroit, some guy who didn't, didn't even know us could've of blown us away, it makes me mad. It makes me mad and it makes me realize that, as my mother say, that, you know, God was protecting us. And I believe that if the guy who came in and said that the shooting was happening down the hall hadn't come in, that we might not have made it. There wasn't anything I could do.

00:39:14:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[beep]

[cut]

00:39:20:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

00:39:25:00

Interviewer:

Talk about, you said that even you thought it wouldn't happen in Detroit. What do you think the moral was of, of the rebellion?

00:39:35:00

Ronald Scott:

I felt in many senses that maybe the rebellion, re-rebellion of the magnitude that it occurred in Detroit might not happen, maybe couldn't happen. Everybody was working. Those of us who weren't in Vietnam were working. And it was carefree. I mean this was Motown, right? Everybody was having a good time. And the wor—the only thing you had to worry about was to get to the party on the weekend. And a lotta money flowing, whole shot. And so people never felt that there was anything happening inside of us, I mean, being Black people, at this point that might lead to the kind of rebellion that happened. In fact, there was an article out at that time, I think, where Mayor Cavanagh said and Governor Romney at the time said why it can't happen here, talking about the Watts rebellion. And I look back at the time and I think about the fact that inside a lotta the people who went out, and not, not so much the looters 'cause the guys and women and so forth who looted I think took basically advantage of the situation that happened, that was just spontaneous situational anger. And you gotta understand that you had stores and apartments, and as I told you before, as I mentioned earlier anyway, there were a lot of absentee landlords and situations where people

were feeling frustrated. There was no way to do anything about it, so the rebellion just was an opportunity to strike back at those places and those people that you couldn't strike back at in any other way.

00:41:32:00

Interviewer:

Cut please. I, I need to get to that.

Ronald Scott:

OK.

[beep]

Ronald Scott:

OK.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

[cut]

00:41:38:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

00:41:39:00

Interviewer:

OK. Couldn't happen here. Why?

00:41:44:00

Ronald Scott:

Lotta people felt it couldn't happen in Detroit because people had good jobs, they had homes, and generally it was a good time. It was carefree and people didn't have anything to worry about. But you can't always judge things by how they appear on the surface. *Inside of most Black people there was a time bomb. There was a pot that was about to overflow, and there was rage that was about to come out, and the rebellion just provided an opportunity for that. I mean why else would people get upset about cops raiding a blind pig? They'd done that numerous times before. But people just got tired. People just got tired of it. And it just exploded.*

00:42:46:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Mm-hmm.

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #2052]

00:42:50:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

00:42:53:00

Interviewer:

OK, people would say, Well, Black folks had plenty of jobs in plants. What's the problem?

00:43:00:00

Ronald Scott:

Black people had jobs. Black people didn't have plenty of jobs in the plant. In the mid-'60s, when I went to work at Dearborn Assembly Plant, we worked on the assembly line. That was a step up from the coke ovens, but most of us worked on the assembly line, and that's what we did. When you came out of there at the end of the day that's all you dreamed about was cars and so forth. It, it was a hard job, it was a monotonous job. ***And you constantly saw White guys on the assembly line, foremen, in White shirts who would leave and who would drive to a better neighborhood, who would drive a better car and so forth. And, there wasn't the opportunity there, there wasn't the opportunity.*** And I didn't wanna end up working in the same situation that my stepfather did, and I didn't want to die like he died at forty-two, of alcoholism and cancer. Not to say that I would have become an alcoholic, but I saw guys die young, frustrated because they couldn't do the things that they had in their minds and their hearts, and I didn't wanna be like that.

00:44:18:00

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm. Talk also about the expectations. I mean, what, you're, you're young, it's 1967. What kind of expectations did you have?

00:44:27:00

Ronald Scott:

By 1967, I think that one of the things that was positive about the Southern movement and some other things was the fact that we were beginning to feel that, as a, as a group of young people, that we could do just about anything we wanted to, that we could, that we had maybe some options that we didn't think that we had. We, we felt that we wanted to do more than our parents had done. Our parents wanted us to do more than they had done. So most of us were looking to universities and other kinds of job situations. That's one of the reasons why I went into the media, because I didn't think about it before, I wanted to be an entertainer. I mean, that's what we did. I wanted to sing and do all that kind of stuff, but then I found that the media allowed me to do similar things. That was unheard of.

00:45:20:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Only 'cause you're going past the time [unintelligible].

Camera crew member #1:

[coughs]

Ronald Scott:

OK.

Interviewer:

Just [unintelligible]—

[beep]

[cut]

00:45:28:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

00:45:31:00

Interviewer:

OK. What changed on that relationship?

Ronald Scott:

The thing that changed is that Black people—

Interviewer:

Sorry. I didn't give you—

00:45:38:00

Ronald Scott:

OK.

00:45:38:00

Interviewer:

The relationship between Black and White.

00:45:41:00

Ronald Scott:

In 1967 or around that time, the relationship between Black people and the rest of America changed, and that is Black people were not willing to accept being less than a real human being and accept less than everybody else was getting. That's why people stole a color television set, they wanted the same thing everybody else had. And in 1967, for us, for we as young people, we decided that we would rather die than ever live in a situation where we couldn't have the same things that everybody else had and the rights and the opportunities and everything else. And I didn't come to that conclusion until maybe a year or two later, but that's ultimately what we felt, and that we could change the world, and that we could change our relationships. That we could stand up with anybody else in society and that we didn't have to hate ourselves and we didn't have to feel like we were less. That changed. I saw it change within a period in lives of my friends and me, within a period in this town of less than twelve months in some cases. Whether it lasted is another thing, but I saw it happen.

00:46:55:00

Interviewer:

Cut. OK.

[beep]

[cut]

00:47:01:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

00:47:03:00

Interviewer:

OK. The guard comes to the door. And talk about what they did but understand folks are saying, Hey, it's a riot. What do they expect?

00:47:14:00

Ronald Scott:

You know when these guys came to my door is that most people can't understand, or most people who are gonna watch this—

00:47:21:00

Interviewer:

Start again.

00:47:23:00

Ronald Scott:

What, what a lotta people really don't understand is that as I was standing there, I'm standing on the opposite side of the door and these guys are banging my door like they're gonna knock it in. I had a choice. I mean, I could go and open the door or I could stand there and let them kick it down, because in terms of what we had read and what we had seen at that time, we knew that if they got past that door, that our lives might be in danger, and that they didn't have any reason to come in our house, they didn't have any right to come in there, but that they were going to do—by this time, people have been killed just for opening their doors. I went and I opened the door and here are these guys, all these guys were my age, young White guys in my home with my sister who was five, my brother who was three, and my mother there. And I was the only person between them and the rest of my family. And I felt violated. I felt like at any minute these guys who had no respect, when they walked in they said, We heard some shooting here. They didn't walk up and they didn't say, Look Mr. Scott, or, We heard something. Could you help us? They walked in and say, We heard some shooting here. I mean, they took control of our house. And in terms of trying to take control of our house, well, they were there, they were in the apartment. The only thing that we could do was stand there and take it because there was nowhere to go. And I don't know if anybody else in that situation would have, I don't know what they would have done. Because I felt at that particular moment that, since it was a situation of life and death, this guy looked at me and he looked as if he wanted to kill me at that moment because I would dare to stand in my house to protect my house against somebody who was coming in. Whatever he felt, whether he felt it was a sniper there or not, I had the right in my house to stay there and to live there and not be worried about whether somebody was going to possibly kill me. And that's what I was worried about. And I was angry, and I was frightened, and I felt angry enough so that if I coulda gotten my hands on the gun he had, that it mighta been the other way around.

00:50:14:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Mm-hmm.

[beep]

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:50:23:00

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