



Interview with **Debra Webb**

Date: June 2, 1989

Interviewer: Madison Davis Lacy, Jr.

Camera Rolls: 1105-1106

Sound Rolls: 148

Team: A

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 Debra Webb, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on June 2, 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 #1105]

[sound roll #148]

00:00:12:00

Interviewer:

This is about—

Camera crew: member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

Interviewer:

—the Panthers just as we discussed in there.

Debra Webb:

OK.

Interviewer:

All right. Frame.

Camera crew: member #1:

Ready to go.

00:00:18:00

Interviewer:

T, tell me, tell me about the Panthers in the late sixties where you grew up in Chicago. Did you, did—what did you think about them, what, and what they were doing?

Debra Webb:

Well, the way I think of them, they were—

Interviewer:

No. Frame your answer, The way I think of the Panthers—

Debra Webb:

The way I think of the Panthers were—I got scared.

Interviewer:

You can start again. No problem.

00:00:40:00

Debra Webb:

I got scared. [laughs] The way I thought of the Panthers were the things that they had did for the people, far as the feeding the hungry, the, the children in the area. I was raised in Henry Horner Projects, and I attended Cr, Crane and McKinley School. So, I got a chance to see them because I would come down to Western and Madison. And right at Madison and Western there was a Vienna hot dog stand and they lived, their—well, their center was next door, so you'd hafta go up the stairs. So I—many times I wanted to be inquisitive and go up there and see what they were doin', which I did. Which I wasn't supposed to be over there, but I was there. And I thought the things that they were doin' was really marvelous because it was just like, which we would need today, people feedin' someone. I felt like it was a great deal because they had it there where children shouldn't have been hungry. I know a lot of mothers didn't wanna feed a child so they sent 'em to school hungry. But here was a place that fed them. You could go there any time to eat. I imagine even with the bums later in the evening, they went up there, but how did I know? I don't know but I'm just sayin' maybe that was all, too.

00:02:07:00

Interviewer:

Well, now, you, living in the community, you heard a lot of things about them. What did you think about their dress, the—the language that they used, and their kind of whole being, the way they carried themselves?

00:02:20:00

Debra Webb:

Well, at first, it was kind of weird, but not whatcha call weird-weird. It was just a new style, OK? A new image, and that style didn't bother me because I didn't fear for them, ya know. I didn't think they were gonna do anything. They never seemed to harm anybody. I only saw the need of help, that's all I saw. Or survival.

00:02:47:00

Interviewer:

When you heard that Fred Hampton and Clark were killed, what did you—how did you feel? What did you think?

00:02:54:00

Debra Webb:

First, what came into my mind was those, at that time we called them pigs, those pigs did it because it was like—it looked like everyone that helps somebody has to come down. Ya know, you're up today but you're down tomorrow, and you're gone, and that's the way I felt.

00:03:17:00

Interviewer:

Did you actually tour the house?

00:03:19:00

Debra Webb:

Yes, I did.

00:03:20:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about that.

00:03:21:00

Debra Webb:

I went from the front door to the back door. Where we walked into the front door, it was all in sh, shambles. Like they tore up the couch as though they were lookin' for somethin' in the house, and we went to the bedroom. We toured in the bedroom where I saw all the blood just splattered across the walls from where the bed was lying, and the mattress was still soaked of blood when I got there. It was just like these boys did not have a chance. It—I don't even believe they had their eyes open. If one had a eye open, there was nothin' he can do because he was just, he was gone. And even to the back on the porch, it was just like a dump yard. They went through the cereal boxes, corn flakes. It was just all destroyed, all over the back porches. The boxes open, the cans was opened. What can somebody put in a c, a sealed can? I would like to know today, but I don't know what they were lookin' for.

00:04:34:00

Interviewer:

Well, now there was a lot of—there was a different story in the press, in the television, from what you saw there, and reasoned happened there. Did you guys talk about that? Did you and your friends talk about it? What did you—

00:04:48:00

Debra Webb:

Yes, we did as far as the paper stated one thing and the newscast stated one thing. Everybody's version was different than the other. By me goin' there to see for myself, I got what I felt was the answer. That these boys were murdered by the big hit mens, and it was just like, it was just like somethin' was set up because they didn't have a chance.

00:05:19:00

Interviewer:

Okay. Let's stop down.

[cut]

00:05:21:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:05:25:00

Interviewer:

What'd you do during the Harold Washington campaign? Tell me about your involvement.

00:05:28:00

Debra Webb:

Durin' the Harold Washington campaign, I was one of the floaters. I worked with the campaign office which would—I was sittin' in at the central office. And during this time, there were calls be comin' in, as far as they, they needed a poll watcher, or someplace didn't have a judge, or they needed food or catering back and forth, or they needed somebody there for trouble, if things broke out. So, I was a driver, and, at that time, I was in use of a car, so I got a chance to go out into the field as a troubleshooter.

00:06:06:00

Interviewer:

Now, tell me that story about how they, how you had to go help the seniors go to the polls that day.

00:06:11:00

Debra Webb:

OK. They got a call in through the central office statin' that they wouldn't let seniors go down to vote, and the seniors was afraid to come out of their apartments because there was brutality by the—I guess they were wine heads or whatever, whoever set them up to do this. So, at this time, they—the call came through. By me bein' as a driver, as I stated, that we decided to go out. When we got there it was four, it was four of us as women, and when we got there, they said, We didn't call for you. We called for some backup. And I said, Well, what do you think we are? [laughs] Why are we out here? They're sayin', You're not no backup. So my supervisor said, Well, we are goin' on in anyway. I said, Well, I'm not scared, and I got somethin' in the trunk, so I know I'm not afraid of 'em. So, by this time, when we walked through the buildin', there were a lotta men standin' outside far from the fence on the curb, and then you hadta walk, I guess, about 100 feet back towards the buildin'. And there were a lot of them standin' there, and they're sayin', We don't know how to do this, but we'll

just go in front, and we'll just surround you all, as though they were gonna cover us. I said, Well, I tell you what. If somethin'—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Debra Webb:

—breaks down, we're a gang. We're goin' down, too.

00:07:38:00

Interviewer:

Stop. We ran out of film. We're gonna go back.

Camera crew member #1:

Cut.

[cut]

[camera roll #1106]

00:07:42:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:07:45:00

Interviewer:

OK. Pick up the story. You go into the building—

00:07:48:00

Debra Webb:

Yeah. At this time, we are goin' into the building. It's like a walkway, a pathway. And by this time, there were, they were all standin' around. The group that we were met, they were waiting for us. So, when we got into it, everybody formed in, ya know, goin' in as twos.

00:08:08:00

Interviewer:

OK. Lemme stop you right there. I think people are gonna get kinda confused with this answer. Start with, We, we had to go to the building to get the seniors to take them to the polls. So, when we got there, and like that.

00:08:19:00

Debra Webb:

OK. We hadta go to the senior building to take some senior citizens to the poll due to the fact that somethin' was goin' on that they couldn't get to the poll. Somebody's stoppin' them from gettin' to the poll or comin' out the buildin' from their floors. So, when we arrived there, our group was there, the man that had called and said, Why are you? We didn't call this group. We called for backup, and we said, We are backup. We can take whatever comes down. So, they said, Well, I tell ya what, we gonna go in there but please, whatever happens, ya know. They were afraid. But we said we wa'n't afraid, because we was there for a reason. And our purpose was to get those seniors down to that poll. So, that's what we did. We went in and those seniors got a chance to vote that day.

00:09:13:00

Interviewer:

Okay. Stop down. Good. That's just perfect.

00:09:18:00

Debra Webb:

Thank—

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:09:21:00

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