



Interview with **Marion Stamps**

Date: June 3, 1989

Interviewer: Madison Davis Lacy, Jr.

Camera Rolls: 1107-1110

Sound Rolls: 149-150

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 Marion Stamps, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on June 3, 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 #1107]

[sound roll #149]

00:00:12:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:00:14:00

Interviewer:

OK. Talk to me a bit about the Panthers and Fred Hampton. You remember the Party?

00:00:19:00

Marion Stamps:

I guess my first real experience in the movement came out of being involved in the Black Panther Party. I remember once having gone to the headquarters and, and taking my children,

how excited I was in meeting Fred Hampton and really getting a real feel about what the Ten Point Platform was all about. And coming home, trying to explain that to my, my mother. And her first thought, Uh-uh, uh-uh! You know, They killing police, the whole thing, That's a gang! the whole bit. That the pub, the public thought the party was all about. My experience with the party was very, very positive. I know had it not been me being able to be in the same room with Fred Hampton and, and, and gained the knowledge that he shared with all of us, I would not be the kind of person I am today. I ran the food program, the breakfast program on the Northside for the party. Had to get up every morning at six o'clock. Fred Hampton didn't want you to give kids powdered eggs. So you had to make sure that you had real eggs, real grits, real everything, OK. But that experience, and, and dealing with those young children at that time of the morning, made us all feel better and the children feel better. Because we knew that those children went to school first of all, full. And secondly, they had already gained some knowledge before they went into that classroom, so it wasn't gonna be as easy to miseducate those children as it would if had they not come to the program. And, and I think that if, if we would just look at today, what is happening, if it had not been for the Party, we would not have free, free healthcare. If it had not been for the Party, we would not have free breakfast programs. All of that came out of the Black Panther Party.

00:02:02:00

Interviewer:

Was your mother's reaction to Hampton and the Party fairly typical for the Black community?

00:02:07:00

Marion Stamps:

Yeah. ***Many Black people initially was very, very afraid of the Black Panther Party.*** Because, see, you got to understand that before the Party came on the set, most of us was into a nonviolent, Dr. King, Whitney Young kind of framework of reference in terms of our Blackness. But then ***here you found some brothers and sisters saying, First, you know, look. The United States Constitution guarantees us the right to bear arms and to protect ourselves. And we understand that we need protection in the Black community. And it's our responsibility to protect Black women and Black children, not the police. Because the police is not here to serve and protect us, only to continue to enslave us. It is our responsibility to see to it that our people have a decent place to live, decent food to eat, and quality healthcare. Not the system. So that frightened a lot of people. I, I mean, they didn't think that it could happen, they didn't think that it was right,*** they didn't believe that this is what democracy was all about. But in fact, the Black Panther Party practiced democracy in the American way better than the Americans did it. So.

00:03:25:00

Interviewer:

You knew Fred, obviously?

00:03:27:00

Marion Stamps:

Oh, I loved Fred Hampton. I, I mean, I have—there are very few Black men—

00:03:32:00

Camera crew member #1:

Excuse me [inaudible].

00:03:34:00

Interviewer:

OK. I love Fred Hampton.

00:03:36:00

Marion Stamps:

I loved Fred Hampton. There are about, there are about four Black men in my lifetime that I can say I truly loved. One of them was Professor Ed Marksman, Tranquility Philip, Fred Hampton, and my daddy, and in that order. You know, I, I, I think that Fred Hampton represents the epitome of Black manhood. Because first of all, he had so much respect for Black women and Black children. I mean this was a brother that you, you, you just knew from being in the room with him that he loved Black babies, I mean, you know, period. If Fred Hampton was living today, the problems we're having in the Black community, we would not have them. He would not tolerate it. He would not tolerate Black men selling drugs. Fred would not tolerate sisters standing on the corners selling their bodies for a toot. OK? We don't—and, and, and because he would not have tolerated that, then those of us who were in the Party would not tolerate it either, you know. So we lost. I mean, when they murdered Fred Hampton, we lost. And we got to—and the one thing that we gotta do is that we gotta make sure that we tell the next generation the truth, so that they can understand that all of these so-called role models they put in front of our faces, tho—they are not the ones. It's all right to talk about Air Jordan, but running in the air ain't gonna save us, OK. And even that thing, see, now, you know, it—White folks are so determined to destroy the next generation, they understand that for the most part they have already gotten us, OK. So, so they're working on the babies and it's always been that way, OK. So now they give us phony heroes and phony role models, you know. If a Fred Hampton would emerge right now, it'd throw this country in total chaos. I mean, you got to understand how frightened a J. Edgar

Hoover, you know, head of the CIA, how frightened he was of Fred. He himself said he was a Black messiah. So you know if they know, we know, OK? So, I just loved Fred Hampton, I loved Fred Hampton because of what he was, what he believed in, what he practiced, you know. You, you wouldn't—I have never seen Fred in contradiction of anything that he believed in. That's real important. I have never seen Fred move in an unprincipled manner. That's real important. I understood clearly Fred had a moral code of conduct by which he moved and operated out of. That is real important. So I feel blessed having been around and, and, and fortunate to have been in his presence and to have gained the information and the knowledge that I gained from him. I feel cheated that White folks murdered him and I'm gonna, I'm not gonna ever forget that, and I'm not gonna ever forgive that, because the only thing that Fred was about was power to the people. And, and, and we have a right to have that kind of power, you know, so, we struggle through it, we'll survive it, but we can't never forget that. And, and, and it's interesting that we fought to get Dr. King's birthday a holiday and, and we deserved that and Dr. King deserved that. But I think that as we begin to write our own history and tell the whole story, then one of the things we have to tell our children, It is your responsibility to understand who you are, where you came from, where you gotta go. And just don't accept Dr. King's birthday as being it. You know, find out what, who Malcolm was, and what Malcolm was about, and what Malcolm's contribution has been that has made it possible for you today to even be here. Know who Fred was, you know, don't be afraid of it. Don't be afraid to learn what this brother was about, you know. Because see, they will have wanting to believe simply because he was a man. Then he was s-something to, to fear. But the only people that feared Fred were those who were untrue, those who were not ready, those who were, who were, perpetuating our enslavement. You know, those who knew Fred did not fear Fred. They loved him and it wasn't a Jim Jones kind of love, OK. So, so our children gotta know what this brother did, and what his contribution was to our own movement and to our own liberation and, and our own existence as Black people. And, and if they just understand a little of that, if they understand just two or three points of the Ten Plat, Plat, Ten Point Platform that governed the Black Panther Party, then they'll understand why they go into institutions of higher learning. We don't send you all there for, for you all to come out being a Xeroxed copy of the little White boy or the little White girl you sitting next to. We send you to those institutions of higher learning to gain as much knowledge that you can get, to come back into the Black community and move the Black community to the next phase of our liberation. Because as long as we're Black people in America, we will always be slaves.

00:09:06:00

Interviewer:

Stop down now. Good. I'm—

[cut]

00:09:10:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

Camera crew member #1:

Good.

[slate]

00:09:12:00

Interviewer:

How'd you feel when Fred was killed? What was it like going through the house?

00:09:16:00

Marion Stamps:

I will never forget [sighs] when Fred Hampton was murdered. One of the brothers called me and asked me had I heard. I said, Heard what? He said, They just murdered Fred. And, you know, it was like somebody calling you telling you that somebody had just gunned down your mama in the streets, you know. So I went next door and I got this sister to watch my children and I went to the hea—first, I went to the Black Panther Party headquarters because that's where everybody was. And we cried and, you know, went through everything, and cursed, and jumped up and down, you know. I feel the same way now I felt then. I felt anger, I felt hurt, and I felt revenge, and that's the way I feel now. So, you know, we, we sort of like took turns in going over to the house where he was murdered at. And, and then you got all this time, you know, all of these lies are coming from the media. Eh—everywhere, you know, all over the headquarters. You couldn't get rid of the reporters, the police, you know, the curiosity seekers, you know. And, and the lies, the lies. They had guns, they did this. We didn't shoot. Yes, you did. No, we don't. You know, but then when you go to the house, right, and you look and you see, and you look at the bed, you know, and, and, and you see the blood. And, and it's like, Yeah, well. You know. One thing them suckers understood, they was coming at a king, you know. And they, they came at him like that. They, they, they—I mean, you could just, you know, when you look at the house with all the bullets—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Marion Stamps:

—and all the stuff that they had done to the house, it was like—

00:11:14:00

Interviewer:

We got rollout.

Marion Stamps:

—an invasion.

00:11:16:00

Interviewer:

I understand. We missed it. We got roll out. So we're gonna have to go back.

[cut]

[camera roll #1108]

00:11:21:00

Camera crew member #1:

Hit it.

[slate]

00:11:22:00

Interviewer:

OK. Tell me about going through the house again, and this time try and, try and keep your eyes focused on me.

Marion Stamps:

Oh, OK.

Interviewer:

It's OK that you weren't—

Marion Stamps:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

—but I understand. Go ahead.

00:11:30:00

Marion Stamps:

Going in the house and looking at all, all the gunshots, the, the, the, the bullet holes, how they had tore the whole house up, everything. It was, it was, it was obvious it was an invasion. It was, it was as though the policemen had hyped themselves up for weeks in terms of how they gonna kill this king. I mean, to me it was like, you know, the biblical story in terms of how they came at Moses, you know, and, I mean, that's the way it was. They inv—they invaded Fred and they—with the whole purpose of murdering him, assassinating him. And it was, it, it was like they were so frai-afraid of him that they knew that they had to come the way they came, you know, and they came very, very viciously. *They came in our community like a thief in the night, and they snat, they just snatched Fred's life just like that. You know, and, and, and, and it's just like, Why? Why? This brother didn't have done nothing to none of you all. The only thing that this brother has done was to instill a sense of pride, and dignity, and self-determination in his people*, you know. But we understood even better than Hoover did that he was, in fact, the one, OK. He was the one. And because we know he was the one, we know that there are some others, you know, and that's why it's real, real important that we have to protect our babies, the born, and the unborn because we don't know which one of them is a Fred Hampton, a Malcolm X, a Dr. King, a Harriet Tubman, a Sojourner Truth, or a Marion Stamps, we don't know.

00:13:14:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's stop down.

[cut]

00:13:17:00

Camera crew member #1:

Hit it.

[slate]

00:13:18:00

Interviewer:

We're now in the Byrne Administration. Tell me what you were doing around housing activism.

00:13:22:00

Marion Stamps:

Well as the head of the Chicago Housing Tenant Organization, our primary responsibility was to act as advocates for tenants in public housing. And if you have any idea in terms of how it is to live in a public housing development in a, in a slave control city like Chicago, then you know your work is cut out for you. Public housing in Chicago has been used as the one political arena that every politician co—depends on, because it's a concentrated area of votes, it's a concentrated Black votes. If you take all of the public housing in Chicago and put them together, then we would then become the second largest city in the state next to Springfield. So we control at all times anywhere from, from two hundred to two hundred fifty thousand votes. So my involvement was to rid the community of the slave masters because we were in fact controlled by the Daley Machine. Having an understanding that in public housing, of course, it's governed by federal laws and fed, federal re, regulations, we really didn't have to deal with these folks in Chicago. They just kind of like wanted us to think that. And we began by educating the residents and the tenants about what their rights were as tenants, you know. And, and as a result of that, we were able to get some laws even on a, on a federal lev, level changed, in terms of tenant participation and decision-making processes in public housing. Having the right to choose vendors that come into public housing, having the right to have some say-so about jobs that come into public housing, and certainly having the right to set the tone and the standards by which we gonna live in, in public housing. Well, that was good for us, but it wasn't good for the politicians, OK. So, you know, they began, you know, to amass a serious campaign against our commitment to struggle around the question of self-determination in public housing. Jane Byrne, my biggest, one of my biggest problem with Jane Byrne was the fact that Jane Byrne had no respect, OK. Jane Byrne did not respect Black women and, and, and, and that's real, real important to me. Even though Jane Byrne got elected because of back women, OK. When Jane Byrne moved in Cabrini-Green, you know, you've already put two racist women, White women, on the board of education. You done put this young, silly White boy to head CHA. *Now you gonna bring yourself up into the public housing community and tell us that if—that only you can save our children. That's the ultimate of disrespect, OK. And I was not gonna get ready for that. I could not accept that because, see, I understood that if we had allowed these children to believe that their salvation was gonna come from the great White hope, then what did that say about me as a mother, as a grandmother, and as a Black woman*, you know? So we began to move on Jane Byrne based on that issue. And because of, of that, is really why the whole snowball began to roll on, on whether or not we was gonna get a Black mayor in this town. Because myself, along with folks like Lu Palmer and some other people, were just hollering about, you know, this woman is just too disrespectful, and it's time for us to stop dealing with these White folks. They ain't gonna never respect us. It's time for us to get one of our own. Understand that we had the numbers, we had the numbers, we had the numbers in public housing. All you had to do was convince people in public housing that they held in their hands the balance to determine whether or not we can elect a Black mayor

in this city. But you just couldn't walk up to that—to them and tell them that because we're very fragile, we were very fragile then, and we're even more so fragile now. So we had to figure out what the plan was. And we just began to devise the plan and we moved on the plan. And because we moved on the plan, we got what we wanted. And, and, and that's what that whole Harold Washington piece was about. Had nothing to do with the man, it was the plan. In fact, I can remember one Sunday in a meeting with Renault Robinson and all of the bigwigs in this town, you know, the who's who of who running it in the Black community, right. And it was real. It was, it was a good meeting, you got a good feeling. Anytime you go in a room and you aren't getting locked out the room, you get a good feeling about that, OK. And it was happenin' to be one of those meetings where they did not lock me out, OK. And we were in a meeting and by this time we had set up voter registration in, in every public aid office in this city and every unemployment office in this city. Everywhere we could set, we, we, we did voter registration, OK. Because, see, initially, when some of us became very, very serious about the Black mayor question, we did the legwork that we were supposed to do in terms of identifying some candidates. One of them being Harold Washington. And his response to us was that unless you can get fifty thousand new registered voters, I don't even wanna hear it. So, you know, we came up with two hundred fifty thousand new registered voters, Do you want to hear it now, brother? You understand what I'm saying? So this particular meeting on this Sunday, we were becoming frustrated, you understand what I'm saying, because we, we had gone through a whole series of stuff with Jane Byrne. I, I mean from 1981 until the beginning of '83, I went to jail at least eight times on the Jane Byrne, the Black mayor, the disrespect, the self-determination question, OK. And I was just kind of like tired, What, what are we gonna do? So we had this big old meeting at Robert's motel, I'll never forget it, I'll never forget it. And everybody is going off and everybody's frustrated because, 'cause we wanted Harold to run for mayor. Harold had not committed himself. And, and my position at that time, and I—and Renault was chairing the meeting, OK, and Renault was also the person that had Harold's ear. And I said to Renault, you know, I don't give a damn whether he run or not because it ain't the man, it's the plan. And with two thousand—two hundred fifty thousand registered voters in the public housing community, we can run a dog in this town and win. So, you know, You ask Harold what he gonna do, we running out of time. And we were running out of time. You got the, you know, you gotta build a political campaign. When you start talking about taking this town, see, you gotta un—a lot of people don't understand about Chicago. When they, when they hear Chicago they think about Al Capone and all that crazy stuff, right, on one hand. And then they think about all the negative stuff that the media print about living in public housing, you know, like the horrors of Cabrini-Green, all that crazy stuff, right? But nobody talk about the role that Black people, Black people at the grass root level play in keeping this city together. Nobody talks about that, OK. So when we began to push the Harold Washington question, then everybody else had to say, Yeah, OK. You right, you know, because, see, at that point, I was glad to be in the meeting, but I had said what I had to say and I'm getting ready to leave. You know, give me an answer. Don't play no games with me. Because, see, my sisters and brothers have been out here day and night registering people to vote, because that's what you said we had to do. Now we ready to move on the second phase of this plan. We're fitting to take this fifth floor of City Hall. Real simple, OK? So Jane Byrne was key in us taking the fifth floor of City Hall. Because if Jane Byrne had not become so disrespectful, Jane Byrne would be the mayor right now. If Jane Byrne had not put those two women on that school board, if Jane Byrne had not

appointed that boy to CHA, if Jane Byrne had not moved up in Cabrini like the great White hope, then Jane Byrne would be the mayor right now. She blew it. It was on her, OK. So my experience in terms of the, of the whole public housing movement have always been out of self-determination. We attacked the issues that affect our day-to-day survival question. Because, see, in Chicago, in the minds of many, public housing is no more than a dumping ground for the used, the misused, the abused, OK. And they come and they pick us up and they put us down whenever they get ready. Well, when we began to organize, they couldn't—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Marion Stamps:

—do that and they couldn't take the pressure. When we began to organize, we said, you know, it was like, Daley, it's over with.

00:22:35:00

Interviewer:

We got a roll out. Good. [claps]

Marion Stamps:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

Good. Very good. You blew through about sixteen of my questions.

[cut]

[camera roll #1109]

00:22:42:00

Camera crew member #1:

Hit it.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

00:22:44:00

Interviewer:

OK, now tell me about this dude Swibel and why it was important to get rid of his ass.

00:22:49:00

Marion Stamps:

Because Swibel ran CHA like it was his own private personal plantation. Real simple. Swibel was stealing money. *Swibel was not providing any services in public housing and he very seldom talked to any of the residents.* The only time you really were able to see Swibel is when you went to a commissioner meeting. And if you, if you were raising something that he didn't want to hear, then he immediately adjourned the commissioner meetings. *Therefore, the people had no opportunity or no recourse in terms of how they addressed their concerns in public housing.* We knew that Swibel had to go. In fact, one of Jane Byrne's campaign promises was that he was going. But once she got elected, then Swibel became one of her best friends. We waged a serious, aggressive campaign to get rid of Charles Swibel and we did. In fact, we—you hear very little of Swibel since he left CHA. I'm sure he's somewhere digging in somebody else's back by now. But he—at least he's not directly digging into ours, at least we don't think so, OK. But you gotta understand that up under Swibel, Daley, Byrne Administration, Swibel's only job was to make sure that the residents who lived in public housing were uh—under control, total control. And that way it guaranteed that Daley would continue get the public housing vote.

00:24:15:00

Interviewer:

OK. Now, Jane Byrne said that she couldn't get rid of him.

00:24:18:00

Marion Stamps:

Jane Byrne didn't try to get rid of him. Jane Byrne had the authority to get rid of Swibel, OK. The chairman of CHA serve at the wishes of the mayor, so I don't know why she would even say that, you know, [laughs] I—

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Marion Stamps:

—because she had more authority to get rid of him than we did and we got rid of him.

00:24:37:00

Interviewer:

OK. Y'all get rid of him and now it comes, she, she appoints this other cat.

00:24:42:00

Marion Stamps:

Andrew Mooney, at seventy-two thousand dollars a year. That, that before coming-becoming the chairman of CHA, could not find himself, his directions, into a public housing development in this city. And again, you know, it was all based on disrespect because public housing in Chicago is ninety-nine percent Black—

00:25:07:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop.

[cut]

00:25:08:00

Camera crew member #1:

Hit it.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:25:11:00

Interviewer:

Mooney

00:25:13:00

Marion Stamps:

Jane Byrne appointed Andrew Mooney at seventy-two thousand dollars a year to run CHA. We all knew that Mooney had no idea about running public housing, OK. Aside from that, we were very, very upset in the fact that you have appointed these two women to the board of education, now you gonna appoint this White man to head CHA. CHA is ninety-nine percent Black and ninety-nine percent women and children. And we were pushing for a Black person, preferably a female, to head CHA. And for her to, to not to respect our wishes, again, it clearly showed us that Jane Byrne cared nothing about our concerns and our needs. Because she appointed Andrew Mooney, it was like the straw that broke the camel's back. And we just made a decision that we were not gonna accept that. At the last board meeting before the election of Mayor Washington, really, we went into that board meeting with the full intent of saying to Andrew Mooney, We do not want you. You cannot stay here. You will not be allowed to function as the chairman of CHA. Along with the fact that, again, millions of dollars was coming into public housing but we weren't getting any of it. We were not getting the stoves, the refrigerators, the tile, nothing. And when we got to the meeting, it was just this blatant arrogance, blatant arrogance, OK. At that time, Renault Robinson, one of the board members and one of the board members who we respected and we knew that was, was protecting our interests began to raise some serious questions in terms of some monies that was being spent in, in CHA as well as some new projects they was getting ready to go—get into. And Andrew just got totally disrespected, you know, respectful in terms of Renault. So it's like you aren't go—I'm not gonna sit here and allow you to disrespect this brother. Real simple, the meeting is over with. And, you know, and that's what it was, you know, it's over with. And at that point, I adjourned the meeting. Of course, not being a board member, I had to use some unorthodox methods in adjourning the meeting, but the meeting was adjourned. And not too long after that, we got a new mayor and we got a new chairman. But again, in order to understand the public housing issue in Chicago, you got to understand the politics of the town. And this is one of the most corrupt political system in the country. There is no politics in the world like Chicago politics. And one would have you to believe now that we are fair, we are loving, we are honest, we don't believe in rewarding our friends and punishing our enemies, you know. But we know all of that is a lie, you know. We know that Chicago politics, like nowhere else, determines whether you live or die. It determines whether or not your children will go to a good school or go to a bad school. It will determine whether you live in good housing or bad housing, whether you got good police or bad police. And for us, up under all of those administrations, we always got the bad. The bad polices, the bad housing, the bad everything. And it was because of, and it is because of the Chicago politics in this town. And at, and at, at that time just like it is now, politicians only see poor people, especially poor Black people, as a tool to use in order to further their own self-interest.

00:29:05:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop down.

[cut]

00:29:07:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:29:09:00

Interviewer:

Voter registration. Tell me what went down.

00:29:12:00

Marion Stamps:

What happened in terms of the voter registration here is that we formed a coalition, a coalition between, Slim Coleman's group, Nancy Jefferson's group, my group, and, and, and another group on the South Side. Got together, went to the legis-legislators, and lobbied so that we could become deputy registrars because before then the only people could register folks to vote was the folks that came out the Board of Elections, OK. And they were not making us deputy registrars. At the time, we really didn't understand why, but then once you get into the system you understand that. Because we lobbied, because we worked to get—become deputy registrars is the reason that we were able to go into public aid offices, unemployment offices, on the street in front of Jewel's, wherever, and register folks to vote. And, and that, that was very key then and it's very key now because a lot of times the system, they already know how many numbers they have to win an election. They don't want those numbers to increase nor decrease because that would determ—change the balance, right? By us becoming deputy registers [sic], we immediately changed the balance, OK. Because now, we are registering folks and it stand to reason the people that, that register you to vote are the folks that you gonna vote for. And the politicians understood that, and they were very, very afraid of that, because they knew that if, if the grass root community was, were the one that were out there saying to the people in the community, Look you got to register to vote. It is your responsibility for you to be a re, a registered voter. Then they also know that when we came back to those same people and said, OK. It's time to go vote and who you, who you supposed to be voting for? then we changed, we, we, we then be—got control of the political apparatus in this town.

00:31:01:00

Interviewer:

OK. Now tell me, what did you do during the Washington campaign? What was, what was your role?

00:31:10:00

Marion Stamps:

I was very, very involved in Mayor Washington's campaign, even before Mayor Washington decided that he wanted to become the mayor, OK. Part of it came out of the whole voter's regisra-registration drive that really we launched. Some of it came out of the, just the grass root day-to-day kind of issues that we, we were confronted in terms of, of the existing administration. And then just some of it came out of my responsibility as, as leadership, you know. Because, see, the one thing that I think all of us tend to forget and that is as a leader, OK, what is your responsibility to the masses? What are you supposed to do? What do they expect for you to do? And, and the one thing they expect for you to do is just make things better, give them a sense of direction in terms of how do you make things better. And we understand that politics can, if you got the right folks in place, make things better. So my whole role in Mayor Washington's campaign was to make sure that we get a Black man elected Mayor. I wasn't as much concerned about whether or not the Black man was Harold Washington, or Lu Palmer, or Jesse Jackson, you know, or some brother from the hood, because we had the votes. So it didn't make any difference who it was, we had the, we had the plan. It just, it was just a matter of just getting a mayor. I'm glad that the man was Harold. I think that because it was Harold it was easier to sell, OK. He had the political experience. He had the, the name recognition, you know, and he had the charisma, all right, to generate and motivate where, where, where, where we left off from.

00:32:56:00

Interviewer:

Now, how did you feel the night he was elec—of the primary?

00:32:59:00

Marion Stamps:

Oh, baby. The night that Mayor Washington was elected, we took over, we—our community, because that's what that election was about. *The election was about us gaining control of our own community. Real simple. And the night that Mayor Washington was elected, I mean, the people in Cabrini, it was a major celebration.* It was a major cel—we didn't, we didn't, we did not go down to the hotel. We stayed right here in our community, we were in the middle of the street all night long, throwing up all the leftover literature, and newspapers, and anything else that we could find. Finally, people just got together, passed the hat, we

went and got food, drink, and everything. We had a celebration. And, and we wanted it to be that way. And the reason—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Marion Stamps:

—that we did not go down to the hotel because the people were here—

Interviewer:

OK.

Marion Stamps:

—and we wanted to be with them.

00:33:53:00

Interviewer:

We got roll out.

Camera crew member #1:

OK. We must [inaudible]

Interviewer:

Then give, give me that and—

Camera crew member #1:

This will be take eight.

Interviewer:

—then we'll—just to hook the story together, I want to go back to Cabrini Green for you to tell me the story again about how y'all actually solved this gang war—

Marion Stamps:

Oh yeah, we did that.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] OK? OK.

Marion Stamps:

Doin' it now.

Interviewer:

All right.

[cut]

[camera roll #1110]

[sound roll #150]

00:34:14:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:34:17:00

Interviewer:

Go ahead about the Washington campaign.

00:34:19:00

Marion Stamps:

The one thing about Harold's campaign is that it, it took a lot out of, out of us, OK? Because the campaign divided. It divided mothers and daughters, it divided fathers and sons, aunts and uncles, because a lot of back people, particularly middle class Black people, OK, they made it because of the regular Democratic Party and their alliances to the regular Democratic—to the machine, OK? And they did not believe. They did not believe that we could elect a Black mayor in this town. And it's like, You all are messing things up. You're messing it up for me and mines, and, and for the next generation to come because we'll never

have a Black mayor in the City of Chicago, and if I get involved in it, I'm gonna lose my job. There was a lot of intimidation going on from the top to the bottom, from the bottom to the top. The Harold Washington campaign was not an easy campaign. I mean, people not only were intimidated, people were actually attacked because of their support of Harold Washington, all right. So we learned a lot as a result of that whole campaign, you know. We, we, we understood that because of, of our desire to make it better for the masses, we were in fact creating some internal family problems. And we had to address those problems at the same time trying to win an election. So you had to grow from that process, you had to take the time to sit down at the table and explain to that brother who's been working for Streets and Signs for twenty years, that has enabled him to send all six of his kids to school. It ain't gonna stop, it's just gonna get better. Now it means that when your children come out of that institution, your child will have an equal chance to the job, you know. We had to convince a lot of Black people that it was in the best interest of Black people first, and other people in general, that we elect Harold Washington as mayor.

00:36:18:00

Interviewer:

OK. Stop. Now stop.

[cut]

00:36:20:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:36:22:00

Interviewer:

Cabrini-Green gangs. Tell me about Jane Byrne and all of that.

00:36:26:00

Marion Stamps:

Well, you know, one of the things that needs to be clear in terms of Jane Byrne and, and, and, and, and her movement coming into Cabrini and Harold Washington being elected mayor—because that's the relationship, that's the link, all right. Jane Byrne came into Cabrini under the illusion that we were supposed to have been under siege by the gangs. That was a lie, that was not the truth. Initially, about a month before Jane Byrne moved in Cabrini-Green, there was a gang war over here, I mean, and it was real ugly. But Jane Byrne was not the one that did that. Women, Black women in this community got together and we went to the leadership of the gangs and it was not easy, OK, because, see, they don't like to talk because first of all they don't want you to know that they are who they are, all right. We went to the leadership and we brought the leadership to the table. And we basically said to them, you know, First of all, let's—if y'all wanna talk, we want to talk. And when we get through talking, we're gonna, we, we gonna make some decisions. We, we gonna tell y'all what y'all gonna do, and we gonna tell y'all what we gonna do. But one of the things that you're gonna do and you're gonna stop doing right now is killing up each other. We will no longer tolerate you all killing up each other in our community. And if you continue to do that, then we're gonna gun up on you. Real simple. Y'all got y'all guns, we gonna get ours, you know. But we are not gonna have our children running from school every morning, running from school every evening, scared to go to the grocery store. We're not having our women constantly living under a state of siege and up under fear because of you all. You all got to stop that. We talked about, we talked to them about the fact that we, at this point in time, is at the threshold of making history that could change for everybody, not just for Black folks in Chicago, but for Black folks all over the world. We fitting to do something nobody else has ever done and that elect a Black man mayor of the City of Chicago. And, and, and y'all can either be part of that—you know, it's like being part of the problem or part of the solution, OK. We want you all to be part of the solution. How do you do that? You go back and you tell your little soldiers or your little honchos that, that, that you all are not gonna be killing each other 'cause one wear a earring in one ear and one wear a earring in the other ear. You do that by telling them that you all own, own nothing here, nothing. Why die for something that you ow—you have no control over? OK. And we, we, we are the ones that brought those brothers to the table and talked to those brothers. And told them, We ain't into no anti-gang thing. That's, that's not our, our, our method of operation. That's one of the problem with Black people right now. Anti-gang, anti-this, it's all being anti-Black. We are not anti-Black, we are pro-Black. You all are part of us: good, bad or indifferent, you all a part of us, you all are our children, our men, OK? But you all gonna stop the craziness. We stopped the gang war, then here come Jane Byrne. And I mean, the way she came up in the neighborhood, she should have been on a white horse, you understand me? So that was like adding insult to injury, all right. So, again, all, all Jane Byrne move in Cabrini did was reinforce our determination to get rid of her—

Interviewer:

Cut.

Marion Stamps:

—and not—OK.

00:39:49:00

Interviewer:

OK. Got it.

00:39:52:00

Camera crew member #1:

Cutting?

Interviewer:

Yeah. Cut.

[cut]

00:39:54:00

Interviewer:

When we were talking earlier, you talked about yourself as a, as a nationalist, and you gave me an idea of where that's from and what that's about. Talk to me about it. Tell me about it.

00:40:03:00

Marion Stamps:

Well, for one thing, I, I, I think that I've gone full circle on the electoral process, OK, the electoral politics. And I'm a, I'm a Black nationalist, OK. I, I eat Black, think Black, you know, [laughs] pray Black, and I believe in the right of Black people, OK. But—and because of that belief, I understand now that I have a responsibility to share that and train the next generation. So that myself along with some other sisters, that's what we're about now. We recognize that the whole Harold Washington, Fred Hampton, Dr. King, those were movements. And those was movements that came out of somebody training somebody to do some things. Now, we got to train the next generation so we will have the next movement. We got to make sure that our children understand that it was Harold Washington yesterday, it was Jesse today, it's gonna be you tomorrow, and it's gonna be the White House the day after that, OK. So we're in the process, we, we, we've organized what we call the Queen Nzinga Brigade. Because Queen Nzinga was a real queen and, and, and that gives you a framework of reference, you can read about it. And because of the fact that I am so convinced that the Black Panther Party had the correct position and the correct line for our people in America. That it's, it's, it, it's almost, it would be almost unreal for us not to train the next generation in terms of what the party was about. The only thing that I'm doing different is the fact that I'm

training sisters only. And I'm doing that because as a Black woman, I know what make us tick. I, I know what it takes for us to survive. I know that because I've been a teenager mother, I've lived in public housing, I've been on welfare, but I also have a bachelor's degree, and I've been running the institution for 17 years, so I know that. And I know what it is that we need in order to guarantee that the next generation will understand that you got to dare to struggle, dare to win. If you don't dare to struggle, you don't deserve to win. Real simple.

00:42:22:00

Interviewer:

Do you think Malcolm had a message for Black women?

Marion Stamps:

Oh, baby.

Interviewer:

Tell me.

00:42:26:00

Marion Stamps:

Malcolm message to Black women was his practice in terms of how his relationship with Betty Shabazz was, his own wife. I, I read [tapping] it was a piece that I read about Malcolm. I can, I can't even recall it right now, but I, I, I wrote it, I got the thought, because when I graduated out of college, I had to write a paper. And what I did was took the Brown versus the Board of Education 1954 decision on integration. And I used Malcolm and, and, and the, and the party and our own school to prove that integration only miseducated Black people and that was not the answer. The answer was quality education. And it—and, and, and again, you know it's, it's, it's what has to happen now, you know. We, we are nowhere we ought to be as a people, because we have let a lot of other kinds of things confused us. We, we have, we have thought a—we have adjusted other folks' cultures, we have accepted other folks' moral code of conduct. We don't talk about what it is to praise the red, the black, and the green. We don't, we, we, we don't wear garbs anymore. We don't drape ourselves and wrap ourselves because we, we, we, we have lost the feeling and the understanding, the spiritual understanding, of what it means to drape yourself. It ain't no style, you drape yourself to protect yourself and to bring all of the spirits of the ancestors wrapped in your body so mind, body, and soul, you can be correct and you can be on point, you know. And I think Malcolm projected this in terms of his, his whole lifestyle in terms of how he dealt. Fred did it, you know. But again, even when you talk about—who you talking about? You talking about men. Where are the female Freds? Where are the female Malcolms? Where are the female Kings, OK? It is time for the queens of, of, of the nations, the mothers, you know, those who give birth to anything and everything, to emerge and save the nation. I think that if Black people

don't hurry up, and, and, and, and wake up and see what time it is, that we will be purged just like the children of Egypt, to wander for forty years until the next generation emerges. We have in our desire to be just like them, we—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Marion Stamps:

—have created all kind of plagues that, that, that, that, that are destroying our community.

00:45:17:00

Interviewer:

We're rollout. Good.

Marion Stamps:

All right.

Interviewer:

We got it.

Marion Stamps:

Thanks.

Interviewer:

Thank you.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:45:25:00

Copyright 2021 Washington University Libraries