



Interview with **Minnie Dunlap**

Date: June 13, 1989

Interviewer: Sam Pollard

Camera Rolls: 2131-2132

Sound Roll: 262

Team: B

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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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 #2131]

[sound roll #262]

[slate]

00:00:12:00

Interviewer:

Just take a deep breath.

Minnie Dunlap:

[sighs] [laughs]

00:00:17:00

Interviewer:

OK? OK Mrs. Dunlap, tell me about when you first moved to East Garfield Park, where you lived, and then where you had decided you wanted to try to move to.

00:00:26:00

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. When I moved to East Garfield Park, 1961, I moved into 3400 block in, on Adams, and that's, like, a predominantly Black neighborhood—block. Then I wanted to move into the 3500 block, which was a better block. The, the block—upkeep of the block was better. So I went up there and spoke to the landlord, the caretaker that was taking care of the building about moving into an apartment up there, and he told me [phone rings] that, We don't rent to coloreds.

00:00:57:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut. Where's that telephone?

Minnie Dunlap:

Don't worry about it. It's—

Interviewer:

Oh no, we gotta—it can be heard.

[cut]

00:01:04:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:01:06:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Dunlap. When you, what happened when you, you moved into, into East Garfield in 1961?

00:01:13:00

Minnie Dunlap:

In 1961, when I moved into East Garfield Park, I moved into a block, 3400 block on Adams, and that block was predominantly Black. But then later, I wanted to move up in the 3500 block, which was—the neighborhood was kept up a little bit better, and I wanted to move up in that area, and the building was better, also. When I went to the door and asked about moving into the apartment, they to—the landlord there told me that they didn't rent to coloreds.

00:01:48:00

Interviewer:

OK. We got to cut again.

Minnie Dunlap:

Come on in, Nancy.

[cut]

00:01:51:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:01:55:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Dunlap. I'm going to ask you the same question again. Tell me about when you first moved into the East Garfield section in 1961.

00:02:04:00

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. In nineteen and sixty-one, when I moved into East Garfield Park neighborhood, I moved to the 3400 block on Adams. That block was predominantly Black. Later, I wanted to move up in the 3500 block, which was a better block, and it was predominantly White. So I went to the, to the building there to ask the landlord about moving into the building and spoke with the caretaker that was there. He told me that they didn't rent to Blacks. As a matter of fact, he just said, Lady, we don't rent to whi—to bla—to colored people. I said, OK, and I left.

00:02:42:00

Interviewer:

Why? Why'd you say OK in '61?

Minnie Dunlap:

Because in 1961—

Interviewer:

Just tell me why you said OK.

00:02:48:00

Minnie Dunlap:

That was acceptable in that time. It was acceptable to say, to accept what he said, so I just accepted and left.

00:02:55:00

Interviewer:

The reason that I, that when he—let's cut a second. I just want you to give me this last part. The reason that—

[cut]

00:03:02:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:03:04:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Dunlap. Take a deep breath. So sorry [unintelligible]—

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. Mm-hmm.

00:03:10:00

Interviewer:

So, the, the, the caretaker who was White told you that they didn't, they didn't rent to coloreds, and you said, OK. Why'd you say OK at that time?

Minnie Dunlap:

Because it was acceptable in that time.

Interviewer:

I need you to tell me, I said OK—

00:03:22:00

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. I said OK, because it was acceptable at that time.

00:03:27:00

Interviewer:

And you didn't question—

00:03:27:00

Minnie Dunlap:

No, I didn't question him because it—in, in that time, people just accept whatever they said, especially if they was the owner of a building. You didn't question that. You just, you take it or leave it.

00:03:42:00

Interviewer:

All right. OK. Let's cut a second. So, when you—

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—when'd you come up from Mississippi?

Minnie Dunlap:

I up came from Mississippi—

Camera crew member #1:

You look very nice in that blue dress.

Camera crew member #3:

Take five.

Camera crew member #1:

Looks very good. It does.

Interviewer:

I know, I see.

Minnie Dunlap:

Oh, thank you.

[cut]

00:03:59:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:04:07:00

Interviewer:

Push in a little. Let's go a little closer, even closer. [pause] Mrs. Dunlap, what was, what was different about the White people up in the North as opposed to the South? I mean, you know, you lived in Mississippi. What was different about living down there, the White people, as opposed to up here with White people?

00:04:18:00

Minnie Dunlap:

The difference in living in Mississippi is that White people didn't like you, they just said they didn't like you, so they didn't fool with you. But when you came here, it was different. They appeared to act like they like you, and you was very good with them, until you attempt to move in or do something with them, and then they put up a tremendous resistance.

00:04:41:00

Interviewer:

So when you went over to that neighborhood, the 3500 block, and that caretaker told you that you, this wasn't for coloreds, what did you think? I mean, the—

00:04:46:00

Minnie Dunlap:

I think he was just acting like White people act here in Chicago.

00:04:52:00

Interviewer:

So, tell me again. I mean, tell me a little more. How did you feel this caretaker was acting?

00:04:56:00

Minnie Dunlap:

I feel like he was acting like White people act here in Chicago, that they don't—we don't want you close to us. You're acceptable in other things, but not acceptable to live next door to us, or something of that nature—or even work close to us.

00:05:12:00

Interviewer:

Right, I see. So then, next year, you moved into, you moved into a section where, where it was more predominantly White in your building. What was the, what was the services like in that building when it was mostly White?

00:05:23:00

Minnie Dunlap:

When the White people were in that building, they kept the services up—because we had a White caretaker there when we first moved into it—but later on, then the White people moved out and the services started to go down.

00:05:37:00

Interviewer:

What happened, like what? What didn't happen?

00:05:39:00

Minnie Dunlap:

The man stopped fixing the building or started doing—stopped doing the repairs, and we lived there like, on a weekly basis, where we paid rent on a weekly basis, so that took in all the utilities and everything, including the, the repairs, the upkeep, painting, all of that in the building. But then, he later stopped doing that, and then we got a Black caretaker, and we didn't hardly get it at all.

00:06:04:00

Interviewer:

He just stopped doing work altogether?

00:06:06:00

Minnie Dunlap:

Yeah. The work services altogether went down.

00:06:09:00

Interviewer:

OK. Let's cut a second. All right—

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—so, when you first moved into the building it was three qua—how long was it three-quarters White, the building?

Minnie Dunlap:

I guess about—

Camera crew member #1:

This will be take six.

Interviewer:

See we always just keep doing these over and over.

Minnie Dunlap:

[laughs] It's, see, it's like, you see a movie.

Camera crew member #1:

We got speed.

[picture resumes]

00:06:27:00

Camera crew member #3:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

Interviewer:

In '62, your family moved over to the 3400 Madison block. What happened? I mean, it was three-quarters—three-quart—had three—Let's stop.

Minnie Dunlap:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

See, even I get nervous.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Minnie Dunlap:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

Even I can't get through it sometimes. Let's start again.

[beep]

[cut]

00:06:53:00

Camera crew member #1:

OK. Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:06:59:00

Interviewer:

OK? In '62, your family moved over to the 3400 block on Madison, and three-quarters of the building was White. What happened when you moved into that building?

00:07:09:00

Minnie Dunlap:

When we moved into that building, the services started to go down after we, after Black people moved in.

00:07:16:00

Interviewer:

Can you just, can you just start again and say, "When I moved into the new building on 3400 Madison—"

00:07:18:00

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. When I moved into the building on 3400 Madison, it was predominantly White, and when, when Blacks started moving into that building, then it seemed to, seemed like White people just moved out overnight. They were there, and the services started to go down. He stopped painting. He stopped doing any repairs and things in the building. If a doorbell goes out and he wouldn't repair them.

00:07:44:00

Interviewer:

What else was happening? I mean, they stopped painting. They stopped collecting the garbage. What else?

00:07:50:00

Minnie Dunlap:

They, he just didn't do any, he didn't give any services in the building like he had when the White, when we had the White caretaker there.

00:07:58:00

Interviewer:

I see. So how'd you feel? How'd you and the other tenants in the building feel?

00:08:03:00

Minnie Dunlap:

Well, I asked him to fix my doorbell. He came up and knocked a hole into the wall and left the doorbell hanging down in the wall and the hole was big enough for my two-year-old son to get in, and I were afraid of him getting electrocuted by the wires, because I'm, I'm just afraid of fire and I'm afraid it would catch a fire. So when I called him to come fix the wall and the doorbell, he came up and fixed the doorbell, but he left it hanging into the wall—but he didn't fix the wall. So I wanted him to fix the wall, and he wouldn't fix it, so I stopped paying my rent.

00:08:39:00

Interviewer:

Right. So, you was telling Judy that you got to the point where you were about ready to go to jail. What did you mean by that?

00:08:44:00

Minnie Dunlap:

I felt that he was going to take me to court. He said, he said it would make me move, and I told him I were not going to move—so by that time, I was ready to go to jail with him.

00:08:53:00

Interviewer:

So what happened? Tell, tell me about the people from the—King's organization coming to see you?

00:09:00:00

Minnie Dunlap:

We had two organizers to come from Dr. King's movement, and they had been pushing literature under the door continuously, but being the kind of person that I was—a working person—I just stepped over it and put the paper in the garbage and kept going. But still, angry with him. Then, when he came to collect rent, I still were not payin'. So they came in to talk to me about him, two of them to the door, and said, Could we talk to you about your landlord? and that got my interest. So, I said, OK, so we sit down and started to talking about it. And he said, Well, this man got forty-five buildings. Do you want to do anything about your hole in the wall? And I said, Sure. They said, Well, if you come to a rally tonight and tell your story over there, we'll get your wall fixed.

00:09:46:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. Very nice. That was very nice.

[cut]

[camera roll #2132]

00:09:54:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:09:58:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Dunlap. You, you were invited to the rallies at the church, right?

Minnie Dunlap:

Yes.

Interviewer:

And you came back and what'd you do when you came back to your building?

00:10:04:00

Minnie Dunlap:

I went back to my building to work with the tenants that was there, because I felt very enthusiastic that something would be done—could be done, *so I sort of made myself a, an organizer and started talking with the tenants that were in the building about holding their event*, and maybe we can get something done—'cause Dr. King was going to come over to our building. They were very enthusiastic. All of 'em was enthusiastic, because that, that would mean an opportunity, they would get a chance to see Dr. King. *So I got only about seven of them to say that they would work with me at that particular time. The others I felt that wanted to work with me, but were afraid, because they were on fixed incomes, particularly public assistance, and they were afraid that the landlord would get their checks cut off.* So, that was their only mean of income, so they wouldn't get involved to that degree. But right after that, the following week, the landlord sent someone in there and fixed

my apartment and painted the whole apartment. So by the time the rallies got there, I didn't have the hole in the wall. [laughs]

00:11:11:00

Interviewer:

[laughs] Cut.

Minnie Dunlap:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

That was good.

[cut]

00:11:18:00

Camera crew member #1:

And marker.

[slate]

00:11:24:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Dunlap. The landlord. Tell me about this landlord with the forty-five buildings. What did he do with his other buildings after Dr. King and his organizers started to come in to the community?

00:11:32:00

Minnie Dunlap:

After Dr. King, the organizers started coming to the building. I started to work as an organizer with other people, because I had gotten some work done in my building, and they, the landlord started to fix the buildings up after that.

00:11:49:00

Interviewer:

Do—and so people felt that their concerns—

00:11:51:00

Minnie Dunlap:

People felt that they could do something about it, and of course, after that we started going to court with some other problems that we wanted a whole tenant-landlord change.

00:12:01:00

Interviewer:

I see. OK. Let's cut a second.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

So, people just felt that, people started to feel like that they could do, they could make—

[beep]

[cut]

00:12:06:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

Camera crew member #1:

Marker, yes.

[slate]

00:12:11:00

Interviewer:

OK. So, what happened with this one, this particular landlord after he started making changes in your, after he made some changes in your building?

Minnie Dunlap:

Then, after he made changes in my building, I started working with—

Interviewer:

Can you say [unintelligible] I want you to say, "After the landlord made changes in my building—"

00:12:24:00

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. After the landlord made changes in my building, then I started to work with other tenants in the other buildings that he had, and people found out then that they could make changes themselves without having someone else to come in and do it for them. And we started to mobilize and organize other tenants.

00:12:45:00

Interviewer:

Very good. OK. Thank you. That's good.

Camera crew member #1:

Good answer.

[cut]

00:12:50:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:12:56:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Dunlap. Well, you know, you're from Yazoo, Mississippi. What was the difference in terms of how White people acted toward you in the South as opposed to how they acted toward you when you came to Chicago? If you could just tell me a little bit.

00:13:05:00

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. In the South, if White people liked you, they liked you. And they would go all out to help you or do something for you. But when you get, when I got here to Chicago, I found that to be different.

00:13:17:00

Interviewer:

OK, one minute. Let's stop a minute.

00:13:19:00

Minnie Dunlap:

If they didn't like you, they'd say they didn't like you.

00:13:21:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's do it again. Let's start again. In the South—

00:13:24:00

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. In the South, White people, if they liked you, they like you and they would go all the way out to help you or do something for you. But if they didn't like you, they would say they didn't like you. They would not pretend like they like you if they didn't. But here in Chicago, it was quite different. You know, you, you'd be around White people here, and they'd pretend like they're all ready for you and all good with you, and anything that you did they're ready to help you to do it. But once you start to do that, then the whole attitude of 'em change, and they move away from you and acts as if that you're somebody that they don't want to be around—or somebody that they don't even know.

00:14:05:00

Interviewer:

OK, good. Cut.

[cut]

00:14:09:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:14:13:00

Interviewer:

Now, when the movement was here, Mrs. Dunlap, they did a lot of marches into the White sections to bring, bring about, talk about the issue of open housing. Now, you didn't go. What were you doing? But when you watched it on TV and you watched the hostility, what were you thinking? What were you feeling?

00:14:28:00

Minnie Dunlap:

I felt angry. I felt sad—

00:14:30:00

Interviewer:

You have to tell me that. You have to tell me that, I didn't march, because I was cooking—

00:14:33:00

Minnie Dunlap:

Oh. I didn't march. The Saturday before the march was, I stand and cooked 200 dinners, and by that Sunday, I was sick because I have a, I have a breathing problem, so ***I was sick that Sunday. But when I watched it on TV, I got angry. I got sad. I got upset. You know, when I watched that kind of ho—hostility and that kind of prejudice that I did not understand, so I just couldn't see why they would do that. And I've, and looking at that, I said, Gee, I'm not as nonviolent as I think I am, especially and Dr. King wanted us to be nonviolent. Because if I had been there and they had threw them rotten eggs and that spit on me, I think I would have just hit back.***

00:15:17:00

Interviewer:

Great. OK. Cut.

[cut]

00:15:21:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:15:25:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Dunlap. What were you doing the night before some of the marches, like the march to Gage Park? What were you doing, and after the next day? When you didn't go to the march and saw it on television?

00:15:34:00

Minnie Dunlap:

I was cooking. On that day, I was cooking. Saturday, before the march, I was cooking 200 dinners so we could purchase buses to go on that march, so people could go on that march. And that, that next day, I got sick and couldn't go on the march. But when I saw that on TV, I was angry. [doorbell] I was upset. I was—

00:15:54:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut. That was good. [beep]—the door?

[cut]

00:15:57:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:16:04:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Dunlap. Tell me about the, the, that you were cooking the 200 dinners the night before the march, and then you got sick, and you couldn't go, and what you saw when you watched the march on television the next day, and how you felt.

00:16:16:00

Minnie Dunlap:

Saturday, before the march, we were coo—I was cooking 200 dinners to sell so we could purchase buses to go on that march. On, and then the next day, when the march was, I got sick and I couldn't go, so I watched it from my TV. And I was upset. I was angry. I just could not understand why that kind of hostility was going on and, and all the prejudice that was in there. And when they started throwing those rotten eggs and rocks and started turning over the buses—and one of the little cars that we had got, that someone set it on fire—I just wasn't quite as nonviolent as I thought I was, because I think if I had been there, I would have just hit back.

00:17:05:00

Interviewer:

OK. Good.

Camera crew member #1:

Good.

Interviewer:

Very good. [unintelligible]

[beep]

[cut]

00:17:08:00

Camera crew member #1:

Speed. Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:17:16:00

Interviewer:

Mrs. Dunlap, how, how did you feel when you heard that Dr. King was gonna be involved in organizing the, the movement, becoming part of the movement in Chicago?

Minnie Dunlap:

I felt very good about that, and my first reaction was—

Interviewer:

You gotta tell me, I felt good when I heard that Dr. King was coming to Chicago—

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. When I heard that Dr. King was coming to Chicago—

Interviewer:

OK, I was just talking on top of you. Go ahead.

00:17:39:00

Minnie Dunlap:

OK. When I heard that Dr. King was coming to Chicago, I felt very good about that, because my first reaction was, Gee, thank you, Jesus. You sent someone to save us from the depression and the oppression that we have been getting. So he was like a Christ to me, that come in to lead us out of, like, the wilderness of, or the depression that we were in and lead us to something that was gonna be different. And I, I really felt like we were being led to the

promised land, in a sense, and that promised land was out of the depression of the way we were being treated—especially as tenants.

00:18:18:00

Interviewer:

OK. Cut. OK.

[beep]

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:18:25:00

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