



Interview with **Frederica McDuffie**

Date: December 7, 1989

Interviewer: Madison Davis Lacy, Jr.

Camera Rolls: 1137-1140

Sound Rolls: 163-164

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 Frederica McDuffie, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on December 7, 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 #1137]

[sound roll #163]

00:00:14:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

00:00:15:00

Camera crew member #2:

Twenty-two.

00:00:18:00

Interviewer:

OK, we're rolling now, so I'm gonna ask you. Go back in time, tell me do you remember the first time, when, the first time you met Arthur?

00:00:27:00

Frederica McDuffie:

The first moment I met Arthur, there was a harmonious, deep feeling inside of me. And I said to myself, Hey. I like this guy.

00:00:40:00

Interviewer:

What was it about him that you liked?

00:00:45:00

Frederica McDuffie:

That sweet look on his face that he had.

00:00:49:00

Interviewer:

Where was it that you met him, and try and keep the story going.

00:00:53:00

Frederica McDuffie:

I met him one afternoon. My mother had sent me to the store to buy a small can of peas. And on my way to the store, I'd seen this guy there, but I decided that I would continue to walk on, even though I know deep inside there was that feeling in me, that I wanted to talk with him. And I went in. I bought my can of peas for mom, and on my return back home, standing all alone himself on a corner, I said to myself, I know the question is going to pop up. Truly and surely, he decided to walk along with me. And he said to me, Hi. I said hello. He said, Where you going? I said, I'm on my way home now. Said, May I walk with you? I said sure. So, he said, I like you. I say, Really? He said, Yes. May I talk with you? I said, Not right now. I have to go now. So, he said, May I have your number? I said, Well, yes. And, I gave him my number, and he called me, and we talked over the phone, you know, for maybe about an hour or so. And, just like I said, the question was popped, and he said to me, Would you go with me? My response, Yes.

00:02:35:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop down for a second.

[cut]

00:02:41:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

00:02:41:00

Camera crew member #2:

Twenty-three.

[slate]

00:02:44:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Arthur was a warm and kind-hearted—

00:02:46:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK, sorry. He's ready now.

00:02:51:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Arthur was a warm and kind-hearted person. He was very joyous, joyful, loving, kind, he was just great. You know, personality-wise, was just sweet. Activities he participated in, in high school, he was a member of the marching band for Booker Washington. He was on the swim team, which he won several first places. He was also president of the Booker T. Washington band, which I was also a part of that, you know, organization as well. So, and he was just merely a well-friendly guy.

00:03:45:00

Interviewer:

OK, so, now you [phone rings] oop. Stop for a second.

[cut]

00:03:50:00

Camera crew member #2:

Twenty-four.

[slate]

00:03:53:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Hm.

00:03:54:00

Interviewer:

All right, now, you know, you're making Arthur sound like a saint.

00:03:59:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Well, he was. He was a saint [laughs]. As far as I'm concerned, he was. He was my cherished, and I cherish my saint, because he was my love. My one, and my only, and my first love.

00:04:18:00

Interviewer:

All right, now, when did you two decide that maybe you'd get married? Tell me, describe how that happened.

00:04:25:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Well, we decided to get married once we both finish high school, but at the meantime, Arthur finished high school two years before I did. I finished, like, class of 1967. Arthur served three years in the service, Marines, so during the time that he was in the Marines, we kept communications through letters, and we prepared ourselves, you know, while he was in the service, that we would get married once you return home and out of the service. And, he was discharged from service on October 5th of 1968, and we married November the 2nd, 1968.

00:05:16:00

Interviewer:

What was the wedding like? Tell me about it. Describe, paint me a picture of your wedding.

00:05:24:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Oh! My wedding day was very exciting. I think we both were more anxious than ever. The night before the wedding, well, we rehearsed for the wedding, and after the wedding rehearsal, we were not allowed to see one another. And, I think he was a little bit too excited to see me, so he decided that he would come over anyway to see me be, the day of the wedding, and I was at my mother's house, and he had to bring over the corsage for my mom. And, as he entered the door, he says, Where's my wife? And my mom said, Not your wife yet! [laughs] So, he was trying to get back to see me, and everyone said, No! You can't see the bride. You can't see her now, until time of the wedding. So, I think he was quite excited, you know, more excited to see me before the, you know, the final time of the wedding.

00:06:25:00

Interviewer:

So, you, you waited for him while he was in the service.

00:06:30:00

Frederica McDuffie:

I waited three years for him.

00:06:33:00

Interviewer:

Were you ever anxious that he'd come back a different person than the one that, that left you, because of his worldliness having been away in the service?

Frederica McDuffie:

Not really. I don't—

Interviewer:

Put it in a statement. No, I wasn't worried he'd come back different.

00:06:49:00

Frederica McDuffie:

No. I was not worried about him coming back differently, because there was no way of saying that he was gonna make any great change over in three years' period of time. I mean, strongly, communication was even better away than it was when he was here, you know, during the years of our, you know, dating.

00:07:14:00

Interviewer:

You don't have to talk a lot about his service and period he was in the service. What did he think about the war?

00:07:23:00

Frederica McDuffie:

He talked about the service very little, because I don't think he was quite excited about making years of years of term in there. He was mostly concerned of making a strong life on the outside once he completed the service. So, very little communication about how his service term.

00:07:48:00

Interviewer:

Did he ever describe to you what kind of a strong life he'd like to make when he got out of the service? Tell me what he said.

00:07:55:00

Frederica McDuffie:

To my knowledge, his goal, mind, was to strive, and strive for nothing but the best, no matter what you were involving yourself, just strive, and strive for the top, and nothing but to the top.

00:08:15:00

Interviewer:

What kind of a picture had he painted for you of the life that you would lead?

00:08:20:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Strongly, the life that he painted for me was the life for a marriage, the family life. He was a devoted man. He was a hard-working man, and most of all, a strong provider for the family.

00:08:47:00

Interviewer:

Did he have any of, vices at all? Did he have any vices?

00:08:51:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Oh, I can't think of anything [laughs].

00:08:56:00

Interviewer:

Well, if you can't, don't force it, then.

00:08:57:00

Frederica McDuffie:

I'll try not to.

00:08:58:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop for right now, for a second.

[cut]

[slate]

00:09:02:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

00:09:02:00

Camera crew member # :

Twenty-five.

[slate]

00:09:05:00

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm. Well, what business did he go into when he got out of the service, and why?

00:09:12:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Once he'd gotten out of the service, like I said, we've gotten married, because it was like maybe a month from the time that he was out of the service. We lived it in a small duplex, one bedroom, and he was not working. He was looking for a job, employment. So, he always wanted something that was top related. OK, and once he started looking for his employment, he was working as, Wells Fargo. And, I think, to my knowledge, he worked there for three months. And, he felt as though it was dangerous. He didn't really like it too well. Then, he decided that he would go into UPS service, driving trucks. And, actually, he stated, he said it was too much hard work [laughs], long hours. And, we were at home, and what happened was, we didn't have no type of insurance, and the insurance salesman came around and knocked at the door. And, he was welcomed in, and he spoke with us about taking out insurance. In the meantime, we did accept taking out the insurance, and he also spoke with him about becoming an insurance salesman. And, he took upon that application of applying for the insurance salesman, and he reached his goal, is doing very well. And, he'd strive on, and strived on, until he became supervisor and had several guys working up under his commands. And, he enjoyed—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Frederica McDuffie:

—it.

00:11:12:00

Interviewer:

OK. We've got rollout on this roll, camera roll. So, we gonna change it. Fine.

Camera crew member #1:

I'm trying.

[cut]

Interviewer:

He never did.

Frederica McDuffie:

No.

Interviewer:

He took everything in stride.

Frederica McDuffie:

Everything was—

Camera crew member #2:

[unintelligible]

Frederica McDuffie:

—in stride. No conflicts. None at all.

[camera roll #1138]

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Did he ever comment on the notion that—

00:11:35:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

00:11:36:00

Interviewer:

—Black people—

00:11:38:00

Camera crew member # :

Twenty-six.

00:11:40:00

Interviewer:

—did Arthur ever comment at all about justice, and Black men, and what, you know, how people sometimes say, Ugh! God, I'm Black! I'm Black, and I'm a man in this society. Gotta hard road to hoe. Did he ever talk about anything like that?

00:11:55:00

Frederica McDuffie:

As far as, as far as saying Black men's having a hard way in, in life, as we were growing up, we noticed that Black people were having it hard from just normally make a life of living. So, he'd always known that it was hard for Black people, because he's from the, Georgia, and back in those times, you know life was hard, living and making it in Georgia. So, those things, they were, they were common for him.

00:12:37:00

Interviewer:

Can you give me a brief idea as to what drove you two to divorce one another? You wouldn't mind talking about that?

00:12:50:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Well. We started having complications with our marriage. Arthur started the being—starting being a little more devoted to the outside world than he would be for home. And, I'm the type of woman that will not tolerate it.

00:13:17:00

Interviewer:

But, at one point, you two had talked about getting back together, ain't it right?

00:13:21:00

Frederica McDuffie:

We decided that we would remarry again in the event that we would make changes in both of our lives. Actually, there didn't have to be any changes in my life, but as far as his life, he had to make a great change. And Arthur decided to make that change. Arthur confessed. He confessed to me that he loved me more than he ever loved me. He felt as though he needed to make a change in his life, and he decided that, that's what he wanted to do.

00:14:03:00

Interviewer:

Now, do you remember—

Camera crew member #1:

[coughs]

Interviewer:

—do you remember the days in December in 1979, before he went on that motorcycle ride—what did you think of him and that motorcycle?

00:14:19:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Well, as he was on the motorcycle, I really didn't know that Arthur was on a motorcycle, because Arthur was here at my home. We went out to a Christmas party the night before he was on the motorcycle, and we arrive home pretty late. We spent most of the night, we spent that particular night together from the Christmas party, and after we, you know, awoke, and had breakfast and everything, and had, you know, prepared dinner, he was going back to check on his house. And, he spoke with me, that he will return to keep the kids, because I worked 11:00 to 7:00 at night. And, no Arthur showed up. So, I decided that I had to make preparations to get the kids to be taken care of for that particular night.

00:15:21:00

Interviewer:

Stop for a second. Let's stop down.

Camera crew member #2:

[coughs]

[cut]

[slate]

00:15:27:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

00:15:29:00

Camera crew member #2:

Twenty-seven.

00:15:31:00

Interviewer:

You were saying something about the, not—you looked up the next night, and Arthur wasn't there. Start over at that point. Keep the story going.

00:15:41:00

Frederica McDuffie:

No, I said the, on my return, I had to go to work that night, and Arthur spoke with me, that he was, he'll be back to keep the kids that particular night that I had to go to work. But he did not arrive, so I decided that I had to make preparations for the kids to be taken care of, for that particular night that I had to work. I went to work, and the kids were with a babysitter, and while I was at work, which was two o'clock in the morning, I was in a patient's room. Happened to be standing to the window, and I looked out, and I'd seen an ambulance coming by, forward into the emergency room, and I said to myself, Well, someone is coming in.

00:16:31:00

Interviewer:

Well, let me stop you right here now. It's not clear that you worked in the hospital. Let me ask you to start over one more time, and let, let us know that in fact you worked at the very hospital. So, pick it up from the same point again, early on. Go ahead.

00:16:46:00

Frederica McDuffie:

The very same hospital that Arthur was admitted to is the hospital where I worked, which is Jackson Memorial Hospital. That particular time, like I said, that he arrived there, and I didn't know that, that was, that he was in the hospital that same night that I was working.

00:17:11:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop down a second, here. I'm sorry. OK.

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:17:14:00

Interviewer:

I screwed that up for you. I'm—

[slate]

00:17:20:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

00:17:22:00

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

Twenty-eight.

00:17:24:00

Interviewer:

OK, start again.

00:17:25:00

Frederica McDuffie:

The night that I had to go to work, Arthur didn't arrive home to keep the kids, so I made a decision to go and take the kids to the babysitter, so someone can keep them while I was at work, at Jackson Hospital. I walked into my patient's room, and I looked out the window, and I saw the ambulance coming across, and I said to myself, Oh, my gosh, someone is coming in. And, this was two o'clock in the morning. Not knowing that, at the same time, that it was Arthur coming in. Never did I think any more about the patient, nor did I think of Arthur. I decided to continue my work on. I work until my regular shift change, which is 7:30 in the morning. I prepare my patients for the next morning. I clocked out, which is my regular time of 7:30. Before I clocked out at 7:30, I call Arthur's home, and spoke with his baby sister, which stated to me that he was at sleep. And I said to her, Don't wake him up. I'll call him when I arrive at home. I clocked out my job. I returned home. Instead of coming in directly as usual, like I usually do, or as I intended to do, I decided—my neighbor spoke with me that morning, and held me up for maybe about an hour, an hour and a half, talking. So, I didn't get a chance to call him at home, because he usually leaves between 8:00 that morning to go out for his business. I came in late. Change up, and I went back over to my mother, pick her up, and we decided that we'll go out Christmas shopping. As I returned from Christmas shopping, there was a note on my door stating to get in contact with the office immediately. Signed Larry. Instead of calling the office, I decided that I would drive to Larry's house. At the moment I arrive, Larry stepped out the door, and he stated to me, Frederica, was Arthur on a motorcycle? Or he stated, Does Arthur have a motorcycle? And I said, Yes. And I broke down. Larry walked me in, and calmed me down, and asked me to call the office, and I said, Larry, what's the problem? What's the problem? And he spoke to me that death was in a motorcycle accident. I said to him, No, you're not telling me this. Frederica, calm down. Excuse me. After I did calm myself down, I had to come back and pick up my kid from school. As I walk in, the hospital called me, and they asked me several questions over the phone. And, immediately, they needed me to come to the hospital to identify his name. And, I said, What is the problem? What's wrong? And, as the doctor was speaking to me over the phone, they stated to several problems that, what was going on with him. And, I said to him, I will be there as soon as possible. Instead, I called his oldest brother, in a moment breaking down in tears, I asked, Louis, did you hear about your brother? He said, Rica, calm down. They said that he was in a motorcycle accident. I say, Who hit him on the motorcycle? No one hit him, as Louis stated, he ranned himself into a wall. And it's just like saying, I feel a little better, because I heard the word from the older brother. As my kid arrived from school, I drove to the hospital. I've gotten there. *They would not let me in to see him. I asked the doctor why. They said to me, We're working on him. You will be able to see him in a couple of hours. There was four hours before I'd seen Arthur. When I did see Arthur—*

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Frederica McDuffie:

—it was like, no. This is not Arthur. This is not an accident.

00:22:39:00

Interviewer:

We have to stop right here to change rolls.

Camera crew member #2:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

Yeah.

[cut]

[camera roll #1139]

00:22:45:00

Camera crew member #2:

New camera roll. 1139.

00:22:48:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:22:50:00

Camera crew member #1:

Take twenty-nine.

00:22:52:00

Interviewer:

Pick up the story from where [dog barks] you first see Arthur.

00:22:56:00

Frederica McDuffie:

[zipper closes] When I went in to see Arthur, [dog barks] I said to myself, No. [dog barks] This is not Arthur. This is not an accident [helicopter passes].

00:23:07:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop for a second, please.

[cut]

00:23:13:00

Camera crew member #1:

[dogs bark] Mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

Thirty.

[slate]

00:23:16:00

Interviewer:

All right. Go back to the point where we were, the first time you saw Arthur.

00:23:21:00

Frederica McDuffie:

The first time I'd seen Arthur in the hospital, I stated to myself that this is not Arthur. This is not an accident—

Interviewer:

We gotta stop again.

Frederica McDuffie:

—as they said it was.

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:23:35:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Oh, my God.

[cut]

00:23:37:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:23:38:00

Camera crew member #2:

Thirty-one

00:23:40:00

Camera crew member #1:

Rolling.

00:23:44:00

Interviewer:

OK. The first time I saw Arthur.

Frederica McDuffie:

The first time I'd seen Asr, Arthur in the hospital.

Interviewer:

Try it one more time. You flubbed it.

00:23:50:00

Frederica McDuffie:

[laughs] The first time I'd seen Arthur in the hospital, I said to myself, This is not Arthur. This is not an accident. Arthur's head was so swollen, there was no features in his face at all. Arthur's eyes were totally popped out. The neck was nowhere to be found on Arthur. I mean, it was just totally swollen all up. Arthur's body was more bruises and more scratches from the ground, was just totally all over his legs, and his arms, and the total body movement was just, just a jerk movement. And I'm saying to myself, No accident could look like this.

00:24:49:00

Interviewer:

What happened next?

00:24:51:00

Frederica McDuffie:

The doctors asked me to step out. I stepped out and spoke with the doctors, and I asked them, What happened? They stated to me, In the report that came along with him to the emergency room, that he was in an accident. And I said, Doctor, what type of surgery did you perform on him? He, the doctor said that, We bolted. We had to go in, in his head, and put bolts in his head, to release the pressure that was floating around the brains.

00:25:41:00

Interviewer:

All right, now, take me to the moment when you really find out what happened.

00:25:47:00

Interviewer:

The moment I really found out what happened was that same night. A telephone call was made to one of the secretaries on the floor that he was placed on. I would say, an anonymous

phone call was made. And in that phone call was stated in the conversation, was that he was beaten, Arthur was beaten. It was the person that made that phone call, I don't know. From that point on, actually, I put pieces together, by the bruises from his eyes. It shows all indications that he was beaten, actually beaten to death.

00:26:46:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop down.

[cut]

00:26:52:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:26:53:00

Camera crew member #2:

Thirty-two.

00:27:00:00

Interviewer:

When did you hear that Arthur would, had died?

00:27:05:00

Frederica McDuffie:

I heard he had died—no, what happened was that, when Artur, Arthur, start over [laughs]. I heard when he died, the late, the early part of that evening, the hospital had called me, and asked me to come in, and matter of fact they asked all the family to come in. And as I arrive at the hospital, he was slowly deteriorating. He hadn't died exactly then, but he was slowly deteriorating. The nurse asked me, did I want to go in to see him? And I told her no. I left the hospital and drove back home. The hospital called me within an hour and a half and pronounced him dead, about 12:00 that afternoon.

00:28:18:00

Interviewer:

OK, now, jump ahead just a little bit to just the funeral. [zipper closes] Your baby's dad, the man you loved, the man you told me earlier that you cherished, there's your one and only love.

Frederica McDuffie:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

How'd you feel? Describe it. Paint a picture for me through your eyes. How'd you feel?

00:28:40:00

Frederica McDuffie:

Once I've actually heard the actual word that he was dead and gone forever, my heart was broken, torn apart. The only love, the first love, was gone. No more. No return. Forever is away from home.

00:29:15:00

Interviewer:

Were you mad?

00:29:17:00

Frederica McDuffie:

A bit hostile, because the truth wasn't out about his death.

00:29:25:00

Interviewer:

Describe the funeral for me.

00:29:28:00

Frederica McDuffie:

His funeral?

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm.

Frederica McDuffie:

Sad. The funeral was quite sad. To walk behind someone you really deeply love, to sit and face someone you really deeply cherish, and spent moments and days of time with, it's like saying everything in all and all is all of me [sighs].

00:30:12:00

Interviewer:

All right. How did you, what, feel about when the, when the men were acquitted, and the riot went down? What did you feel when, when they were acquitted and the riot happened? Tell me about your feelings on both of those instances.

00:30:27:00

Frederica McDuffie:

When the policemens were all acquitted, I felt verily—they were unjust. No one served time. No one was charged. Just [pause] truly and fairly, it was just unjust. So the unjust feeling.

00:30:58:00

Interviewer:

What about the riots? What did you think about that?

00:31:03:00

Frederica McDuffie:

During the time of the riot, well, I was just arriving back from the trial, which was held in Tampa [pause]. I felt a little disappointed. No need to, but, who was I to control someone else's feelings?

00:31:35:00

Interviewer:

How would you like the world to remember Arthur McDuffie? I mean, tell me. You loved him. How would you like the world to remember?

00:31:42:00

Frederica McDuffie:

The world, I'd like for the world to remember him as the one-and-only, lovable Arthur McDuffie.

00:31:58:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's stop down.

[camera roll out]

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:32:07:00

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