

Interview of Mayor Thomas D' Alesandro III

This interview was conducted by Fraser Smith of WYPR in May of 2007.

Transcription provided by John J. Schwallenberg of the University of Baltimore.

Smith: Well, Mayor D'Alesandro we're here to talk about 1968 and I wonder if you would begin by sort of telling the story of those days. We were just talking a minute ago about how the rest of the country was in flame in flames and there was some hope that I think you had and others had that maybe the city was going to escape it because we had went three days without any issue.

D' Alesandro: That's exactly right. I think the city was the beneficiary, at that time of tremendous racial relationships. Good racial relationships that I, as Mayor, inherited from the former Mayor: Mayor McKeldin. Mayor McKeldin from Governor McKeldin was a great humanitarian. He was a champion of civil rights. When I say a champion of civil rights, it was in a time when there were very few champions in the white community, for civil rights but he was out there. That ingratiated himself with the black community. That's what I think was the holding point. I inherited a lot of goodwill and then I established my own record with the black community to enable us to try to avoid this riot. My hope, at that time, was that if we could have made it to Sunday morning when the Ministerial Alliance and the black churches would be opened for services. If we could make it to Sunday morning then we would have made it. We lasted thru Thursday night thru Friday night and at five thirty on Saturday night is when the riots started on Gay Street.

Smith: Do you have any do you have any idea what sparked it? What got it going?

D' Alesandro: Well, it's interesting: I had a meeting about ten o'clock that morning, Saturday morning with Governor Agnew down at the Mansion: With myself Governor Agnew, General Gelston and a few aides. And we had all our community activists we had all the police activists, informers and what have you, who could comb the city. Even at that time Saturday morning things was relatively calm; all the reports coming back were relatively good. No real cause to look in any given direction for concern. But I did mention to the Governor: that it looks too good. I thought it looked, looked too good. I just had that antsy feeling about it. But it was at that time that Governor Agnew said that if anything happened that he was at my beckon call as far as the National Guard was concerned even calling for Federal troops. I couldn't call for Federal troops it could only be the Governor could call for Federal troops. So he was extremely cooperative at that time in his dealings with me. So we left the Mansion about eleven thirty got in to down went to City Hall, checked everything out. Commissioner Pomerleau was the Police Commissioner and General Gelston was the in charge of the National Guard. So um we went through the check points of. You know: were we in good shape police wise, were we in good shape fire fighter wise; were we, were all the communications ready in case of any trouble; was there anything brewing anywhere. We had a lot of Community

Action people out in the streets as well. Everything was in pretty good shape. So I left the City Hall about three o'clock, I guess. When I got home, I got a call about five thirty. I'm a little bit ahead of myself. About one or two o'clock in the afternoon when I was in the City Hall they showed me a pamphlet that was being distributed by some in the Gay Street area. That they better close down their stores to commemorate the death of Martin Luther King. But um sort of a threatening fashion. But nothing was materializing. That was the only inkling that something was moving. So at three thirty at five thirty I got the first call that a brick had been thrown thru one of the stores along Gay Street, which was the beginning of the riots. By the way on the side, a side issue: I was a very good friend of Martin Luther King, Dr. King. Dr. King was my friend. It's interesting if I could, for a second...

Smith: Sure, sure. I know you told me about his visit here when you ...

D' Alesandro: Yeah. He came into Baltimore for some ceremony, some activity in the black community. And I was asked by Box Harris, Col. Harris which was the highest ranking black officer in the Police Department if I would go to the Lord Baltimore Hotel and meet with Dr. King and give him the keys to the city and Dr. King wanted to talk to me. So I was delighted to. Mayor McKeldin was out of the city, so I was like the Acting Mayor. I went over to the Lord Baltimore Hotel and as soon as I walked into his suite, he came out of the parlor that he was in, came up introduced me and said: Tommy, can I call you Tommy, I said fine. He put his arm around my shoulder like and walked me into this parlor set down on the couch. I no sooner set on the couch he says: I want you to explain to me these three amendments that you introduced in the Civil Rights Bill that was pending in the Council. They had in some way lessened certain of the features of the Civil Rights Bill. But I said to him: Dr. King each one of these amendments represents a vote. If I win this thing, if we win, we only win by one vote at the most. I need these three amendments to get those...

Smith: You were going to get a Council person to vote if you added those...

D' Alesandro: Well, I added the amendments after confrontations and conferences with the Councilmen and those three amendments were approved and the Civil Rights Bill passed. I think it passed by one vote. The amendments were approved and the Civil Rights Bill passed. I think it passed by one vote. But getting back to the story: five thirty that night, well, I rushed back down to the City Hall. Then I went right away immediately to the War Room of the Police Department. One thing I want to emphasis: I have nothing but admiration for the Police Department, for the Fire Department, for the National Guard. Nobody shirked their duty; everybody showed up; nobody was sick; nobody called in absent or sick. Everybody showed up and there was no such thing as keeping time: they worked the clock. They put out a Herculean effort and you got to realize that none of us were really geared up to fight an urban uprising. How do you go to school to learn that?

Smith: Sure.

D' Alesandro: As far as the National Guard was concerned, as far as the police were concerned, as far as the fireman fighting fires in the neighborhood when they were being pelted by...

Smith: When you met with Governor Agnew...

D' Alesandro: Yes

Smith: A day or so before

D' Alesandro: No, Saturday morning.

Smith: It was that day

D' Alesandro: Saturday morning.

Smith: Were there ministers there at that meeting.

D' Alesandro: No, no, no.

Smith: They, they...

D' Alesandro: It was strictly him and I and a couple of our aides. General Gelston of the National Guard and I think Commissioner Pomerleau and some of my aides.

Smith: So, it just started to roll at that point. I mean one brick led to another, I guess.

D' Alesandro: Then it got out of hand. You know, at one time, I said this and the Justice Department Representative who was assigned to Baltimore told me, not to say it again because I couldn't prove it. But if you remember, Washington was up in flames right away. And they called...

Interruption...

D' Alesandro: We were talking about my visit to Governor Agnew on Saturday morning. I would like to say for the record that Governor Agnew was my personal friend. I mean he met with serious problems that caused him to leave the Vice Presidency at the end of his career. But my relationship with him as President of the City Council when he was County Executive and as Mayor when he was Governor was always excellent. He cooperated with me 100 percent, not only in the riots but in my budgets, budget deliberations different tax proposals. He was my friend.

Smith: You know you were talking, I am sure that will skip around a little bit here but it can't be avoided, probably. Because things you say you know trigger questions and you remember things. You talked about the good atmosphere that you inherited from McKeldin.

D' Alesandro: Yes, no question about it.

Smith: But there were still problems in terms of race relations. Because...

D' Alesandro: You got to remember what you're talking about Fraser. You're talking about 1968 in Baltimore City. That's forty years ago almost.

Smith: Right.

D' Alesandro: Baltimore was a segregated city.

Smith: Right.

D' Alesandro: The Chamber of Commerce always would identify the city making up say fifty-five to sixty-five percent white and forty-five to forty percent black but I think that the actual figures were closer to the reverse. Maybe fifty-five black and forty-five percent white. So that meant at that time there was no public accommodations, blacks could not eat in white restaurants. There were a handful of jobs for blacks in the downtown area. There were only maybe about a dozen about a dozen attorneys and they were not part of the Bar Association of Maryland, the State Bar Association. They were part of the Monumental Bar Association they were separate. Nobody from the black community could go to the downtown department stores and shop in such a way that you can try on dresses or try on hats. None of that was allowed; you could browse, but that was it. So it was a segregated city.

Smith: Your support for some of the open accommodations legislation gave you some problems in Annapolis too? Right? I mean people were not all that happy with you about some of the positions you took.

D' Alesandro: Well I don't know if I ever felt the animosity of the legislatures but there is no question there was some white slippage in the city and in the counties toward my stand. But they didn't see the city as I saw it as Council President and Mayor. I knew that it had to open up. We had to give an opportunity for everybody to participate in the American way and that was not happening. Many a time I would be at the banquets where I would be the only white person. Sometimes when I would go to a white banquet, I would see maybe one or two blacks, that's all. There was no intercommunication no intermingling of the blacks and the whites during that time. It's all together different today, all together.

Smith: So when, when the trouble began. I mean we were saying before one brick led to another. Do you think that what happened was entirely home grown were there people from D.C. that came...

D' Alesandro: That's a good point. That's what I was trying to mention when we were talking before. I said this and the representative from The Justice Department that was assigned to Baltimore because of the Civil Disorder, told me not to say it again because I couldn't prove it. But like you say: we got by Thursday night and we got by Friday night and then this happened on Saturday night. And the reports that I was getting in from some of the street people was that there was a looting taking place, they were putting them into big trucks and they were dropping them off at some points in Baltimore City and they had Washington D.C. licenses plates on them. So, I was of the opinion that when President Johnson closed down Washington by bringing 10,000 troops into Washington, shut them down. I think an element, I call it a criminal element came out of

Washington and breached our work. But I couldn't prove it. I said it, I said it on the radio and television and they told me not to say it anymore because I couldn't prove it, which I couldn't prove. But these were the reports that I was getting. So there was an element in here that that I couldn't put my fingers on. Even to this day I can't pinpoint a specific project that they may have hit; an area they may have hit. But I think they were here.

Smith: Is that when you were... That the need for federal troops becoming urgent? I mean you were...

D' Alesandro: Well that's a great story about the federal troops being called in. We had the police out there; we had the fire department out there; we had the National Guard out there. And I kept looking out and I saw smoke breaking through in all areas of East Baltimore. I was troubled; but they told me things were under control, that the police were out in the streets. Then there was a Major Armstrong. Major Armstrong was one of the greatest policemen in the history of the city. Champion guy, Champion and he looked just the part. He looked like an All-American policemen. Well when he came into the room, and I saw the look on his face I didn't need anymore reports. I knew we were in serious trouble. It was getting out of hand.

Smith: This would have been Saturday night?

D' Alesandro: Saturday night late, ten, eleven o'clock. That began to spread even in to West Baltimore. That's when I called Governor Agnew and asked for federal troops.

Smith: Should it have happened sooner? Would doing it sooner...

D' Alesandro: Calling in federal troops. Federal troops came into Druid Hill Park about six o'clock Saturday night, Sunday night, six o'clock Sunday night and for all intents and purposes, by nine o'clock Sunday night the riot was over, the up roaring was over. They were 82nd Airborne Infantry troops. They weren't ah. They came down Park Heights Ave. with fixed bayonets. They weren't looking for a problem; but, if they saw problems, they were going to solve it. They never fired a shot. I think a couple of rifle butts were used once in a while, but. It was all over at nine o'clock. In fact, I threw the first ball out to opening the baseball season on Tuesday, Tuesday at one o'clock.

Smith: But in went on thru the weekend, didn't it?

D' Alesandro: Just thru the weekend

Smith: Weren't there quite a lot of people arrested and hurt.

D' Alesandro: Thousands, Thousands, during the weekend. It got to be a full blown riot in the sense of civil disturbance. No question about that.

Smith: Were you criticized at the end of it for not acting sooner.

D' Alesandro: No, no. Like I told you everybody I had control over, the police department the fire department, they worked like, yeoman like. They were there around the clock they

were doing everything they could. It was a tremendous amount of effort by the black community, by the Black Ministerial Alliance. They were out in the streets trying to stop it. They were. Everybody that had an influence on the population was out there doing what they could do.

Smith: I know a lot of people in the city politically say that or believe and maybe you said this, I don't know. That the high expectations that everybody had that turned around when the riots began was very left you quite disconsolate and that was one of the reasons that you decided not to run again.

D' Alesandro: No, no what happened was: That I was City Council President for five years before I became Mayor. So I had the city budget completely under control. I reviewed the budget as the Council President, as the President of the Board of Estimates, the Mayor's budget. Then I reviewed it as the Council President. So I reviewed it ten times before I became Mayor. I knew the budget inside out. So the budget was in good shape and that's where all my priorities were set. That's where my mission was. But when the riots came I just had to let the budget and the mission take care of itself. I had to concern myself with racial relations. That's why I moved with quick dispatch to get the Model Cities Program in effect, to strengthen up community action with Parren Mitchell as the head of the Community Action Department and to have um tremendous. I opened up five Mayor's Stations down in the neighborhoods to show a manifestation of concern on the part of the Administration and at the same time I opened up my government to the first black City Solicitor George Russell: The first member of the Zoning Board, the first member of the fire department, two members of the Planning Commission.

Smith: Bascome on the fire department, the Fire Board.

D' Alesandro: Reverend Bascome on the Fire Board, Reverend Bascome. So we opened it up everywhere. Zoning Board everywhere you looked we opened it up and I let word go out that they were welcome, that the black community was welcome to participate. Black leadership would be part of the administration. That was what had to happen. And that's where I had to drift, in that direction. And this question about um me being despondent by the riots and that was the deciding factor for me getting out of politics. That's absolutely not the case at all. What happened with me was: I wanted to run for Governor. I wanted to run against Agnew, even though he was my personal friend. I figured as being Mayor of Baltimore, I'd be in the Democratic. I can get the Democratic nomination. I think I can beat any Democratic rival. I was going to go against Agnew. I was building up a ticket. I had a great ticket state wide. So um when I was making a speech down in Chestertown it was terrific ah terrific meeting down in Chestertown, Washington College. I had a terrific crowd and when I got off the stage Oh! I'm ahead of myself ah. When I'm going against Agnew, all of a sudden Governor Agnew calls me up about two days before Nixon announces. He said: Tommy I just want to tell you the President's going to, Nixon's going to nominate me for Vice President of the United States. I said, look Ted, God Bless you, I wish you nothing but good luck. I didn't know when I hung up the phone that that was the end of my career. I was...

Smith: Did it occur to you right then, right at the moment?

D' Alesandro: No About twenty four hours later I realized...

Smith: Because Marvin going to be the acting, well he was going to be elected Governor.

D' Alesandro: He was going to be elected Governor by the General Assembly. Which meant if I was going to run now: instead of running against a Republican incumbent, I would have to run against a Democratic incumbent. And then Sargent Schriver from the Kennedy family announced that he was going to run for Governor. So I figured my liberal credentials in Prince Georges and Montgomery Council were gone right out the window. With Sargent Schriver and then Mandel would be a strong incumbent Governor to fight. It was a different kind of fight. So when I came home from Chestertown I made the decision. I had three people that I abided by: I told them I am not going to run back for Mayor and I am getting out of this Gubernatorial fight.

Smith: I know...

D' Alesandro: The reason I got out was I had no money. I was completely broke, completely broke. I had no money. I had five children three or four of them on their way into high school and college. I was getting paid \$696.00 every two weeks as Mayor, that's my take home pay. So, I couldn't make. I just could not make it. So in that, so in politics you move up or you wait until you get beat and get out.

Smith: One of the other stories you told me about this period was what led up to the Governor Agnew's decision to dress down the ministers and you got...

D' Alesandro: I tried to stop him; I tried to stop him.

Smith: How did that, tell us how that happened.

D' Alesandro: I got advance notice of his statement from one of the T.V. stations. And I read it before it became public and I called him. An, I said: Governor, can you, can you either not make the statement or redo the statement or. Not call for a declaration of war with the black community. Smoke is still present in the city; let's just have a cooling off period. But he said: Tommy, I'll tell you, Tommy that's how I feel and I am going to say it and I'm going to stick by my statement.

Smith: He probably was reflecting the views of a lot of people from outside the city.

D' Alesandro: Yes, yes, yes.

Smith: Do you think there was any sort of organized group of, so called, black militants, that provoked this thing or...

D' Alesandro: No I don't think so. I just think it was maybe one or two black activists of minimal consequence. Could take advantage of the moment so to speak and maybe take claim that they started the riots and this and that. I think it was a spontaneous uprising.

Smith: You know, you know...

D' Alesandro: They watch television! And for three days on television it was contagious. That's all you saw was rioting, rioting, rioting.

Smith: The. One of the views, of all of this at the time I guess and in hindsight was that the feeling about it was very different if you were white or if you were black. The people who think back about it or remember it say: Oh that's when the riots happened; that's when black people rioted and the black point of view is: that's when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated. You know you had a totally different look at it.

D' Alesandro: Like I tell you, were talking now two thousand and seven. But in 1968 there were very, very few white people that knew any blacks, very, few black people that knew any white people. It was a segregated city. And as far as a segregated city is concerned, you can imagine. The rest of the state was predominately white. So a anti natural bias towards the city. But we had a solid black community; even in those days, we had a solid black community. It was controlled by the Ministerial Alliances, by the churches.

Smith: By Mrs. Jackson right and the NCAAP.

D' Alesandro: Well Mrs. Jackson. But we had some sure they played their part and an important part. But there was a very, very strong Ministerial, black ministers in the city. Young, articulate, well groomed. They made, they made the case for civil rights when we had it before the City Council. They came in they were so articulate and that's how articulate they were back in their parishes and in their churches. Their churches were packed 1,200, 500, 2,200 whatever their church could hold, they were packed. I was there every Sunday; I would see them packed and jammed.

Smith: Well you know there was...

D' Alesandro: That's why I was hoping we could keep of sustain our peace and calm until nine o'clock on Sunday. We would have avoided this because they could have taken over; but we couldn't reach it.

Smith: There were a year long problem in Cambridge and many of the militants actually did surface down there.

D' Alesandro: Yeah, yeah but those guys...

Smith: But, but Mrs. Jackson and the NAACP opposed what was going on down there to a large extent. So this is part the, what you I think saw as sort of a, you know as a feeling that we could heal this. Because the experience had been so...

D' Alesandro: I don't mind telling you as Mayor, I never thought, once the riot was completed or stopped. I didn't think we would have any problems in the future. I thought we could, and we haven't. We built up a nice, I think a nice. It's like stopping a drive on the one inch line; we stopped it on the one inch line and then we moved ahead.

Smith: But there are also people who believe that we haven't made a lot of progress in terms of the economic condition of the inner city black people. If you look at, I think Pennsylvania Ave. is sort of a symbol of the sort of stasis that has settled in since then.

D' Alesandro: Well you got if you look at the city. The city's grown. This is a different city. Baltimore in 2007 is different from 1968 and there are certain aspects in the economic realm that effect black and white, as well. A lot of people are having tremendous success; but a lot of people are troubled; a lot of people are fighting for their bread and butter, white and black. And, and I think the next coming year is going to be tougher than the previous two decades because things are happening that never happened before.

Smith: You know, you said before that, again and we've repeated it but that you. That McKeldin's legacy helped you a great deal.

D' Alesandro: No question.

Smith: And I know that you're held in very high regard by the black ministers. We've been talking, you know. Here we are so many years down the road. I mean, you get invited when someone dies, you get invited to speak. So it's no question about...

D' Alesandro: Oh sure. When I ran for Mayor after the Civil Rights Bill was passed. When I ran for Mayor I got 93% of the black vote, 93%. That's a pretty good percentage.

Smith: You remember Bob Watts? Robert Watts the NAACP lawyer.

D' Alesandro: Yes.

Smith: What...

D' Alesandro: Judge Watts.

Smith: Yeah Judge Watts. One of the things he said after the riots was: I mean this was 14 years after *Brown v. The Board of Education* and he thought that the willingness of white authority, you excluded, but white authorities across the State of Maryland, not in Baltimore, where the schools were desegregated right away after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954; but it took the rest of the state more than a decade. And his thought was: If segregation and the problems of race can continue against the law, against the Supreme Court, you know, there is a certain element of hopelessness that's starts to creep into things as a result of that.

D' Alesandro: I agree with this with his comments. But I think a lot of good. You may find troubled areas no matter. There is no such thing as perfection when you're dealing with urban government. But I think on the whole better today than they were forty years ago. Blacks are everywhere in government. The Mayor...I told you I put Judge Russell on the Board of Estimates; the first black ever to serve on the Board of Estimates. Well now the Board of Estimates consists: the Mayor is black; the President of the City Council is black; the Comptroller is black; the Director of Public Works is black. So the whole Board of Estimates is black. But that personifies what's going on throughout the community: in every walk of life, in the professions. Tremendous, we have a tremendous group of black lawyers:

strong and good and the same holds true in medicine, in the hospitals. That was never the case you never saw a black person downtown. You never saw them downtown in 68. You never saw them downtown in 68.

Smith: What were your thoughts about what to do afterward? About how to recover and what kinds of programs you...

D' Alesandro: I was blessed by having as my, my Housing Authority Chairman, Chairman of the Housing Authority, Bob Embrey. Bob Embrey is one of the best urban brains in the country. In fact, he was appointed Deputy Director of Housing for during the Carter Administration, almost a Cabinet Post. Well he moved with quick dispatch to take care of the damage that had been done. And see to it, that as far as the housing was concerned, we got back to a normalcy. I had as the Chairman of my School Board, one of the greatest brains ever come out of Baltimore. Became a Federal Judge; Chief Judge of the Circuit down in Richmond, Francis Murnaghan. One of the greatest brains in the history of the state, unbelievable guy, he was the Chairman, the head of my School Board. He moved with quick dispatch to take care of that. I had George Russell as the City Solicitor who met with the Ministerial Alliance, went into the black community. So we moved in every direction to see to it that: we stopped here, now were moving back were going back. Emery, Russell, I had as my Director of Public Works, I had Pierce Linaweaver. Pierce Linaweaver, I picked him as he was the Engineer Professor from Johns Hopkins University. I had a cluster of great guys around me. Moving, everybody moving in the direction. So what I say about Linaweaver that was the Department of Public Works: water, sewer, sanitation so he had to see to it that, that all of our functions were right in order. No disruptions everything going ahead and at the same time always searching to get blacks into government.

Smith: Do you think that it was a set back for racial relations in the City? I mean were people angry? You know, I saying basically white people and people that lived in the suburbs. They said: you know, look, look, what's going on in there, you know: there burning here own houses down.

D' Alesandro: Sure, sure. Those comments were made but. I think it was made primarily out of how they looked at things, how they looked at things. I can just tell you this give you a little minute example of how the racial relationship was: You can go out to the Colt game and see Lenny Moore break through one of those lineman and go sixty four yards for a touchdown and all. And the white, and everybody in The Stadium up cheering the whites and the blacks, overwhelmingly white, cheering, cheering. I always kept in my mind: cheering, cheering, cheering. That night when the team went out to have dinner Lenny Moore wasn't invited; they couldn't get into the white restaurants. You could cheer his run but you couldn't allow him to eat.

Smith: Peter Angelos could go out to lunch but couldn't take Walter Dixon with him.

D' Alesandro: Well I'll tell you. That's right that's true.

Smith: I know.

D' Alesandro: I'll tell you one time: I was coming back from a, what do you call it, a regional development meeting down in Baltimore County and with me was Senator Harry Cole. Senator Harry Cole is a pathfinder in the black community. He's the first elected black in Lord knows how many years to the State Senate.

Smith: First ever! I think.

D' Alesandro: First ever.

Smith: 1954.

D'Alesandro: Against Melnikoff.

Smith: Yep.

D' Alesandro: Tremendous guy, tremendous guy. He was a great State Senator and was a great judge. So as we were coming down Harford Road, I said to him: Judge let's get a sandwich here, let's get a hot roast beef sandwich, let's get a hot roast beef sandwich and mashed potatoes. Sure, Sure. We went in to the restaurant and here's this guy, tremendous pathfinder, tremendous politician in his own way, Judge of the Circuit Court of Baltimore City and as he was sitting across from me I could tell he was perspiring like he was in a sauna. It was, and I knew he was uneasy. I said: Judge maybe we could find another restaurant. Maybe we could find. I said: I wish you would.

Smith: What year was that?

D' Alesandro: I was President of the City Council. It was sometime between sixty four...

Smith: In the sixties yeah.

D' Alesandro: So that feeling.

Smith: This is before you got the Open Accommodations Bill through the Council?

D' Alesandro: About the same time; about the same time.

Smith: And it still had that restriction in it didn't it? The drinking thing: If you made more than half your money on selling alcohol you didn't have to desegregate.

D' Alesandro: I don't know if that was the case in my bill. I don't know if that was the case in my bill. I don't think it was. I don't think it was. But there is something to that as far as the issuance of liqueur license. But I don't know...

Smith: But this is one of the ways that they were holding out against the bill.

D' Alesandro: We had some powerful meetings in South Baltimore with a lot of what to you call it, bar owners. Colonel Battaglia and some of my personal friends and we took the heat out of a lot of that stuff.

Smith: Oh I know.

D' Alesandro: We took the heat out of a lot of that stuff. I was glad I was there, when I was there. I was glad I was there when I was there.

Smith: I think some other cities, as bad as it was here. Some other cities had worse problems and went on for longer than it did here in Baltimore.

Interruption....background talking...

Smith: Do you remember where you were on the day that King was assassinated?

D' Alesandro: I believe either one of two places: It was a Thursday night and I believe I was at the Alcazar. I believe I was at the Alcazar. I was either at the Alcazar or at one of my friends places in Little Italy. Having dinner, I was having dinner when I heard about the assassination. It could have been the Alcazar. But I remember very vividly. Do you remember Lou Angel?

Smith: Oh sure.

D' Alesandro: From the *News American* who was near by. So it might have been the Alcazar. He said: Tommy you're going to have your hands full now; you're going to have your hands full now.

Smith: Well, it must have had some impact on you. You knew him; you spent some time with him. Not a lot of people not a lot of white mayors had done that would be my guess.

D' Alesandro: Right. He was a regular guy, decent guy, nothing pretentious about him. He was... I consider him a friend. I was only with him... I was with him quite some time that day. In fact that night I was with him and then again at the big banquet. But um, it was a good relationship.

Interruption....background talking...

Smith: She, she's um... You know a lot of the merchants, I think, particularly on Gay Street. Tell me if I am wrong here. But I think a lot of them were or at least they were related to survivors of the Holocaust and there was a lot of the reaction was: My God, we've come through this and now look they're burning us out and ah you know...

D' Alesandro: Oh, there was a tremendous hostility and animosity towards me and towards the Administration by I wouldn't say all but by most of the people's whose properties were burned out. And that's natural you know, they lost their lively hoods.

Smith: Sure

D' Alesandro: I was sued. I mean hundreds of times.

Smith: For failure to protect them, or something?

D' Alesandro: No... It was part of the... Yes, I guess that was the general theme. They were thrown out of court, but. You can imagine those people who had their lively hood taken out from under them. But that was on of the areas were we tried to get them back on their feet, quickly; quickly as possible. But it is unfortunate. Look as sad as it was, I don't think. I don't they say we had six deaths; six people died during that riot. I never, that's a late figure. I don't, I don't remember that. I thought it was just one. I thought it was one. It was a vagrant that was in an abandoned, abandoned building. Well, if they say six, I accept it.

Smith: Were people rounded up and put in Memorial Stadium for a while?

D' Alesandro: I'm pretty sure in the. There were no facilities that could accommodate the rioting. You know, the rioting by itself: the burning, everything that took place there was all new to us. So everybody in their different sphere of activity: the police, the Mayor, the police, the judicial system, the States Attorney's Office, The United States Attorney, everybody had to improvise. That's why the Memorial Stadium was used, maybe another park was used. To round up, get them off the streets. But, there's something funny about this: it opened on the Saturday night and believe me it was over, I say, within in forty eight hours at the most and maybe thirty six hours. Federal troops put the quabash on it and that's why I think the intensity of the riot, the motivation of the riot wasn't that deep, wasn't that deep.

Smith: You know when you look back about it. I would imagine you may have asked yourself what could I have done more than I did do. Then you think about what it took to get that Open Accommodation's Bill through. I mean Henry Parks was offering that bill for years before it passed. And every year, I mean, it would be turned back or maybe you'd get a little bit of it and you know.

D' Alesandro: That was a tough fight. That was a tough fight. But we won it; we won it by one vote, a tough fight. Well the city at that time was you could search through history as far as the makeup of this state. You know when Abraham Lincoln when they feared would be an abolitionist an anti slavery....

Smith: He lost.

D' Alesandro: When he ran for President he lost Maryland big.

Smith: He got two thousand votes to the winner got about fifty thousand votes.

D' Alesandro: Did he get two thousand?

Smith: Yeah.

D' Alesandro: I thought he got twelve hundred.

Smith: He got minimal support

D' Alesandro: Yeah he got nothing. And it holds true in a lot of areas, holds true in a lot of areas.

Smith: Agnew was. Not Agnew: But Mckeldin was sort of phenomenal wasn't he? Yeah, I mean he things were even less advantageous for racial relations then, then when you took over.

D' Alesandro: No question about it. He was, he was, like I told you, a humanitarian. He was a... They burnt a cross on his lawn at the State House, when he was Governor.

Smith: Right.

D' Alesandro: But he was firm in his commitment to civil rights. He was a great leader people don't and a lot of people ridiculed him because of his mannerisms. You know he was a little bit of.

Smith: He was a little over the top.

D' Alesandro: A little clown, a little clown like. But he was a strong man; he was a good man.

Smith: Yeah.

D' Alesandro: He was a good man. He helped me indirectly because he, the kind of foundation that he laid, I had to walk on was solid.

Smith: Well, you know, he kept getting elected. He had his positions; he kept getting elected. I mean you know...

D' Alesandro: He was a Republican.

Smith: He was a Republican and he kept getting elected.

D' Alesandro: In those days you didn't get elected.

Smith: Right. Well he had some good political instincts.

D' Alesandro: Well he was very strong in the Jewish community, very strong in the black community, very strong in Democratic areas and he was able to capitalize on it. He was one of the best public orators in the history of the state. He nominated General Eisenhower for President at the convention.

Smith: Right.

D' Alesandro: A great orator, a lot of people compare him to Dirksen. Dirksen was a great orator too the Senator from Illinois.

Smith: He had certain amount of faith though in people didn't he? I mean you couldn't have his position on things if you thought: Oh no, that will never work, we can't do that.

D' Alesandro: He was great: he was well learned in the arts, he could quote any passage of the Bible and he tied all in to any situation. I think he was... In fact, he would make these great speeches and they would call on me as President of the City Council, you know, and I would get up and just say: Me too.

Smith: Laughter...

D' Alesandro: I didn't want to be in competition with him; he was tremendous.

Smith: You know, after 1954 and *Brown v. Board of Education* he was campaigning, it was an election year. He was campaigning on the Eastern Shore and of course people asked him: What are you going to do about that ruling? He said: I represent the law and next question.

D' Alesandro: Yeah, he was good.

Smith: Yeah that was pretty brave back then.

D' Alesandro: You know who the Mayor was during 1954 in Brown versus...

Smith: Was it anybody related to you?

D' Alesandro: Yes it was. He was the greatest.

Smith: He was?

D' Alesandro: He was the greatest, my father.

Smith: Yeah. What did he...

D' Alesandro: Overnight! Overnight! Overnight!

Smith: Well you and I talked about this, actually. Because, Walter took the action and then went over to, your father was in the hospital.

D' Alesandro: That's right. Bon Secours.

Smith: And Walter went over there and said: Well this is what we've done or no, I guess he knew it by that time and when he got over there your father said to him: Well Walter, I don't know if what you did was right but the Priests say it was right, so I guess it was right.

D' Alesandro: Well that's a little... Walter Sondheim was one of the great guys that the city ever produced. But the truth of the matter is: when my father was Mayor, nothing was done unless he says it, nothing. You want to hire a sanitation broom worker, he had to approve it.

Smith: Yeah.

D' Alesandro: The School Board was not going to move.

Smith: He knew what was going on out there.

D' Alesandro: The School Board was not going to move

Smith: Well he was a smart of course...

D' Alesandro: He was the greatest Mayor in the history of the city, by far. He brought the Colts in brought the Ravens, I mean Baltimore Orioles in. I tell you a story about the Colts. You want to hear a story about the Colts?

Smith: Sure.

D' Alesandro: The Colts had a franchise here Baltimore had a franchise and it flopped. That franchise went down to Dallas, Texas. Then it went to Dallas, Texas and it flopped. Then Bert Bell was the Commissioner of football, he wanted to grab the franchise back to the NFL but not give it to Baltimore, going to give it to somebody else. There was a lawyer at Sims, Bone and Sims by the name of Bill McMillan, who was one of the best lawyers in this City, great guy. He found a little wrinkle in the contract that let them go down to Dallas. It said in effect that we had the right to first refusal. It wasn't that clear. But it was there. So he fought the NFL and it went to federal court and the federal court ruled that it had to come back to Baltimore. So Bert Ball was a little PO'ed. He said: Ok I'll abide by the federal rule but I'll also abide by my own rules of expansion: You have to sell 15,000 tickets within thirty days to get the franchise; 15,000 tickets within thirty days. You know who sold about 10,000 of them? My father. He had them under the table at the Board of Estimates you'd go to jail if for it today. He had a table at the Board of Estimates: Anybody doing business with the city had to buy tickets to the Colts games.

Smith: Quid Pro Quo.

D' Alesandro: That's how the 10,000 tickets were sold. He was something else; he was something else.

Smith: They're some great stories.

D' Alesandro: But I just want to leave you with this one thought: That this is a great city that had a very serious interruption by riots. But it came way past. We have grown far beyond anybody's imagination. There are still pockets of poverty and there's some areas of real concern but on the whole this city is on the march and this city will grow, will grow. What's happening in East Baltimore along the Canton area will dwarf what took place in the Inner Harbor. And what's happening at Johns, Hopkins and what's happening with BRAC with the Federal Government coming in with these jobs. This city going to boom like nobody could expect. So were past all our troubles in that sense and we've got to look to the future with a tremendous amount of optimism.

Smith: Well you may be right about who was the Greatest Mayor but I am not sure if any Mayor was tested the way that you were.

D' Alesandro: Oh yeah. I got a body blow.

Smith: You did.

D' Alesandro: I got a body blow.

Smith: You absolutely did. Well thanks a lot. I really appreciate it.

D' Alesandro: Thank you.