I have reviewed the transcript of my oral history interview by the Barclay Civil Rights Scholars on Wednesday May 13, 1992. I grant permission to the scholars to include all or parts of the transcript in their proposed publication on the struggle for justice in Baltimore, Maryland.

This permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

Appropriate editing is made for parts that you show as inaudible in the transcript. If necessary, I am amenable to lend my support to any changes you may deem necessary.

[Signature]
June 24, 1992

We gratefully acknowledge receipt of the above permission and agree to the stipulated conditions.

[Signature]
July 2, 1992
Date

Gertrude S. Williams, Principal
Barclay School

[Signature]
Nov., 1992
Date

Jo Ann O. Robinson, Instructor
(Morgan State University)
Dr. Samuel Banks, Director
Instructional Support Services
1601 East Lombard Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21231

Dear Dr. Banks:

We are very glad that you were able to visit our civil rights group in May. The students enjoyed their time with you. It was clear, in later discussions, that they took in the value and import of what you said, particularly about the importance of education and never giving up hope. Your message was so timely, in light of the Rodney King situation.

The transcript of your presentation and interview is enclosed, with a permission form which we hope you will sign and return. We'll send a copy back with the signatures of Miss Williams and myself. One of my summer goals is to scout about for a method of publishing at least excerpts from each oral history interview which the students conducted. Since the 30th anniversary of the March is approaching we may be able to persuade some funding source to publish the interviews as a commemorative piece. We'll keep you posted.

Enclosed also are copies of snapshots of your visit and a copy of the school newsletter -- see page 2. Thanks again for bringing knowledge, wisdom, and experience that no one else could provide and from which we all learned a good deal.

Sincerely,

Jo Ann Robinson
TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
DR. SAMUEL BANKS BY
THE BARCLAY CIVIL RIGHTS SCHOLARS
BARCLAY SCHOOL, 2900 BARCLAY STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 1992

Michael Lambert: Welcome and thank you for coming. We are the Barclay Civil Rights Scholars. We study how people made important contributions to the civil rights movement. The reason we have invited you to visit us is because we would like to hear your experiences in the struggle for equal rights and justice. We would like you to know that this interview will be taped and that we hope to print parts of this interview. We will send you a copy and ask your permission before we print it.

Dr. Banks (hereafter SB): Thank you very much Michael, Dr. Robinson. Good morning young people. Good morning!

Scholars: Good morning.

SB: Guten Morgan, uh (inaudible). I want to thank you for inviting me and commend Dr. Jo Ann Robinson who's coordinating this activity and I'm so grateful for her very generous introduction. What I'd like to do with you is to set a framework and, one, I'd like you to know me better and, two, I want to share a few thoughts with you about what I see we need to do in order to have a nation of liberty and justice for all, as you say each morning (inaudible). I was born in Norfolk, Virginia, a seaport town about 250 miles from here. I grew up in the south side of Norfolk. Have any of you heard of Norfolk before? Seaport town.

Excellent. Very good. Well I grew up in Norfolk Virginia about 250 miles from Baltimore. And I grew up in a community on the south side called Berkley, just outside, the community was just outside of Norfolk (inaudible).
Barclay: Banks

-2-

grew up in the area called Berkley, just outside of Norfolk in a community that was made up of Blacks and Jews, in the immediate community. A number of Jews who had (inaudible) in the community. And the Blacks and Jews were in that same community, in close proximity, close to each other. We were surrounded by folks that you would think of as WASPS. White Anglo Saxon Protestants surrounded us in that community called Berkley. BERKLEY. Now I want to share some things with you. There were 4 of us, there are 4 of us, 4 boys, 4 brothers, and we grew up with our mother and father in a community where there was closeness. That is very important. As I grew up, young people, and this will be helpful in our discussion, unlike many young people today, we knew, my brothers and I, that we were loved. That was very important to us. Now why was that so important, that before I went to school, before age 5, I knew the larger community that I talked about, that I called the WASP community, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant because they did not know us and because of how they had been taught, did not expect us to succeed. We were expected to fail. That was the expectation of the larger white community. Not all whites, but as a rule, that said black children, non-white children were fully expected to fail. How do I know that at age 4, 5? When I looked at the schools in the community, black and white, when I looked at the stores that were segregated, and when I looked at the transportation, segregated, when I looked at the housing, segregated. I knew as a youngster that there was something wrong before I went to school. And that's very important that you understand that. We have a word that Ms. Rob, Dr. Robinson may have shown you at some point, comes out of psychology, called internalize. It means to take in. Well, I, in terms of just my visual capacity, looking around me, and how the whites were living with much better an opportunity than we. And so one could view, expressed in so many ways
that the segregation that I described and others like that, that we were expected to fail. That was the expectation. Now what made the difference (inaudible) home? One (inaudible) being in a home where my mother and father, neither of whom finished high school but had a passion for learning. They loved learning. My mother could read. My father could read. And he worked in a navy shipyard (inaudible). And secondly, all that love at home and at school. I went to Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, all black. I went to Booker T. Washington Junior High School, all black. And I went to Booker T. Washington Junior High School, all black. And by and large (inaudible), and of course to church, and then to St. Mark's Congregational Christian Church, as it was called then, now called the St. Mark's United Church of Christ. We were told that we were very special by all these fine persons, our parents, our grandparents, our teachers, (inaudible), the pastor, members of the church, people in the community. And secondly, we were told that you are expected to make something of yourself. You are expected to make something of yourself. First, there was love. See we felt that love. And that helped us in terms of the hostile, unfriendly community that took the view that we were not important because we were black. That's a heavy burden for a 4, 5, 6 year old youngster to endure. But we had to endure it. And had it not been for the strong presence of our mother and father, who said to us in many, many ways, don't you listen to that. You are very special and we expect you to make something of yourself, and more importantly, we will be there to support you. And then we went out in the community, to the market, to the church, and that message was reinforced. People said, we expect you to make something of yourself. And we love you. And that helped to overcome what you have thought of, and I knew and thought of too, as racism. What do I mean by racism? I mean, so we'll be clear when we talk about this.
Racism is a belief a group has, usually in this country it's the larger white society, that that group is superior to nonwhite folk because of their color. But that's not enough. A lot of us have that feeling, but we must have the power to execute, to carry out that belief. Because you can have a black person, or an Asian person, or a Native American who may feel superior to white folk. And you may say, look they're racist, too. But, no. You cannot be racist until you have the ability to execute, to carry out. Now back to my last point, in terms of what my mother and my father (inaudible), the sense of community. And it was a marvelous feeling to be able to talk with your grandparents. If you ever went walking with them you saw your teachers in the market, you saw them in church, and so on. The last thing that was important for me -- I want to move along quickly -- that our parents said to us, in order to overcome the racial barriers and to make something of yourself, you must have the tools of education. Learn all that you can, and we will be there to support you. That's very important. Three points. Three points. Abundant love, in spite of what folks said, you're not important because you're black or because you're brown, or whatever. Uh, and there was the old expression: If you're white you're alright. If you're brown stick around. If you're black get back. I heard that much more in the late forties in high school and in the fifties (inaudible). The second point after that love, was that you, you are expected to make something of yourselves, Samuel and Arthur and Rufus and George, my brothers. And we believed that because we thought that there was nothing that we could not do because of the love of our parents and our grandparents and the people in our community. We felt like young eagles, ready to soar, take off. Now the other piece that became important was that you had to have education in order to compete. And one of the things I did very early was develop a fascination with words. I was what you call
precocious (inaudible) it's just that I learned to read quickly and I learned to read, I used to take words that seemed unusual, break them down into syllables, and I would use them. So-called big words that we called sesquipedalians. We called sesquipedalians, so-called big words. I would break those words up into pronounceable syllables. (writes sesquipedalian on the blackboard) So called big words, foot-long words called sesquipedalians. And I started early on using these words, and people would sometimes say, you don't, uh, I wonder if he knows what they mean? But they became early on a part of what we call my repertoire. You know, what I would use when I would choose to do so. An actor or actress has a repertoire. And as a result that helped me in school enormously. I read books, I read papers, and on and on and on. Now something happened. And another story and I will stop and entertain questions from you. There was a library down on (inaudible) Street. I never will forget it. I was about 8 years of age and I used to walk down to the library. It was segregated. Blacks could not go in and borrow. I was about 8 or 9 as I recall. And I'd go down after school, and I'd watch persons go in and out of the library. One day I was there looking across the street from the library. Two policemen, and both of them were white, came up and said, little boy, why are you here? I said, I am going to the library. And one of the officers said (inaudible) you can't go in there. That library is not for Negroes. And so you've got to move on. Do you hear? So I moved on. I did not want to have any trouble. But I came back the next day. And I've often reflected on the fact that I wanted to go in that library to read those books and I often thought about what could I do. And I went down, I would try to (inaudible) I would certainly not be a problem. I would be very well mannered. The next day I went back (inaudible). The two policemen came back again. And they saw me standing (inaudible) I
wanted to go in, I just wanted to do that. And the policeman said, I saw you here yesterday and I told you not to come back here. Why are you here again? So his partner (inaudible) said leave him alone. He's just a little boy and he can't go into the library anyhow and he was right. So they left me alone (inaudible) and finally I stopped going. And I had to, the word is rationalize, which means to find a way out because I felt thwarted, and I didn't know how to deal with it. And I would think about this a great deal because it caused me great pain and I saw other little boys and girls and adults go into the library and I could not go. So finally, one day I said to myself, what we call rationalizing, finding a way out, I don't really want to go into that library anyway, doesn't have the books I want. Doesn't have the books I want. And then I stopped going down there. Well I couldn't go in the library because I was black. It caused me great pain. Great pain, because I could not go in and I would not have been disorderly, would not have created problems. I wanted to go in and read all those books that were there because I didn't have those books at home, nor did we have them in school. (inaudible)

I'll share one other example and then I'll close up. When I was in the 3rd grade I had an excellent teacher called Miss Hattie Hicks. I was very fond of her. She lived right in our community and we never had enough books to go around, something that is unheard of for you, with so many books. And I just hope you can use all these books and the libraries too. But at any rate I read rather quickly. And Miss Hicks said Samuel I'll have to take your book there and share it with someone else. And I did not want to give it up. I had read it. I mean I had read everything in the book, the reader. She said we don't have enough books to go around so we have to take your book. Took my book. That afternoon I went home. I cried, I cried all the way home because I wanted to keep my book. I wanted to keep my book so I cried all the way home. When I got home my mother was
very upset, and she wanted to know what had happened and I told her that Mrs. Hicks had taken my book. And when my daddy came home from work he wanted to know too, what had happened and I shared with him that Mrs. Hicks had taken my book. And he walked, about 3 blocks from us, to her home and asked her, why did you take Samuel’s book. And she said, Mr. Banks, we had to take his book, because there are not enough books to go around and Samuel had already read his book and he knew it well, and he could help others. (Jo Ann Robinson interrupts: You have a message from Dr. Amprey, who is waiting to talk to you in the office. SB: Is it urgent? Gertrude Williams: Well, Jeannette said it was. SB: Can you hold, I’ll be right back. Jo Ann Robinson: Surely. Tape cut off)

SB: So, in relation to what I was saying, my father went to Mrs. Hicks, and she said, Mr. Banks, your son has read the book, he knows it well and he can help other students. And my father came back and told me. I knew that anyhow, but I just wanted my book and I (inaudible). But anyway before I (inaudible) I've long had a passion for learning, a love of learning. And a love of learning, young people, is universal. By universal I mean it goes all over the world, affects all folks in this world. There are 5 point 5 billion people that make up this earth and there are 255 million Americans and there are some 60 thousand black or white, Asian, Native Americans who make up our community. So I've long had a passion for learning. And that was the key for me. When folks said I could not do I used my mind inspite of the (inaudible) the racism (intercom interruption) (inaudible) I finished Booker T. Washington High School, I went to an out of state college that's called (inaudible), a junior college then in (inaudible) And then I went into the service. I fought in Korea. When I returned from Korea in '53 I got another taste of segregation. I came back in March of '54 and the ship was pulling into U.S.
(inaudible) it was called Puget Sound. One of the fellows who fought with me, who was white said Banks, now we can begin to have freedom. We fought (inaudible) in Korea. And I said to him, I said yes, your war is over but my war begins. Because little had changed. And as soon as I got into Seattle, we went into a store, actually a tavern of sorts, (inaudible) and we were told it was off limits to blacks. (inaudible) But again, the point I make, it didn't break my spirit. It hurts. It hurts. But you have to be prepared in order to go on. That's why what you are doing is so important in bringing our nation together, black and white, red and yellow, male and female, all.

Now the other piece. I went to Howard University. I majored in History at Howard, with the top scholars who were there. One of the reasons that I went there. Dr. John Hope Franklin that Dr. Jo An Robinson knows well. Dr. Rayford Logan. Dr. Frazier, outstanding sociologist, as a case in point. And many others. And then I stayed on and did my Masters Degree in History (inaudible). And then I went to George Washington University where I did my doctorate in education administration, and I (inaudible) to finish at George Washington University, got a post doctoral fellowship to Harvard University in Cambridge Massachusetts where I was a national Humanities Fellow and studied Humanities. It was a post doctoral, after you do your doctorate. And then I came to Baltimore after Howard and worked in the classroom for 10 years. I started at Carver Vocational Technical High School and I went to Gwynnes Falls Park Junior High School. It's now since closed, on Gwynnes Falls (inaudible) And from there I went to City College where I introduced the first Black History course that existed in the city. In 19 uh, when I went to City College it was still predominantly white, a large concentration of blacks, uh of WASPs-White Anglo-Saxon Protestant- and Jews.
I was the second black teacher to go to City College, in 1964, and the first teacher who was there, had literally, a black teacher, been driven out by racism. City College then had a largest (inaudible) in the city (inaudible) teachers. Then something happened. There was an examination for department head, that is the person who heads up the department of English, or Social Studies, or Math, or whatever. The department head left. A man named Mike (inaudible). When Mike left that meant there was a vacancy. And I applied for that position. And there was the view that there was no way that I could get that position because I was black. When the (inaudible) came in I was the Numero Uno, I was number one on the list, number one. And I became the first black department head in the history of City College. And then I went on to the central office from there and became the first black supervisor of social studies in the history of Baltimore City Schools, in 1973. I stayed there for just 15 years and was fortunate to do what Dr. Robinson indicated. The Board of School Commissioners asked me and 8 other persons, under my direction, administrators, teachers, to take 2 years to rewrite the entire social studies curriculum, K-12, in terms of what we call now a multi-ethnic, multi-racial perspective. And we did that in 1972 and that curriculum is still in place except for revisions that are going on now. Now in a capsule that's where I am. How do I feel now? I'm not a hater. I've been a victim of racism. I've been excluded because of my color. But I've never lost faith in myself, because of my upbringing. The formulation, don't get angry, get smart. Use your mind. The mind is extremely important. And one of the best ways to overcome racism and prejudice is doing what folks say you cannot do. And the other thing is reaching out to get to know folks, irrespective of color or gender or sex or whatever. That's very important. Let me stop here. That's a capsule.
Because I think the most important part of this, young people, will be questions that you maybe put to me and I can be more specific. So let me stop at this point and entertain questions or comments from you.

Jo Ann Robinson: We have a panel of (inaudible)

Dr. Banks: Oh, a panel, oh a panel excellent.

Carenda Pittman: What was it like to live in Baltimore before the civil rights movement?

SB: It was dreadful. It was dreadful. Baltimore was one of the most wretchedly segregated cities in the nation. Uh, let me give perspective. Before May 7, 1954, I'm sure you've talked about that, about the Brown decision. The Brown decision was given by the Supreme Court. It outlawed segregation, discrimination, in public schools. Two things happened in Baltimore that are important. Baltimore is one of the first cities to start unofficially, desegregation. Now how did that happen? There were a group of black youngsters who wanted to enroll in the advanced course, technical course, at the Polytechnic Institute. It was called the "A" course. That course was not available at Douglass High School. The NAACP, led by Mrs. Juanita Jackson Mitchell, along with an attorney then, the former Justice of the Supreme Court, Thurgood Marshall, threatened to sue the Baltimore Board of Education, called the Board of School Commissioners. And when they went to speak to the Board and threatened to sue the question came down to this. And the Superintendent then was a man named John Fisher. That there is not a program at Douglass where these black youngsters can go, and consequently the Board said, just in this instance, in September 1952 these youngsters, there were about 11 of them, will be admitted to the Polytechnic Institute. A group of black girls, young women, tried to
enter Western High School. They were students at Douglass using a similar argument. They wanted to be in the advanced academic program at Western. They were turned down and the reason was that Douglass had an academic honors program at Douglass High School. The official segregation, desegregation occurred in Baltimore in 1954. There are, now the last, the housing (inaudible) segregated. It still is to a large degree. Blacks in one area, whites in another. Jobs were not available to blacks. This was before '54, and certainly after '54. And to a large degree that remains the same. And black youngsters could not do what you are doing here today, because of segregation before 1954. So (inaudible) it is better now but there's much that has to be done to end racism in our society and in Baltimore. The March on Washington To Save Our Children this Saturday will be focusing on that. How many of you have heard about the march to save our children, save our cities? You'll see much about that this weekend. We're still dealing with the problem of the failure of all people to share equally in our society.

Rosa: What experiences have you had with the civil rights struggle in Baltimore?

58: I've been very much involved. I, just give a recent example. When I was a teacher at City College I had my first (inaudible), I was arrested. The BTU, Baltimore Teachers Union, decided that it would have a strike because there were not equal facilities available to all through the city. This was around about '64, '63. And I was at City. Things were comfortable at City. We had plenty of books, we had equipment. But the same was not true at Dunbar. The same was not true at Douglass. The same was not true at many of the other schools, Lemmel as a case in point. And as a result we decided that we would stay away from school, boycott the schools, teachers. And I never will forget, on
the corner of 33rd and Alameda, I was there with a sign, walking for equality of educational opportunity. And a policeman came out, and he said you've got to either move or you will be arrested. I said I am not going to move because I am here for a cause, the cause is for all children, black and white. And consequently I was led to the patrol wagon, along with several other teachers, one of whom is now teaching at Polytechnic Institute, name was Warren Wise. I don't know if you known Warren Wise. He was teaching history in my staff in social studies. And we got our first patrol wagon ride. (inaudible) But before I was about to be led away my students saw me and said, There's Mr. Banks! And they ran and tried to prevent the officers from leading me to the patrol wagon, what we call commonly the paddy wagon. I said no, you stand back, you stand back, you get back. And we went down to the station. And there were so many of us arrested, taken down to the precinct for the lockup, that they just let us go. Called the revolving door. And as we thought, we got more supplies and money for the teachers and students, primarily students, that was the primary piece. And (inaudible). Does that answer your question? Scholar: Were you in the March on Washington?

SB: I was involved in the March on Washington, too. It was in 1963. I was there. It was a marvelous experience, blacks and whites, Jews and Protestants, Catholics, all there and they're talking about equal education, full funding (inaudible), equal job opportunities, now; end racism, now. That was a marvelous experience. And of course we heard Dr. King with his I Have a Dream speech, we heard (inaudible) who preceded Dr. King warn against the conspiracy of silence. We heard A. Philip Randolph and a host of other folk that you read about. But that was an extraordinary experience and I felt great. I felt euphoric, I felt very euphoric. That meant very happy that we, I thought we were coming together, black and white,
Jew and Catholic and Protestant. And I was so euphoric, so happy, I almost ran all the way to the bus stop, to where we had to go to get the bus, almost a mile. But (inaudible) because I felt for once that we were coming together as a people, black and white, red, and so forth, black, red, yellow, as a people. And (inaudible) after Martin Luther King got killed (inaudible) I protested in ’68 after his death, nonviolent protest. He was killed on April 4 of 1968. I was involved in protests. I was a teacher. I took off to protest in a peaceful way. And then I was involved in other activities, the protest at the SUN papers in 1984. I worked with the NAACP to support a boycott, to get blacks into responsible jobs, because most of the blacks were in custodial and food service jobs. And many of your parents may remember, and Dr. Robinson may recall, we had what we called (inaudible). We said to the publisher then, Mr. Reg Murphy, that unless blacks were given equal opportunity at the SUN papers, in jobs, in its coverage of Africa south of the Sahara, and blacks were treated positively in the SUN paper, we would not buy the papers. And to his credit, Mr. Murphy after the boycott had gone on for about 2 weeks, (inaudible) he agreed to our demands. And there (inaudible) in the SUN papers that were not there before.

Naron Dyer: How has Baltimore changed as a result of the civil rights movement?

SB: I think primarily in terms of opportunity. You would not be here, Naron, you would not be here in this integrated, desegregated class except for what happened in the thirties and forties and of course the Brown decision which opened up equal educational opportunity. There are opportunities that blacks have now that they never would have had. Let me give you just one case in point. I came from Norfolk, Virginia to teach in this school system.
There had never been a black supervisor of social studies in the history of this school system until I was appointed in 1973. Then I go back to ability. I had to take a test, go through the interview and of course, have the credentials. And what happened again, I was Numero Uno, number one. And that’s the lesson. You want to break down segregation and racism you do it through your preparation. No one can take from you what you have learned, no one! And you have to keep that in mind. And, secondly you never turn to hate. Because someone doesn’t like you, that is his problem, or her problem. You return love for hate and always believe in whom? Yourself. That’s it. Believe in yourself, what you can do. Yes, go on. Next question?

Michael Lambert: What were you doing when you learned about the assassination of Dr. King?

SB: Yes, I was in a civic meeting. I was living in Washington at the time. We were having a civic meeting in Washington, southeast Washington, northeast Washington, called the (inaudible) Council. It was a group of, a civic group. I was the chairperson of their education committee. And I never will forget, Michael. We were discussing an issue as to how to improve the community and Mrs. Margaret Power came in, came across the room. And she had a terrible, pained expression on her face. And I knew that something was wrong. And then she told the president, said that Dr. King has been shot and did not expect him to live. The meeting ended, and we all went home and heard the dreadful news that he had died. He had died. I can’t begin to express the sense of pain I felt, and hurt. I had met Dr. King as a student at Howard University, in 1955. It was a Saturday. He had just begun the Montgomery bus boycott in protest of what happened to Mrs. Parks, her arrest. And the Dean of the Chapel selected a group of Howard students,
campus leaders, to meet with him after he spoke. And we met with him after he spoke. And we were just fascinated with this man, very scholarly, very knowledgeable, and of course we thought that we were earth shakers, and we were going to put him to the test when we met within this small group setting. And we questioned him about (inaudible) and Ellersbach, Immanuel Kant, the westward movement, Manifest Destiny, things you'll study more about, and all of that. And he did marvelously. And we left there tremendously inspired because of that meeting. So when we learned that he had been killed it caused enormous pain and disillusionment. And then of course, you know, the next day, the rebellions began in over 150 cities. And the view was here, many folk took the view, black and white, that here was a man that was an apostle of nonviolence, and yet he had died violently. And folk just struck out, as they did in the Rodney King situation. People had seen in the BI second video tape clip Rodney King being beaten and these were folk who felt that they were stakeless, that they didn't have anything really to live for. And there are people who become (inaudible) and after they saw the tape the view was, now we got them, referring to the establishment. But when they moved the trial to Simi Valley. This is important to understand. Simi Valley is outside of Los Angeles, just as you move from Baltimore City to Towson. And that community was 98% white. The jury was, ten, there were ten whites, one Hispanic, one Asian. And there were many folk who thought, as Dr. Robinson and I know, because this has happened to blacks and Hispanics before. Beatings are nothing new. (inaudible) But what was the difference? The difference was the BI second tape. And folks said, there is the evidence. Justice will be served. But what they didn't understand, that the prosecution, the defense for those 4 policemen knew what had to be done. First thing was to move it out of L.A.
The trial, what they call a venue, change of location to Simi Valley in Ventura County. The second piece was to convince those 12 jurors that Rodney King was not human, that he was a beast, he was a brute. And the third thing, that the lives of the 4 policemen were in danger because of this brute. He did not respect the law, and order, and was out of control. He was (inaudible) by a stereotype that many white folk have of black folk, and once that was done it didn't matter how many tapes you showed of this man being brutally and savagely beaten. He's a black. He got what he deserved. (inaudible) and so on. (inaudible) not only the beating, using such force but also for falsifying the report. Now what is the point? (inaudible) in this class. There are folk who see you differently in our society based upon your color. You are (inaudible) have that kind of attitude, that power. And you are here. But there are folk who don't know you, who would look at you and say, You are not important, Michael because you're black, or Lamont, or Carenda, or Syretta, and on and on and on, or Patricia. And would take the view that Dawn is important because she is white, or Rosa is, or Tony is. If you're white in our society, as I close this up, even now, if you're white you have the color it takes. You are expected to succeed if you are white. That's an important point that you have to consider. That the way that we break this down is for young folk like you going out, practicing tolerance, understanding, sharing the word that there's no difference between folk and you ought to be colorblind. And that the beauty of this is that you've found out for yourself that there are white folk who are smart. There are black folk who are smart. There are red folk who are smart. Asians who are smart. But there are several also who are not smart. And that's true of all groups. No one group is made of geniuses. There are no geniuses in terms of races. You
Barclay: Banks

-17-

have individuals within a race who may be extremely smart, or a genius. But you can't say that about all of anybody, as a case in point. Let me get on to other questions. I'm sorry.

Carenda?

Carenda: What happened in Baltimore after Dr. King's murder and did it affect your life in any way?

SB: Oh yes, to be sure. I was teaching at City College. I taught history at City College and uh, here with our able youngsters, and we were talking (inaudible) about the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, as I recall. And the youngsters said to me, Dr. Banks, or Mr. Banks then, it didn't really matter. We're going to go out and we're going to burn some things down. We're going to get back at whitey, as they said then. Get back at whitey, that was the attitude. And they ran up to Greenmount Avenue, (inaudible) and across the town. And you know what happened. The stores went up in flames. And there were clashes between blacks and whites. It was a dreadful time. And then when they returned to class, and I talked with the youngsters, Mayor Schomke had just finished. He was a student at City College, so you know that I worked with him. He was the president, the first black president of the SGA, the Student Government Association. I became the first black advisor of the Student Government Association. And I advised him and others of the Student Government Association. My thought was (inaudible) and I'll never forget one class after that rebellion, and one young man said, no, let's just burn everything down, let's burn City College down, the library and all of that. I said, well, let's think about it. I said, you burn the library down where would you go get your books? Burn the cafeteria down where would you get your food? Burn the building down where will you in fact learn? And he thought about that. I said what you have to do, I would suggest, if you haven't considered it, is to
use what you know in order to break down the barriers based on race, based on race. It was a dreadful time. It was a time of great pain and sadness and hostility. But it was also a time of hope. People felt that in spite of all that had happened, there would be a better day. And the same is true with Rodney King. You can never give up hope, never give up hope. Let me tell you this, because this is (inaudible) When I was younger than you one of the things that really gave me great concern, great concern, how was I going to be able to make it in a society that denied me the opportunity. I was younger than you, 7, 8 years of age. That was a real concern that I had. But I determined, because of my parents, because of my siblings, because of the church, community people, that I'm going to use my mind. That, I had to make it with my mind, use of my mind, with education. And education was the battering ram for me. And the other thing is getting a facility of the language. The use of words became extremely important to me, like a test, seeing relationships, and that was a (inaudible) in order for me to penetrate the barriers based upon race. Very important. Then the other thing is, that I was taught in school, all of us were taught in the all black (inaudible) Booker T. Washington High School, and Junior High School. We had to be better than average to be able to compete with white people. We could not be average. We had to be better than average. If an average party read 2 books, you read 3 books. If they read 2 books you read 4. You could not be average. So I'm not an average person. And I don't mean that modestly. Let you understand what I am saying. If I were an average person I'd be beaten. Most of my classmates were beaten by down by racism. (Inaudible) They either now are dead or in jail or without hope. Education was not something (inaudible). And some of them were very able persons, intellectually, academically. But the
racists have beat them down. They thought they were not important because the larger society said that you are not important and they didn’t have the reinforcement that I had with my parents and of course teachers. Next question.
Michael? Georgetta.

Jo Ann Robinson: Michael, you might go to the last question.

Michael: OK. Do you think that things have changed where race is concerned since you were a child or are the problems just as bad?

SB: In some ways things have improved. That is to say at least now you don’t have the signs, what we call overt signs, that says Black or Colored and White or any other. You don’t have that anymore. But there are problems.
Michael and young people, in the sense that the races now are becoming more divided. And more divided because of the lack of leadership at the national level. Going back to Presidents Reagan, and right through George Bush. Those presidents, and of course, Nixon was before, before Reagan was
President Nixon, did little to bring us together to end racial inequity. So in that sense we’ve become more divided. Now with the Rodney King situation, it will make the situation worse. But yet there’s hope. See, out of the Rodney King situation, as brutal as it was, white folk, for the first time were (inaudible) seeing what black folk go through (taping interrupted to turn over cassette).

But many white folk did not know that. But now they watch on television, what happened in Birmingham, what happened in Selma, in the Montgomery March. The television has had a powerful influence because if you were white you never really had to deal with that issue. But now white folk are
able to see what happened in terms of King. Whether they have to face up to it in public or not, they know that there is a difference. Now why should there be hope? There's hope because Congress confronted the President, saying we've got to deal with the question of race in our society, and race in the courts (inaudible). And secondly because of young folk like you. See that's the key. Because now you know through your study, through your experiences, that there are really no differences between people because of color. We know this through research, too. But the most significant thing (inaudible) There are folk who have never met black folk. Living in Baltimore, you may think that Baltimore is a microcosm of the nation. But there are communities that are all white, even now. And the only time that they know black folk is what they see on the boob tube, television. That's not the same as interacting with a real person, or the person will have a stereotype that they get from blacks, quote, slapstick comedy and (inaudible) television. You know the programs. And therefore if I do not know you, and I look at the television, and I say, that's how they are. They're irresponsible; they won't work. They're on welfare; they're uneducated. They can't speak correctly, and on and on and on. And one of the best ways to deal with that is you come to your class, you come and you are prepared, you speak in standard English. This doesn't mean that you won't go back and do the so-called (inaudible) called Black English or some patois. But you come to Dr. Robinson you use the subjunctive mood, and the pluperfect and all the other moods. And you don't split the verbs. And you go and see the brothers and sisters you might go through all the (inaudible). But after (inaudible) they want to know, what do you know, Michael? Now when you come out into the larger society you will (inaudible) that you know what's going on. Isn't that beautiful? So there's hope. Keep hope alive. That's the key. Through what? Education. That's the key. And each of you has an
obligation to grow up to be an (inaudible). Even now. Even now. One more question?

Naron: Thank you very much for sharing with us. As a token of our appreciation please accept this remembrance from a trip that 9 members of our group recently made to the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee.

SB: Well, thank you for that, Naron. I want to thank you and Dr. Robinson for an outstanding presentation.

Scholars: Applause.

SB: One of my colleagues, Mrs. Berry, who went with you, who is a librarian at Chiniquipin Middle School, told me (inaudible). I wish you well, young people. If you have any questions, here is my card.

Naron: We have one final request. This is our photographer, Devin Johnson. May he take your picture?

SB: Yes, I'd be delighted.