I have reviewed the transcript of my oral history interview by the Barclay Civil Rights Scholars on April 29, 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:

[Signature in pencil]

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

Date

Gertrude S. Williams, Principal
Barclay School

Date

Jo Ann O. Robinson, Instructor
(Morgan State University)
TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH MR. SIDNEY HOLLANDER BY THE BARCLAY CIVIL RIGHTS SCHOLARS
BARCLAY SCHOOL, 2900 BARCLAY STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 1992

Lamont Williams: Welcome and thank you for coming. We are the Barclay School 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 you permission before we print it.

Sidney Hollander (hereafter SH): Thank you. I am going to give you more than that for your money. I'm going to give you three peoples' experiences in the civil rights movement, because my father was very active in it way back when. He would be 110 if he were living today, and my son who is just 50 was also active and went south during the civil rights activities with CORE. Now I don't think you had any write-ups on CORE but you're familiar with it aren't you?

Scholars: Yes

SH: Congress of Racial Equality. O.K. My father was president of the Baltimore Urban League, the local chapter, back in the middle twenties, when nobody even talked about the things that we see today. The department stores, even the department stores were segregated. Almost everything in Baltimore was segregated. He was an opponent of segregation, and not only in his organizational activity but in his personal life. He took moves to, against segregation. For example, he was a music lover, and he went
to the concerts, a series of Friday afternoon concerts at the Peabody downtown. And he had regular season tickets for them and had extra tickets for guests and he noticed that there were no black people in the audiences, so he decided that wasn't a good idea and he had been going there for years, and one time he took a black couple with him and just walked in. And, you wouldn't know it from me, I take after my mother. But he was a big, imposing man and he had been going there for years and nobody was about to stop him, so he desegregated the Peabody concerts just like that. I don't think he would have said he was doing it but that's what he did. He also had season tickets at the Fords Theater, where we had the plays then before the Mechanic and the NAACP was picketing outside because black audiences were allowed only in the top balcony, so he joined the picket line and then went in to take his seats. He wanted to make his voice heard. He had a 50th birthday in 1941 which of course I thought was very old, but now I don't think so because now I'm 77 and as a birthday present his children set up, my brothers and sisters and I set up a little foundation and course 1941 was the outbreak of World War II so we didn't get to this till we all got back out of the service, but we set up a little foundation, and its purpose was to recognize in those segregated days. Each year we gave an award for what we called, quote, an outstanding contribution for the achievement of equal rights and opportunities for Negroes in Maryland, unquote. And later it went out of business, because when the Supreme Court desegregated most everything, not that everything is desegregated, but we figured it was sort of, shall I say, presumptuous for us to give an award for things that were legal, so we stopped it. But when we stopped it we got out this little booklet, tolling, we thought it would be of historic interest, telling of the things, the people and institutions that were nominated, and the ones that were
chosen and we got a jury of outside citizens to make the selection each year. And we kind of whipped it up with a lot of froth to make a thing out of it, got publicity and so on. We printed 10,000 of these books at the time, and I haven't got one that I can leave in the school because they've all disappeared. I even had to scrounge one for the Pratt Library whose librarian called me a few weeks ago and asked did we have one left, and I just about did. But I can pass this around and you can see the kinds of things that we considered progress in those days, and how it went year by year.

Because my parents were civil rights pioneers, I guess you'd say, we had the opportunity at home to meet celebrated citizens who came to Baltimore and weren't allowed to stay in the hotels. That we would otherwise not been privileged to meet. I remember meeting Langston Hughes in my parents' Walter White, who was then the president of the NAACP was a visitor in their home. And there was, I recall a dinner that was given by an organization that, for some out of town people, and it wasn't held in my parents' home, but I was there in the twenties and it was said to be the first time that black and white people sat down together at a public function. It couldn't be held at any hotel or restaurant. It was held in the home of a woman who was interested in civil rights, Elizabeth Gilman who was the daughter of the first president of Johns Hopkins, and she was an ardent civil rights advocate. The Maryland Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union gives an award each year in her name, and the first award in her name went to Parren Mitchell about 5 years ago. My daughter still remembers that when Marian Anderson gave a concert at the Lyric and was not allowed to stay at any hotel. She could sing at the Lyric but she couldn't stay at a Baltimore hotel. She came to our house, and believe me, my daughter has never forgotten it, and neither have I.
My own experience, experience on my own behalf began when I went to college in the Philadelphia area and the YWCA of the University of Pennsylvania had an interracial group, people from different colleges. We would sit down once a month, I guess, and I don't know what we talked about but we went out to supper afterwards and when the blacks and whites sat down to supper in a Philadelphia restaurant I guess we thought we had solved the race problem. But we didn't, but we got a taste then. I, one active member of that group was Juanita Jackson, the daughter of Lillie Jackson, the pioneer president of the NAACP chapter here, and her daughter, married Clarence Mitchell, who was sometimes referred to as the 101st Senator because he was such an effective lobbyist in Washington on behalf of the NAACP. Juanita was a member there because under the segregation law of those days, she wanted to go to law school. No law school in the state would take her. But the arrangement was that if you qualify and the Maryland schools were segregated, the state board would pay your tuition for an out of state education. And she got her law degree at the University of Pennsylvania and that's how I happened to meet her. She was honored just last year by the Maryland Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. She got the Gilman Award herself this past year.

Now as far as activities go, even before the sit-ins the Urban League organized attempts at shopping in department stores. For some reason, Baltimore's stores were segregated when they weren't in the north of us where things were freer nor to the south where things were more segregated. I understand that department stores like Rich's in Atlanta served blacks when the Baltimore department stores did not. So the Urban League organized largely through white members and their black housekeepers a kind of a test. I remember that our housekeeper went to one of the department stores
which is no longer in existence, and asked for something trivial like handkerchiefs or something, and my wife stayed in the background observing this, and then when they refused to serve this black woman, my wife would go to the counter and say, "Oh", the lady would say "May I help you?" and she said, "Well I was going to buy something but if you don't serve everybody I'm not going to" and walked out indignantly. Those were the first tests that were made. I wish I could give you a date, but I can't because I don't remember just when it was. It must have been in the late forties would be my guess, the late nineteen forties.

I myself took part in the first formal sit-in at a lunch counter, and that must have been. I guess, in the middle to late fifties. But as I say I don't know just when it was. It might be in that book that you're passing around. It was at Kresge's down on Lexington Street, which is where all the stores were then, the ten cents stores. And you were organized by CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality. And they arranged for black people and white to go in together and sit down at the counters, and the blacks would give their orders first, and when they were refused, the whites didn't give our orders either. We just sat there, for a stipulated period of time, just to tie up the works. But one of the things that I remember is that CORE had such a high sense of ethics, that they said, when you get up, leave a tip because we don't want the waitresses to have to suffer for this. The waitresses lost a half hour of customers, of course, and we said we are not punishing the waitresses. It's the management that we're demonstrating against. And I always remember that lesson. They were so sensitive to think of that
The next thing that I can speak of in terms of personal experience was the integration of neighborhoods. I was born in Windsor Hills, which, I don’t know if you know where it is. It’s out past Wallbrook, past the end, the western end of North Avenue. And we still live there. My wife and I had a neighborhood party last summer to celebrate our 50th year in that house. In the fifty years it has gone from all-white to practically all-black, but we have an active neighborhood association which is integrated. When black families began to get near to our neighbor there was, as of course was in so many cases, panic. For sale signs sprout. The people leave. The white people leave. And everybody loses. The speculators buy up the houses that were sold by whites in panic for low prices, and then, in those days at least, because there were no fair housing laws, they would charge outrageous prices to the blacks who wanted to move in and didn’t have any place to go. And it was obvious that everybody lost in this process, except the speculators, the people who speculated in these houses. So we in Windsor Hills organized an association, the purpose of which was to stop the panic. The , and that in turn began the formation of Baltimore Neighborhoods Inc. which is down the street here, on St Paul Street in the 2200 block. I was one of the incorporators of that. And the idea was if, remember this was before fair housing laws, if the black population which is expanding like the white can only go in a few places, all the pressure will be on a few neighborhoods. Whereas if we had fair housing laws and everybody could live anywhere, there wouldn’t be this panic. And so some of the whites helped found this organization because they thought it was right, and others just in self interest to avoid the panic. And the 3 neighborhoods that began it were Hamilton out here in northeast, Windsor Hills in west, and Ashburton, which is sort of northwest, where I think the Mayor lives now. And that was the founding of Baltimore Neighborhoods, about thirty years ago, I think it was. By coincidence, just to
show you how these things come around, Baltimore
Neighborhoods is having its annual dinner meeting next week,
and the speaker will be Kenneth Clark, who gave the
testimony in the Brown versus Board of Education case-- I
think I read it somewhere in your materials--that
desegregated the schools. And Kenneth Clark will be
speaking to Baltimore Neighborhoods next Tuesday.

Now let's move on to the south and the third
generation. My son was in Philadelphia, going to college.
He had been president of the honor society at City College in
the "A" course but like many young people, when he got to
college he couldn't focus, he couldn't concentrate and he
dropped out of college and joined Philadelphia CORE. He
was vice president of CORE in Philadelphia when he was, I
guess, about 20 or 21 and he organized sit-ins at the
mayor's office on behalf of equal employment. I remember
that the Philadelphia police tried to make him out a radical
or a dangerous communist or something, and they sent to the
Baltimore police to, they sent to the Baltimore police to
get a record on him and we heard about this through friends
who were interested and we appealed to Governor Mckeldin
at that time who was also interested in civil rights and
made some wonderful appointments and he called the police
off. My son went south in 1963 as a field secretary for
CORE. Their object was to get blacks to register and vote,
which in some parts of the south in those days could be
injurious to your health. They couldn't, they did not use
white personnel to enlist the registration. My son's job was
to keep in touch with the media, to let people in the north
know what was happening, because they thought this was an
important function. So they put a camera in one hand and a
tape recorder in the other, and of course there were no
video recorders in those days, and had him take pictures and
make recordings, and meet with the reporters from the
national news networks and the wire services and the big papers like the NEW YORK TIMES who had correspondents in the south covering the civil rights movement. And he would tell them that next week we're going to do so and so in this town in Louisiana and some other time in Alabama and keep them informed. He also made recordings and took pictures that were used in the northern media and helped raise funds to keep CORE going. These books that I brought here have some of his photographs in them. There's a biography here of James Farmer, and my son's picture of him is on the back cover. And he also has a lot of picture credits in this book of Fred Powledge, FREE AT LAST. He was down in the same county near Philadelphia, Mississippi when the 3 civil rights workers were murdered. Fortunately he was not murdered, but he had some close calls. He would... We went to hear a talk that he did just a couple of years ago down at Washington College in which he told a story we had never heard before. After one of the rallies everybody had left except a few of the black farm people who lived around there, and he had to ride with them. And the police were sort of ruthless about whom they stopped. They would stop anybody on any traffic pretext and he got in the back in the flatbed and they covered him over. And he said at one time he heard a police car come from behind. And he could tell, because the kids he was riding with or riding under, sort of closed in over him and the police sure enough stopped the car or the truck but they never searched it because they didn't see anything suspicious. He was arrested, was put in jail in Canton, Mississippi for a month, on some pretext of disturbing the peace. Of course, registering, giving people their right to vote, to register and vote, was considered a disturbance of the peace in Mississippi in those days. I think the town of Jackson now has a black mayor, if I am not mistaken, but it was very different in those times. We did
have support up here. When we found out where he was we had our senator, who was then Mac Mathias, write to the authority in Canton Mississippi and said that he understood that one of his constituents was in jail there and he hoped they would follow due process and so on. It was just having the eyes of somebody on you, eventually CORE got a habeus corpus under federal law, and ironically, when he was moved to the federal prison in Jackson, the capital of Mississippi, he was in a big jail that was of course segregated, so then he was with whites, and the whites who were there on whatever, for whatever reason people were put in the penitentiary in Jackson, went through his pockets and found civil rights stuff and they beat him up once. But the federal authorities freed him after a day or two and that was the only real physical abuse that he had in two years down there. He eventually came back and lives in Washington now and works with a fair housing organization like Baltimore Neighborhoods. So that’s 3 generations of civil rights activity. Now I guess I should take the questions. Baruke Griffin: The first question is what is your occupation and does it have anything to do with the civil rights movement?

SH: My occupation?

Baruke: Or what was your occupation?

SH: yes. I’m mostly retired, not completely. My, my business is in the...I don’t know how to say yes or no, mostly no. My business is in the field of marketing and opinion research. We do surveys. Somebody calls your home and wants to know what newspaper you read, or how often you use the parks, or how good your health care is. That was our business and still is. We do a lot of this and it is only indirectly related. I did the survey for the SUN papers, the opinion surveys for the BALTIMORE SUN for awhile
and we did have questions about desegregation but I'm not a lawyer. I'm not directly connected with it. I think I chose my occupation because I was interested in public affairs and how people think so it's indirectly. No, I'm not a civil rights lawyer or anything like that.

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

SH: How has Baltimore changed? Well I guess it's changed in so many ways that I never have really gotten used to it. When I see people of different races coming out of an office, when I stand in a school like this, when I go to stores and you think that we had to fight to get black customers waited on. The idea of black and white clerks together still seems, I can't say strange, but there are a lot of things that I thought I would never live to see, that's the only way I can describe it. In public accommodations, in the city government, in everything we do. Not that there still isn't segregation, not that there still isn't prejudice, but it's just gone so much further than I ever thought I would live to see it. Even here, much less than in South Africa.

Baruke: Did you participate in the March on Washington. If so please tell us why you went and share some of your memories.

SH: Yes, I was there, in 1963, was it?

Scholars: Yes.

SH: We went on a bus. I can't remember who the sponsorship of the bus was. But I think it was one of the Jewish
organizations we rode with, and I remember it was very exciting. We were sorry that my son couldn't be there, but he felt, he was down south at the time, he wasn't incarcerated, but he felt it was his job to stay there and do his work, and he missed this. With all those hundreds of thousands of people there we did come face to face with his fiance who had come down from college in Philadelphia and if you can imagine that. When we rode over in a whole caravan of buses and the buses went through the streets of Washington and the residents were standing outside cheering this procession of buses from all up and down the coast. I said it felt like being part of a liberating army, that somebody was coming to take a stand against segregation and discrimination and it was a very exciting place to be. I think it was the first of the big marches and certainly the one everyone will remember who was there. The public address system wasn't very good but I took a little pocket radio and I heard "I Have a Dream" over my pocket radio and then I would get the echo from the broadcasting towers. It was beautifully organized, it was beautifully run. There had never been anything like it before. The police were set for a riot of some kind but it was run by people whose business was peace, Bayard Rustin who was a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a pacifist organization, was the chief organizer behind the scenes, and no militants were allowed to speak on the platform. There have been a lot of marches since. As a matter of fact one of the meetings I came, the meeting I just came from this morning is to work on the May 16 March on Washington to Save our Cities, Save our Children. To restore funds for American cities. Twenty years ago the city of Baltimore got nearly one third of its budget from the federal government. Today it's about 11 or 12 percent. And that's why we're having so much trouble keeping up the city services, and there're going to be
several thousand people going from Baltimore to join a
national march sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Mayors.
Our Mayor is very active in that and helped to organize
it. So I got the marching habit back in 1963 and I haven't
been cured of it since.

Lamont: What were you doing when you learned about the
assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King?

SH: What was I doing

Lamont: During the assassination of Dr. King, when you
learned about it?

SH: When I learned about it?

Lamont: When you heard about it.

SH: When I heard about it. I can't remember that. I can't
remember where I was or whether I read it in a headline or
heard it on radio. I don't remember that.

Baruwa: What happened, do you remember what happened in
Baltimore as a result of Dr. King's death, for example, were
there any riots or outbreaks in Baltimore?

SH: Yes. In a word, yes. I think some of Greenmount
Avenue has never recovered. I think there are still places
that were wrecked then that were, that haven't been put back
together since. It was, there was a lot of devastation, a
lot of destruction. The, I think it was the National Guard
that behaved well, and as I recall -- I haven't thought of
this for a long time, so I'm not certain what I'm saying is
accurate -- but as I recall they camped in Druid Hill Park,
and they were well trained, and wanted to contain the
destruction but not to aggravate it. I think on the whole
the National Guard behaved well. I think it was the
National Guard that took charge. The police I think were
relatively helpless. Who didn't behave well was Governor
Agnew who called a meeting afterwards of the civil rights
leaders and proceeded to scold them as though they were
personally responsible when what most of them had done had
been to try to cool it and Governor Agnew was so belligerent
that the civil rights people walked out, which was just what
he wanted because he got a lot of publicity nationally for
being a segregationist hero, that's how he landed on Nixon's
ticket and both of them, of course, disgraced their offices,
Nixon and Agnew, and had to resign. The only president and
vice president, I believe, in the history of the United
States who ever resigned. It was something we mostly just
followed in the papers. I did drive around some at the
beginning because I didn't take it seriously and I went
through some areas. I didn't feel any sense of personal
threat. But at the outset, but maybe 2 or 3 days later I
would have.

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

SH: Do I think things have changed

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

SH: Oh of course things have changed. They've changed,
they're not perfect but they're so different, that as I said
before, for somebody my age I still look around and wonder
if it's real. I can't begin to describe how different it
is. I could go on for hours. When my wife came to
Baltimore, she came from Illinois. She's a social worker. She went to work in a social work agency where they helped families. When she started reading the records she couldn't understand why they referred in the records to some people as Mrs. and to some people as Ella. She didn't, then of course she caught on. The black cases were always referred to by their first names. There was no such thing as calling a black person Mr. or Mrs. In the, just look at this, the first award that we gave under this Hollander Foundation was to THE BALTIMORE SUN in 1947. We had a jury of some black and some white who made the selection. And why did we give them an award? Well, one of the jurors said that the real reason was that if we got THE SUN, THE BALTIMORE SUN interested in the beginning, we'd always have good publicity for the, for the later awards. But the thing that they gave the award to THE SUN for was that up to that time whenever a person was arrested or committed a crime in the paper who was black, they said, Allan Smith comma Negro was apprehended after a shooting. They didn't say Jenny Jones White. It was always Negro. They always identified the race of the person who wasn't white, in any story at all, unless it was something complimentary. At that time we were just beginning to have black judges. But they never said Judge Watts, black. It was only the people who committed crimes. You just have to look through this and see the things that we celebrated as steps toward equality, as the title of this book is. It's, you ask anybody in your families that question, anybody my age, what it was like in those days. It wasn't just the schools. We didn't have segregated transportation. We didn't have Jim Crow buses in Baltimore. But if you went to Annapolis on the electric line, there was a black car and a white car, or whites in front, blacks in back. There are just so many different ways.

The idea of showing blacks and whites together in ads.
During the civil rights revolution they went to Hollywood, and they went to the advertising agencies and said, you know you act as if these people aren't there. Well, nobody wanted to be the first because if we showed in a McDonald's group, if we showed any black people there, if it wasn't all white, then they'd say, oh that must be a place just for black people. So they kind of tip toed into it and did it gently. Now in my business, you asked about my business, I remember investigating this for one of the beer companies, National Beer, which was the biggest brewery of that time. And they wanted to know if they showed in their television commercials, if they showed blacks drinking their beer, if that would bring opprobrium on them, as being what they inelegantly referred to as a nigger beer, because if it got to be known as that, then whites would stop buying it. You just can't imagine the number of ways in which it's changed. I saw a rerun of a movie I remembered seeing, it was a prize-winning movie, that I saw in my senior year of college in 1935, "It Happened One Night." It's an old classic. I don't know if you've ever seen it or not, but the story takes place on a bus ride, from a greyhound bus ride from Miami to New York, and of course the romantic story develops as they, as the ride proceeds, I don't know if you've ever seen the movie or not, you have?

Scholar: Yes.

SH: Claudette Colbert, and who was the male lead? Clark Gable. I saw a rerun of that a few years ago and I looked at it, and I said, a greyhound bus from Miami to New York, all the people on it are white! On the bus. And you know when I saw that in 1935 it never occurred to me. I can't tell you the numbers of ways in which - I feel like Rip Van Winkle.

Scholars: Laughter.
SH: And anybody black or white of my age will tell you the same thing.

Baruke: This might be a little off. But I was interested. What schools did you attend?

SH: I was a pampered private school child. I went to Park School from kindergarten till I graduated from high school. It was all white and about 90% Jewish. Park School was started because Jews were excluded from the major private schools in those days, like Friends, Bryn Mawr, Gilman, Roland Park and so on. Huh?

Baruk: I know someone who goes to Park School.

SH: Oh, you know someone who goes to Park School. O.K.

Tony Cappelletty: 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.

Scholars: Applause

SH: Thank you.

Tony: We have one final request. This is our photographer, Brandy Brown. May she take your picture?

SH: Certainly.