PERMISSION FORM

I have reviewed the transcript of my oral history interview by the Barclay Civil Rights Scholars on Wednesday, May 6, 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]
24 June 1992

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

July 2, 1992
[Date]
Gertrude S. Williams, Principal
Barclay School

July 2, 1992
[Date]
Jo Ann O. Robinson, Instructor
(Morgan State University)
Dr. Richard McKinney  
2408 Overland Avenue  
Baltimore, Maryland 21214  

Dear Dr. McKinney:

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 basic fact of all people being born free. They also were impressed by the first-hand look at the March on Washington which your slides provided.

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,

[Signature]

JoAnn Robinson
June 24, 1992

Dr. Joann Robinson
3012 Abell Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21218

Dear Dr. Robinson:

Thank you for your kind letter of June 18, 1992 with regard to my visit to your Civil Rights group last month. Let me say again how much I appreciated the opportunity to meet with those promising young people, and to know they are privileged to get some unusually creative insights that will deepen their understanding and extend their horizons.

I am enclosing, herewith, the signed copy of the Permission Form which you requested. Please be assured that I will remember my experience pleasantly at the Barclay School for a long time.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Richard I. McKinney

RIM: jb

Enclosure
TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH DR. RICHARD MCKINNEY BY THE BARCLAY CIVIL RIGHTS SCHOLARS BARCLAY SCHOOL, 2900 BARCLAY STREET BALTIMORE, MARYLAND WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 1992

(In informal introduction by Jo Ann Robinson, not picked up on tape)

Dr. Richard McKinney (hereafter RM): Thank you very much. When I got the invitation to come to be with you I was very pleased, because I've known Dr. Robinson for a long time. We've been colleagues. For another reason because I've heard a lot about Barclay School, a lot of good things about Barclay School, and I welcome the opportunity to come here and meet with you.

You have been studying civil rights. This is a very important topic for us and for all people. Before talking about the March on Washington, which you have asked me to talk about, I thought it might be of interest to you to show you some of the scenes, some of the pictures that were taken during the March on Washington, which was almost 29 years ago. I was there with my camera and I took some slides and because it's 29 years ago, before some of your parents were born, these slides aren't as bright as they were when I first had them made. When you see the slides you'll see some of the people and some of the placards, and some of the scenes that took place in the famous March on Washington, which was held on August the 28th 1963. I suppose we (inaudible) light here. (Projection of slides begins). These pictures are not in any particular order. They're just random scenes so you can see what it looked like at the March on Washington. You see one of the signs said "Jobs For Freedom." And they were looking for freedom, demonstrating for freedom. They were gathering around the
Lincoln, around the Washington Monument. You can see it sticking up. That's where they met to begin the March on Washington. People marched about a mile up the, up the road, to the Lincoln Memorial, where the speeches were given.

(Projection of slides continues) These people came from all over the country, all over the United States. It was scheduled to begin on August the 28th, but some people began many weeks earlier. One man started on a bicycle from out in Kansas, or some where (laughs). And another decided he would walk to Washington, many, many miles that would actually be a part of this demonstration. And there were all kinds of people. There were black people, white people, uh, American Indians and other types of nationalities and races there, all people who were interested in the same thing you're interested in, which is civil rights.

(Projection continuing) They had to have a First Aide station because, do you know how many people were there? Two hundred and fifty thousand people. That's a quarter of a million people came to this March on Washington. So some people passed out because of the heat and the press of the crowd. So they needed to have First Aide stations. Many different organizations, that's just 2, 3 of the slides. The Central Congress of African, of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the National Federation of (inaudible) Sisterhoods, these were just a few of the organizations that were represented on this occasion. You see the television cameras there. They were, they were all around. That's the platform from which the speaking took place. (Projection continuing) I did not edit these, so you see some of the same scenes. (Projection continuing) That would be a friend of mine I hadn't seen for a long time (laughs), he came from West Virginia. (Projection continuing) (reading sign from slide:) "March for First Class Citizenship Now". All those signs usually ended with "Now".

They wanted it now, not later on. You see some of the leaders of the March. They were not supposed to start until 11:30 but they couldn't wait and started earlier.
Have you ever heard of Jackie Robinson?

Scholars: Yes, baseball player.

RM: There he is with the gray hair. (Projection continuing) (reading from slides:) "Decent Housing Now." "Equal Rights Now". And various other mottos after that. Picture of a man who was drawing sketches of it. "Catholics, Jews, Protestants". That's a person who passed out. (Projection continuing) That's a (inaudible) where the speeches were held. (Continuing projection) He was in chains. He was demonstrating, uh, bondage. Men brought his little baby there.

J. Robinson: That baby'd be 23 years old today.

RM: Yes. That's another organization. UAW, that's a picture (inaudible). That's part of the scene of the two hundred fifty thousand. The speeches were up against that building. (Continuing projection) As a (inaudible) they had prayer, people bowed, some of them bowed their heads in prayer. That's, that's a problem with the film (inaudible) The man on the right is a good friend of mine, teaches at the University of Virginia, quite a scholar. "National Council of Churches" that says. This, I forgot that name. She worked in some civil rights organization in New York. I happened to see her there. This is one of my former students I met. He's a minister in Washington. Well that's the end of those scenes. I thought you would (inaudible) seeing the scenes.

Scholars: Applause

RM: I'm going to take about 10 minutes to say something
about the background of the March on Washington, and then
I'm going to have you raise questions with me. You are
concerned with civil rights. This is a concern that people
have had throughout history. Man is born to be free, not
to be in bondage. Man is born to exercise what we call
liberty and not to be prevented from realizing all his
potential. When you take the oath, the oath of allegiance
to the United States the last words are what? With

Scholars: With liberty and justice for all.

RM: Now another word for liberty is freedom. That's the
word that the people in the March on Washington were using.
So we can say that freedom and justice for all, All is
important, because there are some people who do not wish
liberty or freedom for all. Their minds are, are, are uh,
burdened with shortsightedness, with prejudice, with
prejudices, with selfishness. They want things all for
themselves. They do not want to share some of the things
they have with other people. Those who wrote the, the uh
Pledge of Allegiance put it as it should be put, With
Liberty and Justice for All. And you have been studying the
ways in which people have been struggling to achieve that
freedom, or that liberty. People say that the March on
Washington goes back to a long series of struggles and
protests and demonstrations. Some of you may know that when
the slaves were taken from Africa's shores, some of them
jumped overboard when they found out what was going to
happen to them. They preferred to drown rather than be
captured and brought over here. And even when they got here
they began various ways to struggle for freedom, for
justice, for being considered as total human beings.

Now, more specifically, the March on Washington can be
said to have begun in the mind of the man who had the idea
of marching on Washington. His name was A. Philip Randolph.
A. Philip Randolph was head of the union of men who worked
on the railroads. They were Pullman Car porters. The porters did not have a union. They did not, the company did not give them a salary. They had to depend upon the wage, on the tips that people gave them (inaudible) for their income. That was not a way to earn one's living properly, so Mr. Randolph began organizing them into a union, and he demonstrated honesty and integrity. I asked him, when I was in college he came to my school. Is it true that the Pullman Company tried to bribe you, to pay you to not organize the pullman porters. He said, yes, it is true. They sent me a check for $5000 if I would stop. I sent it back. They sent me another check for $15,000 if I would stop. I sent it back. Then they sent me, he said, a blank check. Write your own figure in there. So he sent it back with the words, "I am not for sale." Some people are not for sale, they will not sell their integrity, their sense of right and wrong for money. Mr. Randolph was that kind of man. Now we entered into the world war, back in, uh, 1941. The country organized for being the arsenal of democracy, to supply the goods necessary for carrying on the war. The factories were not interested in hiring minority people, particularly black people. The factories were moving and black people did not have jobs. Mr. Randolph said, in 1941, if the government doesn't do something about it, we are going to march on Washington. President Roosevelt at that time did not like the idea of a march on Washington. So he said to Mr. Randolph, we, I will make an order myself, as President of the United States, an executive order, that there would be fair employment for all people so we had the F.E.P.C., the Fair Employment Policy Commission, was established, so that they could oversee the industries, so that people would get jobs. Now the idea of marching on Washington did not die. There were many incidents in the struggle for civil rights after 1941. 1955, Rosa Parks got off the bus, or was moved on the bus as she was asked to do.
She was arrested and then you had the Montgomery Bus Boycott which lasted over a year. Then you had people marching for equal justice in Birmingham, Alabama in the early part of '63 when the chief of police, Bull Connors, took fire hoses and turned them on children your size and washed them away to keep them from demonstrating. That scene on the, on the television screen aroused the conscience of the people all over the country, so people in California, and Oregon, Washington, Kansas City, Louisiana and New York, Maine, and all the rest of them got this (inaudible) for getting justice for people. So Martin Luther King was the outstanding leader at that time, and some of the leaders got together and said we have to march on Washington. They made A. Philip Randolph the chairman of the movement. He had a friend of his, Bayard Rustin, who was a great organizer, who had charge of the main parts of it. But there were civil rights organizations all over the country who got interested in the March on Washington. You've been studying about the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; you've been studying about SNCC; you've been studying about the NAACP. The heads of all these organizations, in addition to some church organizations got interested. They made their plans in their various ways for the March on Washington. So they all gathered on August the 28th 1963. Why 1963? Because 1963 was a hundred years, that year was a hundred years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Abraham Lincoln signed that Proclamation to be effective January 1st 1863. A hundred years had passed, and people said, we are not yet fully emancipated. So to observe the need for emancipation we will, a hundred years later, demonstrate that we do not have the freedom, we do not have the jobs, we do not have the respect that was supposed to have been given with the Emancipation Proclamation. The outstanding speech on that occasion, many of you already know, was the speech by Martin Luther King, the "I Have a
Dream" speech. There were other speakers at that time, on
that occasion. One man came with a very fiery speech, John
Lewis, but it was so fiery that uh, they said, don't give
that. That will not do what we want to have done. He gave
the speech, but he had toned it down so that it wasn't as
emotionally uh, uh disturbing as he had originally wished
it to be. One of the highlights of the March on Washington
was a song by a great gospel singer, Mahalia Jackson. When
she got through singing, all the people, those two hundred
and fifty thousand people that you saw, got, uh, felt that
they were one people and as they marched that one mile or so
from the, from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln
Memorial, they felt as though they were one people, they
felt that though, that they, that they were real Americans.
Now many people like my, like myself, people like myself,
who at, at this one time felt that we are all Americans,
blacks and whites, and the people of different nationalities
and backgrounds. We were all there. Why were we there?
Demonstrating for civil rights. And one of the interesting
things that I saw was an organization of, of married, of people
who were married to the opposite races, people who were
black married to whites. They were there as an organization,
and their children were there. And the children carried
signs saying, "We are already integrated."

Scholars: Laughter.

RM: And we saw all kinds of different signs like that. So
the struggle was for freedom. And you are here in the year
of 1992 studying the ways in which people have sought to
achieve their freedom. And I know that as a result of what
you have been studying and what your teachers have
demonstrated to you, when you get to be in a position of
making decisions, your decisions will be affected by all the
things you have learned here in this very fortunate
environment that you have. And you will know that you have
to have a part in trying to understand what freedom is all
about, what it means to people, how you, as citizens in this
democracy, can help to make freedom come alive. Yes maam.

Scholar: Inaudible

RM: Alright. I, I said I was going to talk 10 minutes I
inaudible). But I'd be glad to entertain any questions that
you may have. Yes maam.
Brandy Brown: How did you first react, what was going
through your mind when you learned about the assassination
of Dr. King?

RM: (Inaudible) what was going through my mind when I
heard about the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
I always remember where I was. I was in my basement moving
some things around, when my wife called me to say that uh
Dr. King had been killed. I said here is a demonstration of
the kind of violence, a demonstration of the kind of
violence which Dr. King was trying to get away from. He
had a policy of nonviolent revolution, a revolution that
would recognize the rights and the dignity of all people,
even those people who were opposed to him. He was
interested in change without physical violence. Here was
this uh man who had been the victim of the violence that he
preached against. And I thought it was very tragic that he
should have died that way so soon in his life. And I said
well, a lot of people will be very unhappy about this, and I
don't know what the outcome is going to be. And you have
studied, I'm quite sure, what the outcome was. There were
many riots all over the country, people really protesting
against the assassination of this great man. Any other
questions?

Georgetta: Where were you born and raised?
RM: Where was I born? I was born in Florida, the state of Florida, in a small town called Live Oak, named after the trees that were there. And my father, when I didn't do what was right, would go to the oak tree and uh get a piece of a branch and let me know it was wrong to do what I did. I was Live Oak, born in Live Oak, Florida.

Patricia Cuffie: What is your occupation, and does it have anything to do with the civil rights movement?

RM: What is my occupation?

Patricia: And does it have anything to do with the civil rights movement?

RM: Yes, it does. My occupation is a teacher, a teacher of philosophy. And uh I've been doing that for many years. And what, what does this have to do with the civil rights movement? We could say that the civil rights movement, as almost any movement, grows out of what you call a philosophy. What is a philosophy? It is the way you look at things, the way you interpret things, your understanding of the way things ought to be. Uh, it's an attempt to find the truth, philosophy is an attempt to find the truth. And many of the philosophers who have written philosophy, have been persons who have tried to, to point out what truth is, what justice is. One of the earliest philosophers, Plato, wrote a lot about justice. He wrote a book called The Republic in which he was talking about what the ideal state would be like, in which there would be justice. (Inaudible) And other philosophers in the history of (Inaudible) have dealt with the whole problem of justice. So that if as a philosopher I look out across the world scene, I try to understand it in terms of certain principles that are operating, or should be operating. And that's the reason
that I could say that these men who planned the March on Washington were working out of a philosophy that uh, in order to draw attention of the construct, the people who make the laws, draw attention to it, some demonstration has to be made, nonviolent demonstration. And uh that was a philosophy. Another philosophy was that let's have violent demonstrations. Martin King's philosophy was nonviolent. And that's the relationship between philosophy and the movement.

Brandy Brown: Have there been events in your life that made you want to be a part of the civil rights movement? If so, please describe them.

RK: Have, have there been events in your life that made me want to be a part of the civil rights movement. Indeed there have been. Uh, when I was a young boy, in a small town in Florida, I had a job digging a ditch on a farm, about uh, about 4 or 5 miles from my house. The man who owned the farm asked me to do the ditch. And uh it was around an orange grove to drain, to drain it. He couldn't take me out there but he had his wife to take me out there. But because of the attitudes in those, in that time, I could not ride inside the car. In those times cars had what they called running boards. You had to step up on a, on a level and then step into the car. I had to stand on the running board for those 3 or 4 miles to get to the farm to make about a dollar a day. Well I did not like that. But that's the only job I could get and so that was the beginning of my feeling that I ought to do something about justice and about equality among people. I did not feel that I was inferior to people. But the laws and the customs were such as to design, designed to try to make me feel inferior and I've always tried to avoid that. I could give scores of incidents in my life in which I have been, inspired to work for civil
rights. But I, I get involved, so that's just the beginning of my feeling about civil rights. Yes Ma'am.

Dawn Wilson: What was it like to live in Baltimore before the civil rights movement?

RM: I didn't hear that.

Dawn: (repeats question)

RM: Well, it was not easy. Uh, there were some drugstores in Baltimore, a chain of drugstores named Reade's Drugstore. They had eating counters, where you could sit up at the counter and buy sodas and so on. Rite Aid cut that out when they bought Reade's drugstore chain out. But black people were not permitted to sit at the counters to get a soda or a sandwich (intercom interruption). The stores did not treat their black customers with respect. If my wife wanted to go to Hecht's downtown to try on a hat or something she was not permitted to try it on. Uh, and there were a lot of things like that. My wife at that time, she is deceased now. But she was active in CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality. It was an interracial organization. And the members of CORE would go to Reade's drugstores and other places. Uh, it's white and black. So a white person would team up with a black person to go to, let's say Reade's, and sit at a counter and ask to be served. And the uh, the waiter would want to serve the white customer but not the black customer. And the white customer would say I don't want to be served unless you serve my friend. My wife was very active in, in helping to desegregate Reade's Drugstores and some other places, restaurants like that. So I could say it was not very comfortable being in a place where you could not enjoy all
the facilities that were provided for people. In fact the simple thing like going to the bathroom. We take it for granted. But it was very difficult for black people in those days. And one of the stories told by Thurgood Marshall who was born and (inaudible) of Baltimore, is that he was downtown, as a young man downtown and he needed to go to the bathroom. There was no place that he could go. He barely made it home. It was not easy in those days. But we had people, white people, black people who were working to get rid of that kind of uh discrimination.

Patricia: What happened in Baltimore as a result of Dr. King's murder and did it affect your life in any way?

RM: Uh, there were a lot of demonstrations in Baltimore after his murder. People in different parts of the city began to, began to demonstrate. In some ways like they did, like they are doing out, they did out in California a few days ago. And there were different attitudes. There were some people who said there shouldn't be any kind of demonstration at all. Think that, uh, be quiet and take things easily. But there were other people who were of a different mind. And so they demonstrated, and there was a desire not to, not to do any (inaudible). Those are the things that I recall that happened following the, the uh assassination.

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

RM: Well many things have changed, indeed. Uh, as a result of the March on Washington and other forces, uh 1964 we had the passage of the Civil Rights Law. That represented a tremendous uh breakdown of some of the laws which prevented uh minority people from having equal access. Once my mother and my brother were all on the way from Florida to
Detroit. She got ill in the night, driving. No hotel would let them come in for the night. She had to endure the illness that she had and keep on driving until they got to Detroit. That's not true now. If she were driving now, and wanted to stop at a Howard Johnsons or any place else, as a result of the equal accommodations law she could stop there. If you wanted to get something to eat. I remember vividly on Pennsylvania Avenue and North Avenue, there was a restaurant there, a nice restaurant. But for blacks to eat they had to go around to the side and ask in a window for something to be handed to them. That's not true anymore. They can go in the restaurant now. That restaurant is no longer there. But they can go in any restaurant. Some of you can't imagine some of the things that happened during those days. Well, for one who travels as I have done, it's nice to be able to make a reservation at any hotel, uh, that I can afford, and stay there, and go into the dining room and eat like other people. Those are uh big changes. Also there are minority people who are teaching in colleges and universities. That's a big change in my lifetime. Uh, there, one of the biggest changes is black people in athletics. Uh, Naron says he wants to be an athlete, perhaps, and uh you saw the picture of Jackie Robinson I showed you. Before Jackie Robinson came on the scene no black could be in baseball because they certainly, the power structure did not want them to play baseball. But a white man named Branch Rickey who was with the Pittsburgh Pirates who said this should be changed. And he recruited Branch Rickey, who was playing with the black baseball league to play with the Brooklyn Dodgers, and uh, recruited Jackie Robinson to play with the Brooklyn Dodgers. And uh a lot of people didn't like it, they didn't think that black people should be playing with white people in baseball. But Jackie Robinson was the right kind of person. He was cool, he knew how to handle situations. One of the first games he played
somebody brought a black cat and threw it out on the baseball field, thinking he would be scared of a black cat. And they had a number of instances like that. But what did he do? He just acted cool. And people took a different attitude toward black people in baseball. I was in a pullman car one night. My compartment was next to a compartment with 2 white women and I could hear them talking. The train wasn't moving then. They'd been to New York, and they'd seen Jackie Robinson play. One of them said to the other, he's just like anybody else isn't he? They were glad to see him (inaudible). He was an excellent player. Well you know now what's happened after that. It's basketball, particularly collegiate level and professional level, you see many black people participating (inaudible). Uh, it's true in many instances where blacks were denied opportunities, they are given opportunities now but there are those who say that those opportunities are not as broad as they ought to be. For black people in, in, working in big corporations the feeling is that they can rise but so high. They call that the glass ceiling, they can see places that they are prepared to go, but they are not permitted to go beyond that. So while there's been progress there are still some limitations placed on some black people. Uh, we have black people making more money now than they did on an average but even though they are making more money, the gap between the average that the black person makes and the average that the white person makes is still wide and (inaudible) getting wider. So we still have progress in some way, but we do not have the basic uh cutting out of certain aspects of discrimination that people are working for.

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

RM: In Baltimore?

Patricia: In Baltimore.
RM: I have had no experiences that I remember very vividly
that were unpleasant during my career in Baltimore. Perhaps
because I, I was teaching out at, at uh Morgan State
College. And I did not have occasion to go into situations
where I would be the victim of some form of discrimination.
Uhh, my wife deliberately went into those situations. But I
didn't. Uh I did have students at Morgan who were
demonstrating at Northwood. I volunteered to take students
to the demonstrations, as some of my white colleagues did.
Uhh but beyond that kind of activity I did not participate. ,
I was about to go and join the picket line myself in
Northwood but that afternoon the owners of the drugstore
relented and said we will integrate and that kept me from
demonstrating myself. But I was planning to do that then.
Any other questions. I think we have (inaudible) minutes or
so.

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