

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farrell Race Relations Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 777

WILLIAM SAMUELS

Interviewed

by

Ronald Rice

on

June 9, 1980

## WILLIAM ELLIOTT SAMUELS

William Elliott Samuels was born in Farrell, Pennsylvania on May 11, 1947. Samuels grew up in a very underprivileged neighborhood and was raised by his mother because his father died when he was two years old. His mother continually stressed to him how important his education was while he grew up. Samuels graduated from Farrell High School in 1966 and went to college. In 1970 he graduated from Westminster College with a B. A. Degree in business and economics.

In 1972 Samuels was hired by the First National Bank of Mercer County as an assistant vice-president in charge of the Farrell branch of the bank. He has remained with the bank until today.

Samuels is a member of the Friendship Baptist Church, belongs to the Shenango Valley Chamber of Commerce and is a member of the Free Accepted Masons. Samuels married and has two sons, ages three and five. In his spare time, Samuels enjoys playing racketball, chess and going horseback riding.

Samuels was a member of the Black Youth Action Committee and the Cultural Center of Farrell in the late 1960's. Both of those groups were active in protesting the conditions of the Black minority in Farrell. Samuels' involvement with those groups gave him first hand experience with the racial violence and tensions in Farrell, Pennsylvania during the 1960's.

Ronald James Rice

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INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM SAMUELS

INTERVIEWER: Ronald Rice

SUBJECT: racial tensions, schooling, Ku Klux Klan,

DATE: June 9, 1980

R: This is an interview with Mr. William Samuels for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the racial tensions and rioting in Farrell during the 1960's by Ronald James Rice at 1307 Buhl Terrace Drive in Farrell, Pennsylvania on June 9, 1980 at 6:55 p.m.

Mr. Samuels, I would like you to tell us a little bit about your childhood and what it was like to grow up in Farrell and what you remember about your parents.

S: That's fairly easy. I have a pretty vivid memory of my childhood. I was born and raised right here in Farrell, Pennsylvania. I grew up on Lee Avenue, which is in one of the worst sections of town. We lived in an apartment building where there were three families; we lived in the back. In order to get to our apartment you had to walk about thirty or forty yards in total darkness then up about twelve steps to finally get to the door of the apartment that we lived in. It was a four room apartment. It had two bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room, and a very small bathroom.

I had an older brother and an older sister. My father died when I was two years old, but I never really got to know him. I was raised by my mother.

I can recall a childhood life coming up in Farrell. You don't realize how culturally disadvantaged you are until you become older because when you're a child you don't think about the fact that you don't have a shower or the fact that when you go to the bakery and get stale doughnuts and that's your breakfast along with some tea that some other kids are eating cereal and milk or bacon and eggs. So as a child you don't

really realize how culturally deprived you are. But as you get older and you experience a little more and gain a little more knowledge of the world, you look back upon your childhood and say, "Gee, I really had a bad time, but I didn't realize it because as a child I was having so much fun with my peer group that I really didn't understand the fact that I had patches on my knees," which was not considered to be decent attire in those days.

I can remember that my mother was a type of person who was very strict with the three of us. She always emphasized good manners, always emphasized getting a decent education. To me, I think she was the cornerstone of the family which is still the case in a lot of black families where you have problems where the husband or the father does not stay home; the mother becomes the cornerstone. The children pretty much tend to say, "Look, if my mother tells me something, it's going to be right 95% of the time."

R: What do you remember about school? What was it like to attend the Farrell school system?

S: I thought I got a good education in the Farrell school system. Some of the teachers, well, the majority of the teachers were pretty strict on you and they made you learn and they made you listen. We've always had good discipline in the Farrell schools right on through. From kindergarten through grade twelve there has always been good discipline.

I was involved in athletics and that tends to make you a little more popular than the average guy in the school. Some of my experiences were probably better than the average guy because I was one of the better athletes of the school and I think that was a help.

I think the education that kids got in school while I was there was excellent witnessed by the fact they were able to prepare me to go on to college.

R: And what years did you attend high school?

S: I was in Farrell High School from 1964 through 1966. From there I graduated and went to Westminster College.

R: What was college like there? Westminster is a pretty small school isn't it?

S: Yes. At the time I was there, their Board of Trustees followed the philosophy that even though they had the land to grow and become a school that could probably handle ten or twelve thousand students, they liked the small private kind of school. We only had like 1,600 undergraduate students in the four years that I was there.

I think the personal attention was good for me. I think a lot of the students who were there were a little further ahead Englishwise and mathwise than I was. You would only have fifteen sometimes twelve students in a class with one instructor and you were able to ask those questions that you needed to get asked and get the personal attention. I think that really helped me a great deal.

My experience at Westminster was just a great one, an unbelievable experience. The personal attention from your instructors, the athletic program was great. You had coaches there who were more concerned with your development as a man and a human being rather than whether or not you played football and basketball. To me that was a far greater thing to do for me than seeing that I played basketball for four years or football and then didn't get a degree.

R: Were you on Farrell's basketball team?

S: Yes.

R: The state champions?

S: No, we didn't win a state championship. We went as far as the state semi-finals and got beat by Uniontown by two points.

R: I remember Farrell always had a super team.

S: Yes, that's right.

R: Why did you decide to go to Westminster? I'm sure you had a few colleges in mind.

S: The answer is the same thing. It's basically what I just said. When I came out of high school I interviewed with a guy by the name of Joe Sipriany who was the coach of Nebraska. I had an offer from the Florida State Seminoles in Florida at a time when there was no black athletes at Florida State. I had an offer from Cincinnati. I narrowed it down to Westminster College and Nebraska. I went to Nebraska to visit and I walked about campus with the basketball coach. We went to the student union building; we went to the library and a couple of other buildings and absolutely no one said, "Hi, Coach Sipriany. How are you today?" It was cold. It was impersonal. Nobody even knew the basketball coach.

When I went to Westminster College, Coach Riddle walked around campus with me and everybody knew who he was. "Hi, Coach Riddle. Who's this with you?" And he introduced me to different people on campus. When I talked with him he told me, "Bill, the most important thing we feel at Westminster is that you develop from a young adult into a man and that when you graduate from Westminster you're able to get a job." The guy from

Nebraska, all he could say was, "If you play football or basketball for Nebraska for four years, we'll probably get you a pro offer."

R: Do you think you had a pretty close-knit family too and it was easier for you to go to Westminster?

S: It certainly was. They could all come and see me any time and I could come home on weekends.

R: You received a bachelor of arts degree in business and economics?

S: Yes.

R: Why did you decide to go into that field? Any reason in particular

S: No real particular reason. When I was in high school, around tenth or eleventh grade, I always wanted to be a physical therapist. For some reason I got sidetracked in college. I didn't really think I had the grades to go on and to get into something medical. I felt as though the next best thing--if it wasn't going to be physical therapy--was business. I looked over the courses and I thought business and economics would suit me.

R: You presently work for the First National Bank of Mercer County?

S: Right.

R: What is your job consist of there?

S: At the present time I'm an assistant vice-president and manager. That basically entails the interviewing, hiring, promotion of the clerical staff as well as loan officers, making installment loans, mortgage loans, and commerical.

R: If we can let's move up to the 1960's in Farrell. What was a typical day like, say, in the early 1960's? You would probably have been in junior high school. What would you do on a typical day?

S: A typical day, say, not in school?

R: In school and when you get out of school?

S: Well, you would go to school and put your time in and learn what you could, when you really felt like learning. You didn't always feel like learning in junior high school, especially when it got warm and you wanted to be outside or be playing basketball. Then after you completed your day if there was some type of a practice during the sporting season, you would go there. Then you would come home and have your dinner. My mother would always have us study for at least an

hour or two. After that was over we got to watch television for a hour or two. Then we went to bed. That was a very typical day.

R: How about in the summer?

S: Summertime was a little bit different. There were those of us who lived in this section of Farrell who realized that probably our own salvation of getting out of the "ghetto" was through athletics. So our summers were spent every day playing basketball or football, all day. The only time we came home was to eat and then you went right back to the playground and you would either play baseball, basketball, or football. That was your entire day.

In the evening, when it got dark, they used to have a playground on Spearmon Avenue called the Washington Playground. It had lights and we would play under the light until eleven o'clock at night. Then the police would come and run us off the playground because the neighbors around the playground were saying we were making too much noise and this type of deal.

Then you got into a situation where, after you left the playground at ten or eleven o'clock at night, you would hang around on the street corner and do absolutely nothing, but talk. This is where a lot of the guys started to lean towards other things than . . .

R: Did you feel that there could have been more? Was there things to do in Farrell like recreation that just weren't available to you?

S: When I was growing up in Farrell there was a gymnasium where the ceiling was like . . . The ceiling was probably ten feet tall, which meant that the basketball hoop was about eight feet tall. If you notice all the black kids that played high school ball in Farrell in the 1960's, they all shot with a line drive shot. There were only a few that had any arc on the ball. The only facility we had to play in had no real ceiling, so we all shot a line drive shot and that's the way you developed it.

There were no swimming pools. If you didn't play either basketball, football or baseball, there was no other athletics you could get involved with. There were very few tennis courts and those tennis courts that did exist existed at the bottom of the so-called hill.

R: And you weren't allowed to play there?

S: Well, you were allowed to play, but you didn't go up there and play because you knew you weren't wanted around.

R: While you were in high school what was the feeling the kids-- your friends in school--had about some of the black minority

leaders in the country, say, Martin Luther King? Did you have any feelings yourself about it that you could recall?

S: That's an interesting famous subject that you bring up. When I was in high school, I never was really faced with a prejudicial or discriminatory type of situation.

R: Because of your sports?

S: Yes. I think the fact that I was a popular person kept me away from the direct discriminatory acts. But I could feel at times when someone didn't particularly care what they saw me doing. As an example, any popular athlete, black or white, is always going to have a certain number of girls who like the guy. It's simply because of the fact that he's popular. On a few occasions some of the girls who I happened to be with might be white and a white adult would make a snide remark like, "What are you doing with that nigger?" or that type of thing. Or they would look at you in such a way that you knew that they disapproved of what you were doing. It's a funny thing. Nothing was ever directed towards me; it was always directed to the person I was with. But, as far as friends, I had many, many white friends in high school as well as in college.

R: Did you feel any tension like in Farrell? Was there any [tension] growing there? A lot of people feel that the violence and the rioting--if you want to call it rioting--that happened in 1969 and a little bit in 1968, was built up from the early 1960's. Do you recall any kind of tension mounting?

S: Not really per se. The only thing I really witnessed that might be considered as mounting tension would be the fact that a lot of the guys that I graduated high school with were unemployed. That was from like 1966 through 1969 and 1970. Most of these guys if they didn't get drafted in the service right after high school, they hung around here; they were unemployed. I think if there was any kind of a build up that can be said about that, was the uselessness that comes from not really being employed and having something functional that you can go to everyday and say, "Hey, I'm useful because I'm achieving something."

R: Right. Do you remember anything about rioting and violence in other cities that was recorded, say, by television or what you read in the newspaper?

S: Yes, I recall reading and listening to reports about Watts in California, Harlem in New York, and Chicago, south side of Chicago.

R: How did you feel about that?

S: You know, I really didn't think it would happen in my hometown. I really felt as though these riots were about areas where there



were large concentrations of blacks. I'm talking about thousands of people in a four or five block area, you know, when you talk about these ghetto areas. I felt that that frustration there had to be created. I didn't think Farrell was capable of really getting into that type of a riot. I think I really misjudged Farrell on that case.

- R: Besides the unemployment, can you think of anything that might have contributed to the growing tension? Not so much between blacks and whites, but just blacks alone?
- S: If there was any other particular item it would be housing areas. Unfortunately, you can take any street in Farrell that runs east and west, and if you ride the one mile length of the town at each block, you can see a difference in the houses. You do that today and ten years ago, eleven or twelve years ago, it was even worse. If you start on Broadway, if you come up any street, you can see that the houses from like Beechwood Avenue down are absolutely the worst. They're eight years old, some more. And the further up you go, the newer the homes are, and the better they look. The entire minority population of this town has always lived below Beechwood. Just in the last six to eight years has there been some type of opportunity for them to move up.
- R: Do you think the white people of Farrell tried to keep minority below Beechwood?
- S: I think that's part of the ball game. First of all, in order for a person to upgrade themselves, they have to be gainfully employed. Now there were probably a lot of black who were employed at that time, but they were underemployed. You know a guy might have a skill at a mill, but rather than his employer making him a mill rank so he can make the mill rank's wages he probably had him doing labor. So even though he had a job, he was underemployed which meant that the rest of the ball game of getting a decent home et cetera did not come about because he wasn't economically, and financially sound enough to do it.
- R: They were mostly economically kept in that area?
- S: Yes.
- R: I've heard stories where some realtors wouldn't show houses in certain areas to blacks. Do you recall any of this?
- S: That still exists.
- R: Today?
- S: Yes, it exists today. I'm in the banking business and I know people who move in the town constantly from other cities that work for Westinghouse, Sharon Steel et cetera. When I finally get around to meeting these people and talk to them,

I tell them about the nice houses that they have in Farrell and they will tell me that so-and-so realtor said that there was nothing in Farrell that they would want to move into. So the realtors are directing them to communities like Hermitage, Sharon, Sharpsville; they're directing them away from Farrell.

R: Do you think they're prejudice to Farrell because of the large minority population?

S: I think the fact that Farrell has always had the greatest portion of minorities living in it since the early 1900's when it was called South Sharon . . . It has always had the greatest number of minorities living in it and I think that has always been a problem as to why Farrell . . . I think after the riots it just became worse because it became known as a town where there was a lot of violence. Anything with any violent nature or even something of simply a controversial nature that happened in this town to me was reported. It was reported on radio and it was reported at that time with the Sharon Herald. It got good headlines.

R: Do you think they were bias in what they reported?

S: I think they have been down through the years. I think they're getting better, but I think they have been bias. I think that some of the things that happen in this community get page one or page two, but if it happened in Sharon or Hermitage it might receive fourth or fifth page billing.

R: How about the reporting on Farrell? Do you think it added to some of the problems? Do you think the paper could have contributed to some of the problems in Farrell?

S: Well, first of all, the riots that happened in Farrell were not nearly as bad as was reported. There were a few store front windows broken out; there were a few cars that were vandalized but there was very, very little physical damage done to human beings. It was mostly okay. I've got this pinned up aggression. I felt as though some of the guys . . . Even they felt as though they had been discriminated against. They didn't know for sure whether or not they had been, but they knew they had a lot of aggression in them. When they decided that it was time to do something about it most of it took place against what really should not have been the object of their aggression. They were hitting buildings; they were hitting windows; they were hitting automobiles. If they really felt as though white people were discriminating against them, then the object of their aggression should have been a human being known as white people and that's not where the aggression took its place.

R: Once the violence and rioting began here in Farrell, how close were you or were you in college?

- S: At the time I was a student at Westminster College, but I was home for the summer.
- R: How close were you? Where did you live? Were you close to the violence and can you recall seeing or hearing . . .
- S: I lived in the middle of the violence.
- R: Really?
- S: At the time I still lived on Lee Avenue.
- R: What was it like?
- S: It was interesting. I remember growing up in this town when you went to bed at night you could leave your doors open. When you left home you could leave your doors open. You could sleep outside on your porch and no one would bother you. But the town had begun to change while I was in high school--the three years I was in high school and the four years I was in college.

There was a large influx of minority people from the South in this town. Figures, I don't have. I remember that summer very well because the previous summer I went to Clinton, Iowa to live with an uncle and work in the DuPont Factory. The following summer there were a lot of people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five in this town that I didn't even know and I had grown up in this town. So there was an influx of people who weren't really born and raised in this town, who didn't really fully understand the town.

We had to lock our doors; we kept the lights dim and you put very few lights on. We were minority people living right in the middle of where this thing was happening. I told my mother that after dark I wanted her in the house because some of those people out there who were involved in damaging physical property I did not know. Those people who I had grown up with did know my mother and she would be in no danger, but to those who she didn't know . . .

- R: Some people feel that most of the violence was done from people from Youngstown or from people who didn't even live in Farrell. Do you think there is any truth to that?
- S: There is very little truth to that. During the riots there was an organization in Farrell called the Black Cultural Center. Has any one explained that to you yet?
- R: No.
- S: There was a Black Cultural Center. It was on Staunt Street across from the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks Building. The Black Cultural Center had an arm of subsidiary

that was called the Black Youth Action Committee. This cultural center was a center for young blacks between the ages of eighteen and almost thirty to go and get books on black culture, black history books, sit around and just hold conversations if you had a problem; things like this.

The Black Youth Action Committee, what they felt their main purpose was was to see that no acts were perpetrated upon black youths that were considered to be discriminatory. Otherwise the Black Youth Action Committee would be their lawyer so to speak or take up the action. But they, the Black Youth Action Committee, were basically at the forefront of the riots in the City of Farrell, not people from Youngstown, not people from New Castle, not people from Warren or Pittsburgh. The Black Youth Action Committee made up of people born and raised in this town were at the forefront and they called the shots. Whatever happened, or if nothing happened, these people said it happened.

- R: Do you think the reason that those people felt that it was outsiders, they considered people who hadn't lived there very long outsiders?
- S: You know, if you were born in Farrell and you were eighteen years old, they could consider you an outsider.
- R: You wouldn't say there was any truth to that at all?
- S: I don't feel as though there is very much truth to that at all. I think there was communication--I'm sure--between the Black Youth Action Committee and other black groups in other cities. There was communication without a doubt, but as far as people coming in to town from other cities and actually participating, there was very little of that.
- R: Farrell had a curfew all day then, didn't they?
- S: Yes, they had a curfew. In fact I was one of the guys who was assigned to ride in a police car with a patrolman to see that things were quelled as best as possible. They took about five or six of us to do this--those who they felt the other young blacks in the community looked up to so to speak and would respect and listen to. We rode around with the policemen for days and nights making sure that wherever people started to congregate we would get out of the police car and talk to them, try to calm them down, try to get them to disperse, this type of thing.
- R: Do you think the curfew law was unfair?
- S: I think the curfew at the time was appropriate the way tempers were running. I think it was appropriate to have a curfew.

- R: I think they have the same curfew, don't they?
- S: Yes. I think they still have a ten o'clock curfew; it's outdated. You can't get a nineteen or twenty year old in the house at ten o'clock at night. It is practically impossible, especially if they have a car.
- R: Yes, right. How do you feel the police and the government agencies handled the violence and all the tensions? Some people feel they added to it; some people feel they controlled it pretty well; some people feel that they didn't understand it.
- S: Before I deal with the police I probably should deal with the city fathers at that time. The Black Youth Action Committee requested a meeting with the mayor. Mayor John Gerosky refused to meet with the Black Youth Action Committee. If I recall his statements were, "Who do they represent? Who? To who is their follower." After Mayor Gerosky refused that meeting the Black Youth Action Committee decided to demand a meeting with Mayor Gerosky. So they did that next and Mayor Gerosky still didn't show up. Now this was before any violence had taken place. That next afternoon, I can recall seeing cars driving down Idaho Street and Staunt Street and the younger blacks, like eighteen, twenty-one or twenty-two years old, hitting those cars with bricks, breaking windows, putting things in cars. The word got back to Mayor Gerosky, still nothing happened. Later on that evening, a few white businesses got their windows broke. The next afternoon the Black Youth Action Committee had a meeting with Mayor Gerosky.
- R: So they got his attention . . .
- S: They got his attention.
- R: The only way they could!
- S: Yes. The meeting was held at Farrell City Hall. They had the mayor and council there and all the leaders of the Black Youth Action Committee. The Black Youth Action Committee had a list of grievances that they thought were going on in the City of Farrell. I can't recall all of them now, but I know one of them: At that time Farrell was like 28% black and there were no black councilmen. I think at the time we had either six or seven councilmen. There were no [blacks]. That was one of the problems. I think we had four black policemen.
- R: What about teachers in the schools?
- S: Teachers in the schools were another problem. They probably should have taken that over to the school board. At the time you don't think about those things.
- R: Right.

S: I think at the time Russ Phillips was probably the only teacher in the school system.

R: Were there any black firemen?

S: No, no black firemen. They had a long list of things and the mayor just did not seem to really want to listen to us. He gave the normal administrative answer of "We're working on that." "We're trying." "Give us some time and all these things will take place," et cetera. The same thing that you still hear today at times.

I think when the Black Youth Action Committee left that meeting with the mayor they were totally frustrated, so they went right back to doing damage to people's property. At that point, someone, I don't know who, whether it was an administrative decision from the mayor and council or not, but someone sent the fire department down to the building where the Black Youth Action Committee was located where a lot of kids were still throwing bricks and stuff. They hooked up the fire hose and they were going to disperse these young adults with the fire hose. But when that fire truck got there, fortunately, there were some older black adults there, one of them being Paul Flint. And when that fireman hooked up the hose I can remember very vividly Paul Flint saying, "If you think you have a problem with these young people, if you turn that hose on these young people, then you're going to have a problem with the older adults too." I remember that very vividly. Mr. Russo, the fire chief, said something to the effect of, "What do you expect us to do? They're damaging people's property." Flint said, "I don't know, but if you turn that hose on these kids you have got a real problem." And the fire department left. But had he done that, and if the riots would have escalated, I think it would not only have been young people, but I think you would have had grown men out there and then it would have really become a problem.

R: Where was the Black Youth Action Committee's location? Did they have a board and a director or an organizer?

S: I'm not sure that they had a board of directors so to speak, but they were renting space; they were renting office space there. I think they had officers, like a president, vice-president, treasurer and that type of deal, but I don't think they had a board of directors. They did have a committee of probably five or six guys who made all the major decisions.

R: Do you remember any of them?

S: I remember quite a few of them. I remember George B. Thomas, one of our current city employees. Roger Winston was a member of that committee. I think he is the deputy director of the Redevelopment Authority now. I was a member of the committee.

I didn't hold an office in the committee, but I was a member of the committee. Leader Flint was a member of the committee. Maurice Hopkins, I think he was president at the time. He's in Illinois now.

R: When you refer to city fathers, do you mean city council?

S: Yes.

R: Do you think if they would have been a little more open minded and listened to your grievances and possibly made some efforts to it, that things could have been cooled off?

S: You know, I really believe, Ron, that the mayor and council should have been totally receptive to the thoughts that these people were trying to express. I think they should have set up an ongoing human relations type committee that would really deal with some of the issues these younger people were talking about. It would have stopped any violence that actually took place in this town had they been willing to sit down. Even if they talked until all hours of the night, because as you talk you tend to alleviate tensions. Then after you have done all that you can get down to what you see are the real legitimate grievances. Some of them were probably picky human things, just idiosyncrasies that certain members of the group had. But had they done that I think they could have avoided any damage in this town, any violence. They could have really avoided it.

R: Do you think it could have been possible?

S: I think it was very well possible because the people who were at the head of the Black Youth Action Committee were intelligent people. You know, they weren't dummies. They had all had high school educations and some had spent a year maybe two in college, but not graduated. I think had the mayor and council been willing to sit down, set guidelines for discussions and actually begin to honestly work with these people that there may have not been any violence whatsoever. I really feel that way because I don't think any of these guys really wanted it. I'm talking about the leaders. Of the five or six leaders, I don't think any one of them really wanted the violence. But as always when you get a group of people involved there is going to be those in there who are very adamant in their feelings and they're going to cause splinters. Possibly those might have been the ones who would have broken away and did some violence anyway, but it would have been kept at a minimum. Once the five or six leaders of the committee felt as though things were hopeless, then that sanctions everybody to go out and do what they want.

R: How was the Black Youth Action Committee treated by the press? Did it get any publicity or recognition?

- S: Yes, they got quite a bit of publicity. At first they were disinclined to speak with the press because they said, "Look, this is a Farrell problem." There was some girl from the New York Times over here who wanted to write an article on the Black Youth Action Committee and the riots in Farrell. But they refused to talk to her for days because they felt this was a Farrell problem; they felt that Farrell people could solve it and they felt that saying anything to the press could give people the wrong impression.
- R: Fear that it would have been distorted and propaganda?
- S: Right. So they stayed away from that really for almost a week, then they started to talk to the press.
- R: How did the Herald react to the committee? Do you remember at all?
- S: I don't recall anyone even talking to anyone from the Herald. I'm sure they did, but I don't recall anything about that.
- R: Was there any time or place in which you or your family was a victim of violence?
- S: No.
- R: How did it change your life besides the locking of the door?
- S: Well, I think that was the first time in my entire life that I have ever been labeled as a radical by anyone simply because at the meeting at the city council--being a little bit more articulate than some of the rest--I did do some speaking towards the subject. I did hear after that that "Bill Samuels is a radical." It didn't really change my life any because I felt that I was always me. Someone had to articulate the position and so I was part of that. But it really didn't change my life to any great degree. What it did make me do was become aware of the fact that if you don't speak up for yourself, then nothing is going to happen. It made me become more of a person of action than a passive person who says, "Well, things are going to get better."
- R: That reminds me of a saying, "No one walks on you until you lay down."
- S: Yes, that's correct.
- R: How did your friends and your relatives feel about the tensions and the violence?
- S: Well, I think most of my friends and relatives were in sympathy with the young black adults who were out there rioting. I think the older ones really felt, deep down inside, as though



they had failed the younger people because conditions in the town weren't any better than when they were . . . The younger people felt as though they had to go out there and actually commit violence in order to get people to start listening to them and to address some of their problems. I think this really made the older blacks in town feel ashamed of themselves for not having accomplished more than what they had while they were growing up.

R: How did most of the white people who were probably prejudice towards you anyway . . . Did they label you as a radical part of that Black Youth Action Committee?

S: Yes.

R: "Stay away from him"?

S: Right.

R: Most of the black people were for it and understood it. Do you think very many of the whites really understood what it was about?

S: I would like to think that there were a lot of whites in Farrell who understood the problem and probably understood the root of the problem even more so than what we did. Being a part of the so-called system, I think they were more cognizant of the subtle ways in which you can be discriminated against and really did not realize it simply from the standpoint that creating more bureaucracy and paper work you can discriminate a person. The longer I live the more I realize that and I'm sure those people knew that some of those things existed.

R: Well, that's very interesting about the Black Youth Action Committee. You're very well informed on that and I appreciate all that information.

Do you know anybody who was directly affected by this violence besides yourself and your family? Any physical violence? I'm sure the mental aspect affected everybody in Farrell.

S: Yes, it did. I can't really recall any individual during these riots that was physically harmed. I really can't recall anyone. Now there may have been some, but I'm not really sure. I don't think there was.

R: Is there any rudiment that you know which attempted to better the racial relations and prevent the riots in Farrell other than the Black Youth Action Committee? Civic groups or church groups, other than all black groups, any white groups?

S: Well, let me say this. When the mayor and council finally did decide to meet with this Black Youth Action Committee,

one agency did come forward with support and that was the Shenango Valley Urban League. Their executive director at the time was Ernest Prince and he did come forward at that time and very articulately stated the Urban League's purpose, which I think most people knew. But he did pledge his support openly and in public at that meeting. I don't recall the NAACP coming forward and doing that. We've got some inherent problems with that organization anyway. At the present time the president of the NAACP is employed by the city, so how much is he going to speak out anyway.

R: Looking back now at the 1960's and the whole racial tension scene and the violence, what changes would you have liked to have seen instituted in the neighborhood possibly to prevent it, to better the situation?

S: The chief thing, probably the most important thing, was for these people to get jobs. It's still the most critical point among minorities. If they can get jobs, and not just minimum wage jobs, but if they can be mainstreamed into the employment area, be able to make enough money to live comfortably, I think you can alleviate a great deal of the frustrations that these people feel. Once you eliminate the economic problems of not being able to feed your family properly, of not being able to house your family properly, then a person can go a long way and deal with the other items. You know, being able to have two cars, take a nice vacation every year, all the luxuries that you get from moving up to the middle class. But when a community does not provide decent jobs for its people, does not provide adequate housing, then you've got to expect to have problems in that community. I think those conditions exist in this community right now, just as they did in 1968.

R: Your basic employer is Sharon Steel?

S: That is correct.

R: Is the employment situation still as bad?

S: Yes.

R: With all the equal opportunity?

S: That's right. We still have hundreds of young black adults standing around on corners without jobs.

R: The education is there, but now they don't know. So the number one cause would be economics?

S: That's right.

R: Because they can't provide themselves with their basic necessities. I can understand that. It's very logical. You

can't eat, you can't have a roof over your head.

S: That's right.

R: Do you think there was any way that this could have been changed around? Have things changed at all in Farrell? Is there any representation now in city government? Is there any better hiring?

S: The 1970's have changed in this community. You will find now that there are a number of minority people that have decent jobs in this town. After the riots, some how, the city of Farrell lost a city councilman. I don't recall whether it was through death or he moved out of town or whatever, but there was a vacancy for a councilman and a lot of people applied for that vacancy. I'm not sure I have the facts right, but a black person by the name of William Hyde was appointed to council. I can't recall--I'm not sure about this--but city council did not appoint him. City council, according to the third class city code or whatever they were working under at that time, had like thirty days or sixty days to appoint someone to the vacant seat. If I recall this correctly, they couldn't make a decision. They ended up going to Mercer and I think Judge Stanahan ended up picking the appointee to council and he picked the black guy, William Hyde. And this was after the riots.

R: Why do you think they wanted him?

S: For some reason council could not reach a decision on who the appointee should be.

R: Because they were elected, do you think they feared that if they were to pick a black guy that the white neighborhoods wouldn't reelect them?

S: I hope not. Farrell has never had precinct or ward voting. Everyone was elected at large. You know, so everyone who was running had the entire city to draw from for votes. You didn't have a selective bunch. The town has always been very ethnic oriented. The Italians vote in block, then you know one Italian is going to be elected. The Polish people vote in block, you know one Pole is going to be elected.

R: Yes, Farrell is something; sort of a melting pot.

S: Yes, it is.

R: With all the different minorities do you think any of the other minorities faced some of the same discrimination that the black minority did?

S: I'm sure they did.

- R: How about the race relations themselves now in Farrell? We know that the employment situations are much better and the economic situation is similar to what it was in the late 1960's. How about the race relations now? Do you think they have changed between black and white at all? For better or worse?
- S: In my short 33 years of life there has never been a real definable black-white problem in Farrell, contrary to what everybody thinks; there has never been a real definable black-white problem. In this town you will always see blacks and whites socially together, at most places. That's most places, not all places certainly, but in most places you'll find this.
- No one even mentions the fact that a black guy and a white guy are sitting somewhere having breakfast together or over each other's house having coffee together, or my kid sleeps with so-and-so's kid and he's white. You don't hear that type of stuff. It doesn't get reported in the paper. I think this has always existed in this community.
- R: People outside only want to hear about thefts?
- S: Yes, they want to hear about the difficulties that you're having, not about the good things that your community is doing.
- R: I think the general feeling I get from people I talk to is that things are as bad in Farrell as people outside of Farrell think they are.
- S: That's right and they aren't; they never have been.
- R: Well, that is basically about all the questions I have. Is there anything else that you think important to add that we didn't cover?
- S: I really can't think of anything.
- R: Okay. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW