**UMBC Course Cultural Documentation in Participation with Communities (AMST 358)**

**April 1st, 2013**

**Speed’s Barber and Beauty, Turner Station, MD**

Interviewers: Oumar Ballo **(OB),** AMST 358, and Michelle Stefano **(MS)**

Interviewee: Courtney Leigh Speed **(CS)**

Transcriber: Ashley Sippel, AMST 358, UMBC

**[0:20] CS:** My name is Courtney Leigh Speed, L-e-i-g-h.

**[0:25] OB:** What brought you to Turner Station?

**[0:30] CS:** Love. Love for my husband. I was living in the city on east side and he came to the city to get a manicure, not only did he come one week but came another week and then after the third time the ladies in the salon said, I was not married then, Miss Jackson I think he has eyes for you. I said oh no he doesn’t, he’s coming to get a manicure and that’s it. But fast forward, it ended up we got married and I moved to Turner Station in the 1960s.

**[1:09] OB:** Now was that the shop or was that somewhere else?

**[1:13] CS:** At the barber and beauty shop he was an existent barber and he liked to be referred to as a tonsorialist. This is a picture of my husband, John Emmitt Speed, Jr. who started the barber shop in the 1940s.

**[1:49] OB:** How has Turner Station developed differently to you?

**[2:02] CS:** When I came in the 60s there were a few businesses, and this is what we’re interested in, redeveloping the businesses. There were several businesses but as many as they had they were on decline. And the area, I had really never heard of Turner Station, and I found it to be the ideal place to raise a family because of the faith of the community and the way it had been set up financially and they would always have celebrations where you could have food and fun. So those five ‘F’ words were the things that I observed when I came to Turner Station. Faith, family, finance, food and fun.

**[3:10] MS:** Would you Oumar a little bit about the history of Turner Station as you know it?

**[3:14] CS:** I can tell you Oumar, a little bit about history as I know it and from my husband an oral historian. He came here in the 30s and I understand back in that time there weren’t any streets or there weren’t as many residents as it was later in the 30s to 40s because I understand that they had few schools and most of them had to go to other areas to go to school. And there were several churches and during that time there was a growth of the residents from about 12000 to 15000 by the 50s.

**[4:15] OB:** How has Turner Station developed differently or is it the same?

**[4:20] CS:** Oh, it was developed differently because of a man that i was told about by a very good friend Mary Coleman who told me about her uncle, great great uncle Anthony Thomas and if I could be allowed to read from the script, I would like to do that. [...] I would just like to read about Anthony Thomas which was brought to us by his great niece Mary Coleman. It says ‘Anthony Thomas the father, 1857-1937. Anthony Thomas was born on the eastern shore of Maryland and came to Baltimore in the 1880s where he worked at Sparrows Point as a rigger foreman. Now that was extraordinary because this wasn't too far from slavery time, 1880s and not only was he a darker black man because back during that time there were a lot of the men and women who were from integrated families, even at that time and they would use a word called passing, well theres no mistake that this is a black man. So he was a rigger but not just a rigger, he was a foreman and that was extraordinary for someone during that period. In his work at Bethlehem Steel, which a lot of people came later to be employed, he worked in Buffalo, New York and in Australia. That’s phenomenal. He and his wife Annie Green Thomas had six children and were pioneers in the Turner Station community and that community grew from 12000 to 15000 persons in the industrialized southwest section of Baltimore. Mr. Thomas was one of the founders of the area’s first building associations, so we take that business in mind. The tuxedo savings and loan which helped area pioneers to build homes which mean they had to purchase the land and to build homes, this is what he advocated. And he helped build Saint Matthews M.E. church, which is located right across the street from us now and he opened a grocery store and a real estate office. That was extra phenomenal and a perfect base for this area called Turner Station. [...]

**[9:06] OB:** I would like to ask you about the steel mill, were you involved with any of the workers or..?

**[9:16] CS:** I was involved with the worker as a part of them being our clientele at the barber shop and the beauty salon. so there were females that became employed later in the life of Bethlehem Steel. So we serviced those females and males who were employed at Bethlehem Steel and when they would come over there were many accounts that they would tell us about and when you were employed at Bethlehem Steel you were top of the [eschalants] working community. And there were some that were [...] that lived in the city and they would tell how they would have a brown bag in their hands and in order to get to Sparrows Point they would hold their bag up and that someone who had a car, on their way to Sparrows Point, even though they were not acquainted with them, they would pick them up. The brown bag was the transportation signal and I thought that was really great because nowadays you cannot do the hitch hiking or anything, not too many people that you can trust but there was a trust factor with the employees that were at Sparrows Point. And then as they would have conversations they would tell about some of the dangers of Sparrows Point and they would tell about some of the hot hot jobs that was given to the blacks only and then they would tell about how many workers were killed but it was never reported. And it was a daily death for those who were employees of Bethlehem Steel and we will never know that number because those that have worked there, a lot of them are gone now and so has the Bethlehem Steel, the historic Bethlehem Steel is no longer operating.

**[11:42] OB:** Could you tell us a little bit about the start of Turner Station? How people came over to this area, just the whole development of it.

**[11:54] CS:** I can tell you a little bit because actually we have written four books on Turner Station and this community. I really don’t think they realize the importance that they have on the impact of the world. It started with a man named Joshua Turner who had purchased this land back in the 1800s and he had purchased it for a guano which is pigeon droppings and this was fertilized land. He had an office in the city at that time and would still go back way into the 1800s and you can imagine the smell that was prevalent not only in this area but for miles away. But there was a lot of farmland near so the fertilizer was to be used for the different orchard farms. I understand there were apple farms and different vegetable farms not too far from here. So Joshua Turner as I understand, from the records that we had read, had set up a station for the employees that were employed at Sparrows Point and thus this is how the name came about, Turner Station after Joshua Turner. Now there are different accounts that we found concerning that name and they are in the books that we had written but I think Jerome Watson, Edy Brooks and I worked on that along with Mr. Diggs who has another book, ‘The Meadow to the Point’, came to the conclusion that the credit goes to Joshua Turner for the name Turner Station. And thats Turner Station without an ‘s’ because there were many that had turner’s with an apostrophe ‘s’, turners, but we found that since it was Joshua Turner and it is listed out in Towson as Turner Station.

**[14:36] OB:** Could you also tell us a little about the surrounding neighborhoods, any stories?

**[14:45] CS:** The surrounding neighborhoods would be Waters Edge and Logan Village and there is another are called Saint Helena, and that takes us up to the bridge that divides the city from the county on Dundalk Avenue. So we can start either way, St. Helena, Logan Village, oh I’m sorry I forgot historic Dundalk is in between there too which is named after a town in Dunalk, Ireland. As a matter of fact we just had a celebration of St. Patrick’s Day that included the Dundalk name for this area.

**[15:55] MS:** Well talk about the barber shop maybe a little later in the barber shop but would you mind describing the space we’re in now?

**[16:02] CS:** The space we’re in right now is a historic [...] confectionary store it was called and I was blessed to take care of this lady before she left to go to glory. Her name is Martha Ullman, her husband Thomas had this store and it started out as the store on the top floor. and she went out to Towson and let them know that she wanted to open the store. She said they suggested to her that they dig and make the store in the basement so they allowed, because there were no basements in the area because this is low flood plain property so they made a variance for her to dig and put the store in this lower level, you always have to keep the sump pump on. But her name is Martha Ullman and there is a picture. I’m sorry I don’t have a picture of her husband with this but this historic lady lived to be 101 years old, and I loved it because she advocated no credit cards. She said if you don’t have money to pay for it, save your money until you get it.The homes that they purchased and the cars that they purchased they were Chrysler people and they would have enough money to pay cash when they went to a dealer. So therefore they could negotiate with this big wad of money that they had in their hands and they did not have any children and they really wanted to adopt my husband, but she said they didn’t do it and regretted really not adopting him. So when it came time for her to know that she was gonna go to glory she sold this whole corner to our family, the Speed family and we are so grateful because we are trying to restore it at this time, as we speak to replicate the things that she had in here. This was a full service grocery store. The counter that’s behind you is the original counter, the shelves are the original shelves, they were hand built and she had the store stocked from floor to top. On the left side was the deli counter and they had meat chopping, that they could get a whole carcass of meat and a bandsaw to give the cut or chops or beef whatever. They had a ground grinder that would grind the beef to make the hamburger meat. Then the window where we are proposing to put the Henrietta Lacks heela cafe, had hams that came from Smithville, VA. People would come from miles around, especially at New Years Eve time. You know the custom of the African would be the ham hopps and black eyes peas that she would have the ham and the peas to have during that period of time. And then she had all kind of little candies, which we are trying to get some of those nostalgic candies in the showcase now because she too catered to children and this is what we’re trying to do. But the store was a full service grocery store [...].

**[20:29] MS:** Could you talk about a few of the things around us that we see?

**[20:40] CS:** Around you, you see the incubator for the Henrietta Lacks Museum and there will be other displays of all the families that resided in Turner Station so this is the incubator for the Henrietta Lacks museum that we are proposing to erect before 2019. And I would like to say our little line for that, ‘we too, have a vision and a dream to create over 100 business ministries by 2019.’ So we started this in 2012 so we have another 6 years which was at first a total of 7 years which in the scriptures is the year of completion. We also use this as a training center for children, and not just children we try to take their whole family so we can be an impact also on those families who are on social service. Right now its called SNAP and we are trying to train the whole families at the work ethics of our culture and to have another means to show them that they can earn a living for themselves and not depend upon the federal, state or county to take care of them. Because when God gives you a gift you have to enhance it and with that improvement you can stay employed until Jesus comes! You can start a business with family even if you are carrying your child and not only that, you’re not limited in age with the working law, I forget what it is, you have to be 14 or 15 with a work permit but when you train your children from zero age bring them up in the bassinette and have them around the environment that you want them to see and model that for them then they grow up knowing that work ethics is something that can be passed on to the next generation. As we have read in Deuteronomy 6, four generations deep we’re supposed to leave the skills, and the ethics and heritage and legacies to our families.

**[23:40] MS:** Could you talk a little bit about yourself, I know that you are a bit of a historian of Turner Station and also a community leader, can you speak about that a little bit?

**[23:56] CS:** Oh wow thats a lot to say that I am because I consider not to be because I was not born or raised in Turner Station but I love this community and I feel that if we do not record the history or the legacies, or the habits, or the work work ethics we will lose it, and we will be losing a tremendous diamond, a joy that would be [...]

**[23:31] MS:** I’m wondering about your role in this community, obviously your very interested in preserving the history, and displaying the history for people to learn so I just want you to speak about your role in this community.

**[24:48] CS:** I feel my role, as a widow now, that not only do I teach about this community to our children but my biological grandchildren and my spiritual grandchildren. And not only the biological and the spiritual but the state children, and not only the biological, spiritual and the state but the world. We must reach the world and see what we can to to hold on to our basic foundation because theres so much change going on that the younger children in the next generation, they are losing their POR. And the POR stands for your point of reference, and thats what I think I’m here for, as a point of reference. After three scoring ten, of which I am, we have to make sure that the next generation experienced some of the things we experienced. That’s why, at the Speed center, we train the children to do things manually because there may come a time there will not be any electricity and this has happened many times with storms. But when we have a storm, we light a candle and customers still come in to make purchases. They have been taught how to write the purchases down and use the manual addition and subtraction to forge on.

**[27:01] MS:** Could you briefly introduce who Henrietta Lacks was?

**[27:12] CS:** Oh a phenomenal woman, mother, grandmother, great grandmother of whom I have met. If we could go to a picture again and I could show you her family. BBC had come over, and just think about this, BBC British Broadcasting Company they came the air, on the boat, on the train whatever transportation they took from there to America. Then once they get to America how would they, or why would they come to a state called Maryland. Once they got to Maryland why would they look for a place called Dundalk? And after Dundalk why would they look for a little town called Turner Station? And it was all because of a lady named Henrietta Lacks. When I was at the Barber and Beauty Salon, this is where they came. I had no idea, this was in 1997, I had no idea of who Henrietta Lacks was. So I had a cousin who graduated from Johns Hopkins, and she had minored in research so I said ‘oh God thank you for sending Dr. Barbara D. White a new cousin’. So she was elated as much as I was because I told her the day before BBC had come to ask me about this lady named Henrietta Lacks, so I asked her, would she find out who this lady is. So not only by the next day she had found out who Henrietta Lacks is, she found the family over in East Baltimore. So she brought Deborah Lacks down, who had been working, trying to get information out to the world about her mother. She was so forlorn because Johns Hopkins had taken her mother’s cells when she had cancer and was waited on, she was a little child she was around about four years old, and they had her come there for the treatment for the cancer that she had and Dr. Guy’s researching to try and find a cure for cancer. At that time, he was unsuccessful because the cells that he had been using, they would die right away which did not give him time to get any concrete information. But after the death of Henrietta Lacks, he took some of those cells without asking the family, and not only did he use them he passed them on to others so they could use them. And as of today, Henrietta Lacks cells are still being used. They replicate and they have been used for the cure of Polio, used in the Polio vaccine, used in the in vitro fertilization, in the HIV research and the cloning and just so many other things.

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**[0:00] MS:** So when you’re ready, say your name and introduce yourself again.

**CS:** Okay. My name is Courtney Leigh, L-E-I-G-H, Speed. And I reside in Turner Station, MD and I've been here since 1960’s.

**[0:17] MS:** Great. Would you mind describing where we are right now? Saying the name of the place. And talk a little bit about its history.

**CS:** Ah wow. This is the Mecca place for conversations and I found a book the other night dated back to 1948 that my husband was having meetings here with some of his uh friends in the community called the comrades. And wow what a discovery. So this barber shop served as the meeting centre and as the political conversation and religious conversation and maybe in between there you might get a haircut.

**[1:02] MS:** Would you tell me a little bit about your husband’s history with Turner Station and with this barber shop?

**CS:** The best that I can recall from what my husband had told me uh they came here from Isle of Wight, Virginia where he was born. And um his father had come up for employment at the Bethlehem Steel Company and when he was five years old his mother passed so my husband was sort of a semi-...(1:35, unclear) at that time. But that was in the thirties and because he was born um April the 23rd, 1925 and during that time they, the community, the village, they raised their own children so several families took my husband in when he was five years old and helped raise him and one of the families that I um I do remember was the Holmes family, and there was um Milton Holmes who they grew up like brothers who is now, which is another story, um one of the Tuskegee Airman, Milton Holmes is. There's so much richness in this community. Uh my husband uh went to Booker T. um Elementary or Junior High school in the city because I think at that time they did not have too many junior high schools or high schools in the community in the 30’s. So they trans...they had transit to go to the city to go to the schools. And that will bring us up to maybe about when he was 19 years old. The Almons, who we had talked about in our previous presentation, had wanted to adopt him but they didn’t. But they still looked out for him so they actually built this barber shop here for him. He’s the only one that has occupied this original building and this was built in the last thirties early forties. And um Speed’s Barber Shop was erected for him when he was 19 years old.

**[3:29] MS:** And what did you do here? What was your first encounter with this barber shop here?

**CS:** Oh goodness. I didn’t meet him until years later in the sixties actually some of the barbers that he had trained here uh was working in the city and it was a beauty and barber shop set up similar to this one and I was working there so uh one of the barbers said uh they used to call him a nickname “beanie boy”, “Beanie Boy, go next door. There is a girl over there”. Because in his first marriage they were uh ending it and then uh they thought he would need another wife so they sent him over uh to get a manicure and as I told you before, with these three manicures it led into marriage. Isn’t that something? From manicures to marriage. The M and M. And um I came here because of the same profession that I had, I brought the clients from the city. Some of the clients came and some of them said they have heard about Turner Station and said, “I'm not coming all the way down there cause they don’t even have streets”. Well that was at one time that they did not have streets but by the 60’s they did have streets and sidewalks here. And that’s how I came to Turner Station by marriage. Yes.

**[4:59] MS:** And what did you do here?

**CS:** I am a cosmetologist. So I worked on the other side, the other side of this petition is a um beauty salon. And I would babysit our children along with working with the clients and the clients were so kind to us. They would help change diapers, and uh even though I breast-fed at that time I had uh milk that I would pump and they would feed them the bottles when I was waiting on uh them for beauty service. And um we have had this salon ever since the sixties when I came so that’s what we did here. He was on the barber side and I was on the beauty salon side... (phone rings).

**[6:20] MS:** Okay, so let’s see. Would you mind speaking again, maybe a little more in depth about the connection between Sparrows Point and Turner Station as well as with this barber shop?

**CS:** Sparrows Point, Turner Station and the barber shop is a triplet that really helped the community to know what was happening because at the barber shop and Sparrows Point, they would always come here to find out what was happening sort of as a grapevine. And I know a lot of people think that women talk a lot oh my goodness you should be hearing sometimes the buzzing that went on in this barber shop. So it was information center, it was education center and it was uh last but not least a place a grooming center. Because during that time when shoes used to be shined my husband had um shoe shine in the back and a lot of younger teenagers, that would be their first job. They would sweep the floor, do the windows, clean off the stand, clean off the chairs and um do shoe shine. So here again, I like the comradery that was experienced in the barber shop because it was like bulls talking to the younger bulls and they would have bull sessions. They would help the young men to know the male, the role of the male the role of the African American or the Africa male and they would explain to them how they did cooking, sewing. Everything that needed to be done to have a successful home and marriage was discussed in here. There was not a TV at that time. It was not the “Days of Our Lives”, you know, it was the days of their lives. And the bulls all came from different backgrounds other than Sparrows Point. They had officers that would set up um their own surveillance um auxiliary police and they had doctors and lawyers, morticians and um men that had their coal business, their refuse sanitation. All of them would meet here. So the children, the young men had a chance to sit at the elder’s feet and watch and hear them talk which instilled a lot of work ethics for them because it was modeled for them. They weren’t, and when I came, even in the sixties there was not a high crime rate in this community and it’s about two miles wide and two miles long and we’re a peninsula, water on three sides which is the water that flows from the inner harbor. The Chesapeake Bay, um so the men would take them fishing and a lot of the meals was caught you know right at their back door and that was as fresh as you could get. And a lot of them talked about planting vegetables and they did. And when I came I could walk from the street that I lived, Chestnut Street, and I could literally eat my breakfast because there were apple trees, pear trees and through the ally that I came through, there is a grape harbor and a mulberry tree and the fruit would come different seasons and next door, Mr. Moore had a garden and you could pluck off a part of his collard greens, he had all kinds of fruits and vegetables as you were walking through the community. So uh there was food and everything that was brought here to the barber and beauty salon yes.

**[10:46] MS:** That’s great. So um you mentioned earlier that you on the other side of this shop you worked with, your clients who were women that worked at Sparrows Point. I’m curious what you learned about Sparrows Point through them or from them, what they talked about?

**CS:** Oh they talked about…and one of them who is still one of our clients, Ms. Francis Almon talked about how it was just like family there. The family from Turner Station, Sparrows Point and from the city carried over into the workplace in Sparrows Point and she said they were just like family and there were some of the jobs that they men would look out for them that they did not want them to do and whenever there was some grievance they had a grievance committee that would help them out also. And we had several of the foremen that was born and raised here in Turner Station and there has been books written about them. The Parish family was one of the leading families, one of the largest families here in Turner Station. And they too had a grocery store and everybody seemed to have a gift that God had given them and like I said they would enhance it to use it for employment not only for themselves but for their families. And I think their size of the family was recorded as the largest or next to the largest, I forget right now. But um sixteen children raised here and this beautiful community of Turner Station which was the lowest crime community in the Dundalk area.

**[12:44] MS:** So one of my last questions would be, I don’t know if Oumar you have some or anyone else, you mentioned earlier this idea of legacies of Turner Station. Could you describe what some of these legacies are? What do you want people to know about Turner Station?

**CS:** Okay. The things I want them to know I have to go back to my POR, my point of reference, when I came here and I saw the faith, the family, the finance, the food and the fun that they had. During holidays if you were not a part of their family a lot of the families would have cookouts and if you walk through where they were cooking their food, you were welcome to share in the food that they had. And I would want them to remember about the faith of our fathers because without the faith it is not going to survive and that would be a point of reference. With the six sons that I was widowed to raise, uh I loved it. And I didn’t like the way they treated me. Not helping me from the federal, state or county but God has a plan that’s already recorded in the Bible so we took the book of Proverbs and read that. This is what we raised our children with and that was the main book but the other books that are available. Uh how to have your marriage is in Ephesians 4, 5 and 6. How the children are to respond to the parents and then how the parents is not to aggravate the children so that they become rebellious and these are the things that I would want them to know. There are many books that has been written but the one who created us would be the smarter one, I would think that we should use that POR in order to raise our families and to get married and stay married till death do us part.

**[14:54] MS:** One last question. I apologize. Could you talk a little bit about how the closure of Sparrows Point has affected Turner Station?

**CS:** Oh wow, devastating as it has been all over adjoining communities because Sparrows Point was the main employer for the employees here in Turner Station. And even though the elders were able to purchase their homes and raise their children and send them off to college with um the salaries they earned at Sparrows Point. So the next generation had become employed but now were at the point there is not employment in this area which is inclusive with Westinghouse…General Motors and Martins Airport are the surrounding larger employers for those of us who are not god-employed or self-employed. So it’s been a tremendous impact upon those who were employed and then supporting support for their families. So um all over the world that has affected Sparrows Point, Bethlehem Steel closing.

**[16:35] MS:** Oumar, do you have any questions or anyone else?

**[16:38] OB:** Oh yes. Um I was going to ask you one main thing. Now we know this barber shop played an important role when first established. Um does it continue to play an important role to this community as of now?

**CS:** Absolutely because I really think we are the only business that is set up that still existed during that era. And we have one of the last of the barbers here from the era and at the end of this I will show you his picture. And um we have um two other ladies that is employed here and we continue to see what we can do to recreate in order to stay employed and to reach out to the next generation is what we are trying to do now. Because we want to transfer this salon to a younger generation of um cosmetologists and tonsorialist. So this is the place where the community brings the news. We put flyers in the windows as you can see and if there is information concerning some of the activities that is going on we get it by phone and we spread it orally and we refer to that as the grapevine. So that’s the importance that we still have. But I like to share also too this is the barber shop that Rebecca Skloot, the last one to write the book that your school has been uh what’s the word, not compelled but adopted to read. This is the barber shop that she came to when she wrote her book and we are, I am in chapter nine and this is the TV that she watched the film on and when I left her here I knew she would be safe. But um I didn’t want her to be disturbed so I closed the door in order that she could watch the BBC presentation or documentation that was done in ’97. But for her to get information about the Lacks family, about the (unclear) and the area that she could find more information about in Clover Field, Virginia and Halifax, Virginia. And it was so important for Deborah who was so sad because she all she wanted to do was get the information out about her mother and for the world to know who Henrietta Lacks is and for the world to know this is and was a black woman, and this is and was her mother. And I have, and we have been working with um the grandchildren, Jerry Lacks and the sons, Sonny Lacks, Laurence Lacks and um Zacary, and the nephews, and we will continue to see what we can do to keep the legacy and the heritage of Henrietta Lacks going so we can advocate for the family which they are not getting any compensation. So did anyone else have a question?

**[20:24] MS:** That was excellent, thank you so much.