

(INTERVIEW WITH LEON BRADLEY)  
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED OCTOBER 1991)

(BRADLEY) I came to Detroit in 1959... from Flint. Do you know where Flint is? Sixty miles up the pike. Flint was getting too small. Detroit was a little bigger, lights were brighter. Truly, I was on my way to New York. I got out of the cab down at 12th and Pingree, down at my brother's barbershop, saw them lights on 12th Street and said, "Broadway ain't no brighter than this." And I've been there ever since.

My brother and I opened our own shop on 12th Street and stayed until 1968, and the powers that be told us we had to move.

What was 12th Street like? I ain't never been to heaven but I'll tell you what, that's what I visualize heaven as being.

Everything happened. Twelfth Street stayed open twenty-four hours a day. On West Grand Boulevard. to Clairmount... were wall to wall night clubs, everything. Anything that you wanted was right there. I never had to go downtown to buy nothing! Because what wasn't in the store there on the corner... they'd bring it to the barbershop, everything. Twelfth Street was fantastic! We had night ladies, we had day ladies, we had everything. Everything was on Twelfth St. It was real fast times.

During that time the barbershop and the church were the focal points of the whole Black thing. All the good stuff, went on at the church and all the bad stuff went on at the barbershop.

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Numbers, dope, prostitution.... everything! You could get anything. You could go to any barbershop on 12th St. and get anything you wanted. You just come in and make your order and come back in twenty minutes and pick it up... whatever it was.

I had a brother that had two books. He had a book of people that wanted stuff. You want a mink coat, write that over here. Now, he knowed dudes that stealed mink coats. That's how he made a living just booking it up.

He was a hustler. We call him a hustler, you'd call him a coordinator. He'd put the two people together and he'd make 10% for selling your stuff and a 10% finders fee from over here. He didn't do nothing, just sit up there... make two phone calls... boom boom... get the money.

We had a dude what you'd call a "dog man." Used to walk the alleys... find out what kind of dog you've got. And I don't care how bad your dog was... he could steal your dog. Now, that's a fact. I don't know how he'd do that. People come in there and order... they want a female doberman... call "dog man", he'd know to go down on Edison between 12th and 14th... had a female doberman in the yard. He'd go down there and steal that man's damn dog. And he'd never get bit... I don't understand how he could do that. We had two guys steal pianos. You want a piano, they get you a piano. I'm serious... anything... we'd get you anything. And you know, a car went like nothing. We'll get you a car in twenty minutes.

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You had some guys come and meet you at the barbershop in the morning. They'd do that when I'd get there, "We're ready to play checkers." Had to put 'em out at night. Old man would just set right there and play checkers all day and all night. We had to make room for 'em. You had to have X-number of square feet for the customers and X-number of square feet for the checker players.

We could have stayed on Twelfth St., the business people didn't want to go, that was in the plan. We didn't want to go. We wanted to stay there. They wouldn't allow us to stay there. They just told us we had to go. I asked Nicholas Hood in a meeting, "Where would you have me go?"

"They don't give a damn where you go, just got to go." So, we just had to go. And they didn't give us time, you know what I'm saying? They said, "You've gotta be out of here by Monday."

Cavanaugh was Mayor during the riot. If we had had a different Mayor, Cavanaugh tried to be a nice guy. A different Mayor might have..... I don't think the riot that day would have happened. It might have happened later in the year but not that day, because the police were aware that it was happening but they didn't come onto 12th St. They didn't arrest nobody for a couple of days.

At that time, I was opened on Sunday and closed on Saturday. We moved out on Friday night and opened up Sunday morning up on the Boulevard.

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The barber's the expert. The barber's a low paid shrink. You tell me your problem and I'll solve it. It's easy, same as a shrink.

People have always had problems with their kids. And I don't know... we never paid any attention to our parents... I don't understand why we think our kids should pay attention to us. Everybody's always had problems with their kids. Nobody's ever had enough money... never. You look at the economic situation and nobody ever has enough money.

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If you were a customer of mine and you don't have the money, I'd give you a haircut rather than let you run a tab because, invariably, you'll lose your tab and you'll lose your customer. It's easier for you to find another barbershop than it is to come and pay me.

Rather than do that, if you're a good customer, been coming around for years, what the hell, it's cut in a few minutes. I'd give you a haircut, no big deal. Then you'll have no reason not to come back when you get some money next time. I've seen that happen to..... you know, just in friends. They borrow a guy's money. He don't have the money to pay 'em, so, you avoid the guy.

Ask for the money, or you gotta tell another lie why you can't pay him. So, there's a friendship broken up, couple bucks. So, rather than have you lose your friendship, lose you as a customer... I cut your hair. What's it take but ten

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minutes... not doing anything anyway. I cut your hair, you're cool with me, next time you need a haircut you'll come back.