

Interview with **Daniel Schorr**

Date: December 5, 1988

Interviewer: Paul Stekler

Camera Rolls: 429-430

Sound Rolls: 4073

Team: D

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

**Preferred Citation**

Interview with Daniel Schorr, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on December 5, 1988 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

**Note:** These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #4073]

[sound roll #429]

00:00:13:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it please.

[slate]

00:00:15:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's start right, right with the press conference. Tell me about the press conference and what happened.

00:00:21:00

Daniel Schorr:

February seventh, Martin Luther King came to Washington and he gave a press conference to announce that there was going to a Poor People's March on Washington, a march that he would not live to lead. At this press conference, network reporters, including myself, constantly pushed him to try to say something as militant as possible. We were interested in getting the kind of sound bites that would get on the evening news. And in fact, as I went

back over the script of that day, I realized that we did get him to say things like, The first phase of this march would be educational and then if that didn't work, that it would be disruptive, that they were going to stay in Washington until they got a response. When the press conference was over, I was waiting for my camera crew to pack up and saw Reverend King sitting there looking somewhat disconsolate. And I walked up to him, sitting at the table there and asked why he s-seemed to be so mournful. And he said, Well it's because of what you people in television are doing. He said, I don't know if you are aware of it but you keep driving people like me, who are non-violent, into saying more and more militant things and if we don't say things militantly enough for you, we don't get on the evening news. And who does? Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown. By doing this, you are first of all, selecting the more militant Black leaders to be civil rights leaders because everybody sees your television programs, and secondly, you're putting a premium on violence. That gave me a lot of think about.

00:01:52:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut. Cut.

[cut]

[slate]

00:01:56:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah, just a second.

00:01:59:00

Interviewer:

You can probably, I think you can probably take it, take it from, "The press conference ended."

00:02:04:00

Daniel Schorr:

OK. When the press conference was over, I waited for my camera crew to pack up. I had come with them. And the room was empty by this time but the Reverend King sat at the table looking rather reflectively out, and a little mournfully, I thought. And I walked up to him and said, Excuse me, you don't seem very happy. He said, No, I'm not very happy and you're part of the reason why I'm not very happy. What did that mean? And then he said, almost

verbatim but not necessarily verbatim, he said, I don't know whether you people realize what you're doing when you try to poke at me, trying to get me to say something about disruption and about possible violence and about blocking bridges and about scaring all the White folk here in Washington. That may be what you need today, but by selecting that, and by selecting people who say that, like Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, you're appointing our Black leaders and they're not necessarily the non-violent ones. And you're also putting a premium on militant statements and perhaps militant action. And if that's what you want to do he said, well you go ahead and do it. But it's not what we're here to do.

00:03:32:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK. Mark it.

[slate]

00:03:37:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK. Just a second. OK, Paul.

00:03:41:00

Interviewer:

OK, about the press conference that day. And again, a relaxed, conversational description.

Daniel Schorr:

After the press conference was over?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

00:03:50:00

Interviewer:

When the press conference was over, I was waiting for my camera crew to pack up, I'd come with them. The room was now empty but the Reverend King sat alone at the table from which he had spoken. He looked rather reflective and disconsolate. I went up and asked him whether he was unhappy about something. He said, Yes, among other things, you. And proceeded to explain that he was aware that we, network people, had been pushing him to say constantly more militant things, threatening disruption, maybe violence. And that he had to defend himself against that, at the same time being aware, that if he was going to get on the evening news, that it would be only if he said something rather militant. He said, You know, I hope you know what you're doing. He said, You are giving greatest attention to those Black leaders who sound most militant, like Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, and those of us in the movement who are non-violent, and want to uphold non-violence realize that you may be appointing others as our leaders. What you also may be doing is putting a premium on militant talk and maybe overly militant action. And so, if there is trouble in this country, I hope you people know what part you played.

00:05:10:00

Interviewer:

That's great. OK. Cut.

[cut]

00:05:14:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:05:17:00

Interviewer:

OK. So, we're in late May in Resurrection City and you're covering the March to the Agriculture Departments, and you're talking about, you're becoming aware of Jesse Jackson. Just what happened when he got there?

00:05:29:00

Daniel Schorr:

As part of our continuing coverage of Resurrection City, the Poor People's March, which by now, had become my continuing assignment for CBS. On this day, they organized the march

up to the Department of Agriculture. They had been there before but several hundred people went up there. On this occasion, we had not been forewarned, on this occasion, they went down to the cafeteria, lined up, took trays, went through the line, and everybody said, the Reverend Jackson will pay. There was a Reverend Jesse Jackson there. I had not been really aware of him very much before. He'd come into the whole Poor People's Campaign rather late from Chicago. What he did was to collect all these checks from these, that these people had for their food, adding up to a few hundred dollars, and then announcing that they weren't gonna pay, that this was something which the government owed the poor people of America. It didn't sit well, I was told, with the leadership of the Poor People's March headed by the Reverend Ralph Abernathy with the result that Jackson then disappeared for a week. I was told he was sent back to Chicago. He later reappeared on the scene in time for the wind-up of the Poor People's March leading some of the people up to Capitol Hill to be arrested.

00:06:40:00

Interviewer:

Now, it was on this march that he was leading people chanting?

Daniel Schorr:

Yes.

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, hold it. We're gonna change ca—sound.

Interviewer:

OK. We're gonna change sound.

[cut]

Daniel Schorr:

I can just add that. I can, I come right out and add it. Just get a different, get a different—

00:06:51:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:06:55:00

Interviewer:

OK, the Department of Agriculture.

00:07:00:00

Daniel Schorr:

Mired down in mud and misery, the people in Resurrection City clearly needed some action to lift their spirits. So, every now and then, somebody would come and organize something for them to do. On this day, late in May, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, of whom I had not been aware before this date, took three hundred of them, they marched up to the Department of Agriculture. ***He took them down to the cafeteria, they picked up trays.*** I saw Jackson tell them to go and go through the line and to give all the checks to him. And so, one by one, they took food, they went through the check-out counter, and they pointed to Jackson who was standing there, a tall, six-footer, you know, nodding, smiling and they said, He's got the check for all of us. ***And when they'd all gone through the line, Jackson took a megaphone and he announced to everybody, OK, he said. This government owes us a lot. And they've just begin to pay a little bit of it with this lunch.*** I think the check added up to about three-hundred-odd dollars. When the Resurrection City ended, there was still, the Department of Agriculture was still trying to collect this unpaid debt from the Poor People's Campaign.

00:08:10:00

Interviewer:

Let's take it to the last day of Resurrection City and you're, you're walking up to Capitol Hill with Jesse, what are you hearing? What are you seeing and what happens?

00:08:21:00

Daniel Schorr:

Resurrection City got a one-week extension of its permit to camp out at the Lincoln Memorial. But clearly, this thing had to come an end and the only question was how? And now, once again, Jesse Jackson appeared on the scene. Between the Department of Agriculture incident. Let me, let me start that again.

00:08:38:00

Interviewer:

Why don't you pick it up right there?

Daniel Schorr:

OK.

Interviewer:

You don't need to tell us where you'd been.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Do you want me to make a—

Interviewer:

No. That's all right.

00:08:42:00

Daniel Schorr:

All right.

00:08:42:00

Interviewer:

Oh, yeah. Sure, sure. Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Just a second. OK.

00:08:51:00

Daniel Schorr:

On the last day, one group of the people of Resurrection City were formed to march up to Capitol Hill to be arrested. They were led by Jesse Jackson. I walked along with them as we went up Independence Avenue towards the Capitol where we knew they were going to be stopped because the police had not issued a permit for them to come on the Capitol grounds. So, this was going to be a planned confrontation with the police. Only later would I find out that Roger Wilkins, on behalf of Attorney General Ramsey Clark had planned all of that to give them a dignified exit from all of this. As we walked along on Independence Avenue, for the first time, I heard something which I later heard many times again. Jesse Jackson, walking up and down along this line of people, shuffling on Independence Avenue, and he would go up to a group of them and he would say, "I am somebody. I am somebody." And they would say, "I am somebody." And then he would say, "Let's hear it again. I am

somebody." And with this chant of "I am somebody," they finally came up to Capitol Hill, where the Chief of the Capitol Police were waiting. One by one, they quietly submitted to arrest, were taken off in buses and booked for trespass on Capitol grounds. That was the end for them, not for Jesse Jackson.

00:10:15:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about your, your trip back to Mississippi with Robert Kennedy and what happened and what he said.

00:10:26:00

Daniel Schorr:

I was sent down with a camera crew to cover what was...let me get this together because he wasn't alone and I, I shouldn't indicate he was there alone. He was there—Senator Clark, who was the Chairman of that subcommittee was with him.

00:10:38:00

Interviewer:

Why don't you, starting on the plane back would be fine.

00:10:40:00

Daniel Schorr:

The plane back. OK. [pause] After that day in Mississippi, I flew back on the plane from Memphis to Washington with Senator Kennedy and we walked off the plane together. I was met by my wife and we stopped for a moment to talk. And she asked him and me together, How was it down there? And Senator Kennedy said, I've seen poverty in a lot of places and I've never seen anything like this. He acted as though he was profoundly moved and profoundly affected by what he had seen. It was apparently a lot more grim than he thought it might be. That was terrible, let me do that again.

00:11:27:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Wanna cut now?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Do you need some water because I know—

[cut]

[slate]

00:11:34:00

Interviewer:

So, starting with, "We flew back from Mississippi..."

00:11:38:00

Daniel Schorr:

I flew back from this trip with Senator Kennedy. We arrived at National Airport in Washington. My wife was there to meet me and...no, let me start. I have to start that again. I have to have been, I have to be walking off the plane with Kennedy. [pause] I flew back with Senator Kennedy. We walked off the plane together, as it happened, met by my wife. And he stopped to talk to us for a minute and she asked how it had been down there. And Senator Kennedy said, You know, I have seen poverty in a great many places, Asia and Africa. He said, I've never seen poverty as I've seen poverty today in Mississippi, in our own country.

00:12:20:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut.

[cut]

[slate]

00:12:28:00

Interviewer:

OK, OK. One last time, coming back from Mississippi.

00:12:32:00

Daniel Schorr:

I returned from Mississippi on the plane with Senator Kennedy. We walked off the plane together and my wife was waiting to meet me and we stopped and talked for a minute. And she asked, How was it down there? And he said, You know, I've seen poverty in many places in the world, Asia and Africa, he said, shaking his head, I have never seen any poverty the way I've seen poverty in Mississippi today.

00:13:03:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Let's cut.

[cut]

[slate]

00:13:09:00

Interviewer:

OK. The last day of Resurrection City, what you saw.

00:13:15:00

Daniel Schorr:

On the last day, there was a march up to Capitol Hill, all planned apparently in advance for them to be stopped by the Capitol Police for trying to get in without a permit and then they would all gonna be arrested. And they knew they were all gonna be arrested. They were led up there by the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who had meanwhile, returned from Chicago. And I walked up and down the line with him as he would say to these people, "I am somebody. Repeat after me, I am somebody." And then they chanted with him, "I am somebody." And saying, "I am somebody," they arrived where they were stopped by the Chief of Police who told them that they'd be arrested. They submitted quietly to arrest. They were identified. They were somebody. They were identified. They were put in the hands of the police. They were taken in buses and taken away to be released a few hours later. And you know, it seemed to

me then, these people who had been through these miserable weeks of rain and mud in Resurrection City, having said they were gonna stay until they got something from the government, having to leave without getting very much, this could have been considered a, a defeat. Yet, somehow in the way that civil rights people contrive to do these things, they turned their greatest defeats into a moment of victory. The cameras were there, their dignity was there. As Jesse Jackson had said, "I am somebody." They were somebody.

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

00:14:47:00

Interviewer:

That's fine, thank you.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:14:51:00

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