

Interview with **E.D. Nixon**

1979

Production Team: D

Camera Rolls: 2-3, 7-10

Sound Rolls: 3-5

Interview gathered as part of *America, They Loved You Madly*, a precursor to *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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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*.

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[camera roll 2]

[sound roll 3]

[hand slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK.

Nixon: In, in 1955 it was a trying year for us. First, we had a young lady who was arrested and complained to us that she was mistreated on the bus. Her name, Mrs. Waynefield. And the second case we had was a young lady named Claudette Cobbin and the third case we had, a young lady who lived about three blocks from here and named Mrs. Smith. All right, you people sittin' here today along with a whole lot of other people would think any of the case—any case along with the person that was mistreated on the bus would have made a good litigant. Most of you would think that. Well, my experience with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters or the NAACP and all the other organizations I had represented over a period of years have taught me a whole lot different. I had to be sure that I had somebody that I could win with. And either these other three I couldn't have had won. And to be able to ask people to give us a half a million dollars to fight discrimination on the Montgomery bus line, I ought to be able to say to them, we got a good litigant. And so, when Rosa Parks was arrested in December the 5th, I was out of the office when the call came through and I came back, the note was sticking into my telephone, call home at once. And I called home and I asked my wife I said you called me? She said, yes. They've arrested Miss Parks. I said, for what? She said, I don't know. Go get her. Just like I could go get her. Well, course, all the police at that time wasn't too friendly to me. So I called down there to ask their, their sergeant what the

charge was and he told in no uncertain terms, it weren't none of my business. Fred Gray, our local lawyer who had just came out of law school about a year was out of the city at that time. So I turned to a white lawyer that I had known for some years and I told him they'd arrested Miss Parks. It was easy for me to talk to him, of course, Miss Parks had done some work for his wife see. So I said, call down there and find out what the charge is and I said, and I'll go down there and get her. So he called me back he said he got a charge with violating the Alabama segregation law. I said, I'm going get her. He said, come by here and I'll go with you. So I went by, he came down the steps, it was cold. By the time he got to the car, his wife come runnin' down the steps. So the three of us went down there. I made bond for her and got her out. By the time we got her out, gotten in the car, her husband came up with a couple of mens [sic]. So she got out of the car and got in with them and we followed her on to her house. So I talked to her a couple of hours from time to time and I ended up by saying to her point blank, *I said, Miss Parks, I said, with your permission we can break down segregation on the bus with your case. I said, I'm, I'm, I'm convinced that we can do it. I said, if E.D. wasn't convinced, I wouldn't bother you by it. She asked her mother what she thought about it. She said, I'll go along with Mr. Nixon. Asked her husband, he said, I'll support it. So that's fine.* Then I went home and I said to my wife I said, baby, I said, we've got a case that we goin' [sic] boycott the Montgomery city line. She said, do what? I said, we're goin' to boycott the Montgomery buses. I said, we ain't gonna ride 'em. And she said, man, don't you know these folks ain't gonna stay off the bus cold as it is? I said, I don't know about that. I said, if they stay off while they cold they won't have no trouble keeping them off when it warm. And she looked at me and shook her head. And she said, my husband, my husband. She said, if headaches would sell for a dollar a dozen my husband just would just be the man to walk into the drugstore and say, give me a dozen headaches. I said, I'm gonna try it. I said, I'm convinced that we can win with this case and I'm gonna try it. And I recorded any number of names on the tape recorder that night before I went to bed. And the next morning I got up and I went to—at five o'clock and I went to calling these peoples. Number one, I called Ralph D. Abernathy and he said he'd go along with it. Second, I called the late Reverend H. H. Hubbard. He said, yeah, I'll go along with it, brother Nic [sic], have you talked to Aber—Abernathy was secretary of the Ministers Union. I said yeah. And he said, well, I'll call him too and tell him to call some of the rest of the folks. And I said, OK. And I called Revered King number three. Now this is no reflection, I have to tell people that, cause some people would think that I'm—been using a reflection. I said after—Reverend King said, brother Nixon, let me think about it awhile and call me back. Well I could see that. There he—new man in town, he don't know what it's all about. Less, no less than five hundred people in town, so I could see what is all—so I say, OK. So I went on and called eighteen other peoples and I called him back he said, yeah, Brother Nic, I'll go along with it and I said, I'm glad of that Reverend King cause I talked to eighteen other people. I told them to meet at your church at three o'clock this evening. And so, then, at that time, then I talked to another Methodist minister. And I asked him to preside in the meeting. I couldn't be there that evening. I had to leave—go to work. I said, don't elect no permanent officers just temporary officers till I get back. And then I called a white man by the name of Joe Azbell and you, you hear people say that a white woman got hold of one these, one of these cooks or something brought it there for her to read it and she give it to the paper to print. All right, that's far-fetched. You see, I got hold of Joe Azbell and that was Friday and I sit down and explain it to him, well, I know him personally and he knows me and he, he told

me he'd write a good story. He said it would come out Sunday morning. All right, if these pamphlets what these talking about they won't put out until Friday night. And then, then if the woman who got hold of one that carried to her missed it have been sometime Saturday then it certainly wouldn't have been in the paper Sunday. But, anyhow, that Joe Azbell as I said, after we sat down and talked 'bout [sic] it, he wrote this story and he wrote a two column spread. He done more to bring us together anything else that I know of. It came out Sunday morning. I came in Sunday morning. My wife met me at the station right there and she gave me the paper and I read it. And I said, this is good. I got home, I got on the telephone, I had all the ministers' names beside the wall in my den and I went down the line and called them. I said, have you read the paper this morning? Some said, yes. Some said, no. I said, read it. Take it to church with you, with you. Tell the peoples what is happening. Tell them that we want, we want two thousand people at Holt Street Baptist Church tomorrow night for the purpose of letting the folks know that we aren't gonna take this laying down no longer. And then the, then the, then the Commissioner of Police got on the air and he thought he was doing something—

[sound roll out]

[cut]

00:07:53:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ROLLING.

[camera roll 8]

[hand slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: PICTURE EIGHT.

NIXON: Ready? And, and as you know that not only did we had [sic] two thousand people that I was requesting the press said we had four thousand and five hundred people. And, course, knowing Montgomery like I do, I can truly tell you if we didn't have seven thousand people we didn't have a single soul. But with all of this, that was the day that Miss Parks was tried, and, course, I'm, I'm gonna tell you as I attempted to say and I think we may be duplicating, but I want to get this in to show that about the group of people. Well, I can tell you that morning there were over five hundred peoples [sic] in and around at the beginning of the trial and when the trial was over with—around ten o'clock, there was over a thousand people in and around the Court. And I walked out there I couldn't believe my ear. And when the guard tells me if I didn't—if we didn't hurry up and come back I'd—he's comin in there to get me. I couldn't believe it. Now, with reference back to what we's [sic] talking about, about the church. We had this meeting that night and, course, as you know, somebody probably told you or you read about it, some of the people didn't—it started off they didn't want their names mentioned and I don't know how in the world you could build a, an organization to boycott the Montgomery City Line without somebody's name being mentioned. I guess you read it in Reverend King's book my—I—the way I bawled him out

and so forth and the “Stride Toward Freedom,” itself, books make mention of it. Anyway it ended up that I said to them that night, I said tell you what I says, we can settle this easy without arguing. I said, Reverend so and so, when we get to that night all you do get up and call the house to order and sit down, that's all you got to do. I said, Reverend so and so, I said, you sing a song and sit down. That's all you got to do. I said, Reverend so and so, you pray and after that, sit down you don't have to—that's all you have to do. And I asked another man to sing a song after him. And then, after that, then I spoke—or we introduced Miss Parks, first, and then I spoke. Then Reverend King spoke. I said, and we do it like that. I said, then nobody name don't have to be mentioned, but I said, I want to be frank with you. We can't have a bus boycott without the white people knowing who the leaders are. I said, you're gonna have to be signing checks, you're gonna have to be out speaking and all that kind of stuff, they are bound to know it. Of course, then they give in after I eat 'em out about it and they give in. But it was a wonderful thing to see all those many peoples in Montgomery after all the year that they'd had been walked on. They would stand on their feet and be counted. And, course, as I—lady said to me one day, and I, I—this is, this for the record and she's talkin' about all the things that, that Reverend King did and about bringing the organization together. I said to her, I said, you know Reverend King wasn't actually elected till seven thirty the night of December the 5th. I said, then that the papers said there were four thousand and five hundred of hymn-singing Negroes in and around the Holt Street Baptist Church. I said, if somebody wasn't doing something before Reverend King come, who got all those peoples out there? I said, I'll tell you who got 'em out there. I said, you ain't gonna want to know the truth. I said, I got 'em out there. And it's true. I did get 'em out there. But we need as an organization for history's sake that somebody tell the truth about the thing and not that how much credit I get or Reverend King get, but the children who come, cause the children who come along behind like over to the school the other day. Well out of that nine hundred and some odd children, I had over a hundred children ask me different questions about the Montgomery Bus boycott. And they ought to be able to know the truth about it. And that's what hasn't been told. Everybody who tried to make it appear that somebody has done this or somebody else did this, when it's so easy to tell the truth about it. And—

00:12:16:00

INTERVIEWER: WHY DID, WHY DID YOU DECIDE ON—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HOLD ON.

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00:12:18:00

[hand slate]

INTERVIEWER: WHY, WHY, WHY WAS REVEREND KING SELECTED? WHY DID HE—DID YOU HAND PICK HIM OR—

Nixon: Oh yes. Yeah. On the—

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME THAT.

Nixon: On the second Sunday in August of 1955, Reverend King was a speaker for the NAACP. A man who—one of the professors over at State's [unintelligible] college. Professor J. E. Pierce. And I was sitting in the back of the church when he got through talkin' [sic] I said, Pierce? And he said, yes. I said, you know that guy made a heck of a good talker. He said, he sure did. I said, I don't know how I'm going to do it but one of these days I'm gonna hang him to the stars. And that was on the second Sunday in August 1955. And on the morning of December the 5th, I hung him to the stars. And then after I had selected him and got home after everything was over with and I had a meeting at night and I got home lay in bed then I thought about my promise. But now the reason for that, ***Reverend King was a young man, very intelligent young man. He had not been here long enough for the city fathers to put their hands on him.*** Usually, they find some young man come to town and they gotta be aggressive. They call him down there and pat him on the shoulder tell him what a nice church he got. Reverend your suit don't look so nice to represent Bethel Baptist Church or Holt Street Church. Give him no attention, but just standing here and get you a suit. His mouth is closed forever for a suit of cloth. You have to watch all those kind of thing. All right, you know it's not, as bad now as it used to be, but it used to be. And, and that's why you hear me say that I have the utmost respect for A. Phillip Randolph. He couldn't buy—nobody couldn't [sic] buy him. And I happened to be a small fry, but I've turned down a many dollars that I coulda [sic] had. It don't worth my, it don't worth it to me that stay awake [sic] half the night fighting with my conscience, knowing that I didn't do right. And I'm gonna—the day that I walk down that street and everybody that knows me and I knows pretty much all the folks. And I, I'm not gon [sic] to sell for a lousy few dollars that don't worth it to me. I'm gon to be a man. If I had to do it by myself. Course if some went bad wrong and I needed some money real and had a good reason for needing some money, I can almost walk into any of one of these banks and get a few hundred dollars or a couple thousand dollars if I want, because all of them knows me. And I, I, I'm proud I lived that kind of life. And I'm proud I've been able to make a contribution to mankind. And I don't just deal with—help poor black. You know, a white person comes up with a problem, if I can help him solve, he or she, solve that problem I help 'em. Because if I was going to go around there and said, I ain't going to do this cause she's white or he's white, I'd be doing the same thing they done to us a few years back. So that I've, I've learned to do it like that and I've found that I've made a lot of friends. I've—I was surprised a couple of weeks ago a man was telling me that a white leader worked for this company. In Sunday school he was talking about that there were no more good mens [sic] any more. She said, she spokes [sic], oh yeah, there are some. She said, I know one. She said, a man that I look up to. She said, he's a black man. She said, he's a man with integrity. She went on to tell him about. In the end, though, she told who I was and four or five people there knew who I was and they all started apattin' [sic]—applaudin' [sic] when he [sic] did. But, supposing I'd been ratty sometime. She never would have made that remark.

00:16:38:00

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU GO, GO BACK OVER A LITTLE BIT OF IT AGAIN AND TELL ME ABOUT HOW DID YOU—WHAT IMPACT DID THE NEWSPAPER HAVE? WHAT ROLE DID THE, DID THE—FACT THAT THE MEET—THAT APPEARED IN THE NEWSPAPER? TELL ME ABOUT AS—HIS NAME WAS THOMAS P. ASBURY?

Nixon: Joe—no, Joe Asbury [sic].

INTERVIEWER: JOE ASBURY [sic].

Nixon: Right, Joe Azbell, he wrote a heck of a nice story. And, course, he won't admit it now, but he thinks he was fired 'bout [sic] that same story. But he didn't worry—in words, he, he's not a poor man, so he didn't worry him too much. And he's still around about—we laugh about things now sometimes we'll just meets down in a hotel and sit down and talk about things. But Joe Azbell happened to be a clean-cut man and he was the one, he, he was a witness in our defense, in our defense in Court—when we went to Court. He said, I ain't got nothin' to lose and I don't care about what these people don't like. He said, they don't feed me. And he went.

00:17:41:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID—COULD YOU TELL ME AGAIN THAT, THAT JOE—AFTER YOU TALKED TO HIM AND HE WROTE THE ARTICLE AND THEN GIVE ME AN IDEA OF WHAT HE—WHAT WAS IN THE ARTICLE AND THEN WHAT—

Nixon: Oh now, now. Well, now, now I can't tell you what was in the article. Now I really—see that's been twenty some odd years ago. I can't—I don't remember all of the—remember the things that was in the article. But I do know this. That because of that article, we got the message out to the peoples. A whole lot of them had read it and didn't know what it was all about, but when, when they got it and said, demand to sit in church today the article in the paper and they said they want all us to be there at the Holt Street Baptist Church tomorrow. And, and we got the message home. Now I'm tellin' [sic] you if, if—and if we hadn't had that, we wouldn't had a third of the peoples or we couldn't a wish 'em. And then because of that, the newspaper, man, the newspapers here—that thing came out Sunday morning and we had this meeting Monday night. We had newspaper reporters from Atlanta and Washington and, and Birmingham and Memphis and all across the country even, even that Monday night. And from then on every time we had, had mass meetings we had somebody from some of these places.

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00:18:58:00

Nixon: Ready?

[hand slate]

Nixon: Now, with reference to Mrs. Rosa Parks, *Mrs. Parks was formerly my secretary in the NAACP in the local branch for about twelve years. She also worked with me when I was state president of the NAACP. And she also assisted me in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. And if there ever, ever was a woman who was dedicated to the cause, Rosa Parks was that woman.* She had a deep conviction about what she thought was right. And she lit up there. She could come in here right now and take this paper to read it. She kept—she keeps a pencil in her hair all the time. Every once in a while you see her take it out and mark the old misspelled word. When you get the paper behind her, you know she had it. Because every misspelled word she'd mark it. And me and her worked together, traveled over this state together, and I knew that, that she was clean as a pin. No one, nobody could touch, touch her morally, her character or nothin' [sic]. The only thing you could say about Rosa Parks just wouldn't get up and give that white man her seat. But to come, come back and say that she'd done this, she done that, she done this, she's clean as a pin. And that's, that's what made me know that we could won. Now there, the other cases we could've had, we couldn't have won because the press would have killed it before we got started. And they tried to see get something on Rosa Parks. But they couldn't find nothin'. They couldn't nail her to the cross with. And for that reason we were successful. And, course, this may be news to a whole lot of you, see. A whole lot of you that really don't know that we actually didn't win the right to ride the bus with Rosa Parks' case. In 1944, we had a problem on the bus with a woman named Viola White. She was found guilty and fined ten dollars in costs. We appealed this case to Circuit Court as in 1944. And when Rosa Parks was arrested December the 1st, 1955, this case had never been put on the court docket. The city of Montgomery knew that they couldn't win and they kept, kept—we didn't have no black lawyers or nothin' and we couldn't get on the Court calendar, the Court calendar. All right, when Rosa Parks was arrested and we'd went on to the second Sunday in Jan—January 1956. I called Reverend King, Abernathy over to the house one night, I came in that Sunday and I said to him, I said, y'all [sic] come over here. And we got here and Mrs. Nixon fixed some coffee, I said, I called you all because I got news for you boys. And I can say that because I've got a son older than either one of 'em. I said, you all think we're going to Supreme Court with Miss Parks' case. Well ain't that what we're going to do? I said, no. I said, that's what the power structure thinks you are going to do to try to get to the Supreme Court with Miss Parks' case. He says, well, what are you going to do? I said, well, I says, I, I've been told by some good lawyers that we got a good chance to take this case to Court. All we got to do is to find four or five people who say they've been mistreated on the bus and file our case right into the Federal Court. Bypass Montgomery. King said, can we do that? I said, that these, these lawyers say we can. He said, where are we going to get the people? And Abernathy said, said, Martin, he said, you don't know E.D. He said, I've been knowing him for all these years. He said, if Nixon says it can, can be done. He said, it can be done. He said, now the question is let us follow his lead. And I told them about the Viola White case, had never been called in, and she died and that case never did get put on the Court calendar. And we found five or six women, one of them backed up and said that Fred Grey got her to represent without her consent, but it just so happened that we had a tape recorder on and everything when we talked to her and everything and we had her consent on the tape recorder. But in doing that we filed this case into Circuit Court, I mean, into the Federal Court and we paid Miss Parks' case off in Court of Common Appeal. It cost us fifty-one dollars, I believe, that's what it was.

Now, not that Miss Parks didn't have a good case, but they were going to do us just like they done us in the Viola White case. They gonna hold—wanted to wear us out, wear us out and never move that case up the Circuit Court and they was all dumbfounded when they found out that we done decided to, to go into Federal Court with two or three people who had been mistreated on the bus. The city fathers dumbfounded. And the—and, you know, I found in a whole lot of instances, white peoples whole lot of them wants to be smarter and make you think they're smart and let a whole lot of folks that they hadn't near the opportunity had, I do. I tell the people that about the Housing Authority. We got all these laws on the book but they—and, and we got people who haven't even finished the second grade. Wrapped these power structures here with the Housing Authority around their finger.

00:24:43:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT HAPPENED TO ROSA PARKS?

NIXON: She's still livin' [sic] Detroit.

INTERVIEWER: WHY DID SHE LEAVE—JUST, JUST TELL ME THAT ROSA PARKS WAS HERE AND SHE COULDN'T FIND WORK.

NIXON: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME THAT.

NIXON: Rosa Parks, you see, after, after this thing happened on the bus then nobody would hire her, see. And then she had to leave here and look for work. And her brother was already in Detroit. So she just took her mother and her husband and went on up to Detroit. Now see, now her brother dead since then and her husband too. Nobody livin' but she and her mother and her mother is just about ninety years old.

00:25:22:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. COULD, COULD YOU GO, GO THROUGH THAT JUST ONCE AGAIN FOR ME? I THOUGHT—WAS SHE WORKING FOR YOU?

NIXON: At that time?

INTERVIEWER: OR WAS THAT—OR, OR—

NIXON: Oh, no she work—

INTERVIEWER: WAS BEING THE SECRETARY TO THE NAACP WAS NOT—WAS AN UNPAID POSITION?

Nixon: No, she got some pay. She got some work, but she wasn't working directly for me, she was workin' at a, at a clothes store when this thing happened. And she had worked a

whole day down there as a seamstress and then got off and come, come home December the 5th. I mean the first—it's pretty crowded downtown at that time of evening on the weekend and, and by the time she got out there and got her a seat, got comfortable the bus driver told her to get up and give it over to the white man seat and stand up. That mean four black people had to get up so one white man could sit down. And that them seats was, she was sitting in the seats that were reserved for black, ordinarily, reserved for black. That was the last seat that black people could sit in, but under the law of the police, the, the bus driver had police power. He could make you get up, have you arrested and so he could sign the warrant for your arrest. That's what, that's what happened to her. There, so when, when the police got on the car, they wanted to know if, asked her, did—was she going to get up? She told 'em no and so they wanted to know from that bus driver, was he going to sign a warrant for her arrest or just wanted them to give her a reprimand. He said, I'm gonna sign a warrant for her arrest. And it was the worst thing that ever happened to him.

00:26:59:00

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU TELL US, TELL US ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS AND HOW THEY, HOW YOU USED YOUR—THE SAME ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS THAT YOU HAD WORKING WITH THE BROTHERHOOD INTO—

Nixon: Well—

INTERVIEWER: HOLD ON, HOLD ON. FOCUS. THAT'S RIGHT. JUST WHERE YOU WERE. WHEREVER YOU WERE. START THERE.

Nixon: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, GOOD.

Nixon: If, if I had hadn't been president of the Brotherhood, I mean, of the NAACP at the time this happened why I would have handled Miss Parks' case under the auspices of NAACP. But the man who was president at that time he didn't believe in cutting any corners when I told him about what had happened. He said, well I'd have to write the national office and, and get their consent to do that. I said, well I'm gonna tell, see, even a telephone call is too slow. I said that if you gonna have to do that, I said, I'm gonna have to—I'm gonna have to organize another organization, because we've got to move now. And the way I ain't—I said, I ain't got time. I said, in the morning is Saturday, nobody in the office in the morning, in the NAACP office in the morning. I said and, and we got to have sudden start to work towards—so Monday we can do something. I said, we can't wait that—I said, if you gon [sic] write 'em wait for an answer. I said, well we'll be way down the road when the letter get back. So, that's why the NAACP didn't have anybody if, if, if I'd have been in chair I wouldn't have thought about no national order. I'd have got, got the thing in swing and then I'd have called 'em, told 'em. I said, Man we in the—we in the somethin' up to our necks down here. We, we'll pull a bus boycott and told them what we'd doing. I, I, I reading in some book somewhere, some you know, it ain't been long ago where somebody said was

talking about Rev. K—King criticized the NAACP. But I, I, I never heard that. I never heard him criticize, because I can't see how he did it, 'cause the NAACP really supported us. And, and supported most all these organizations like SNCC and all of them that got arrested all across the country, it was the NAACP who put up the bond money. They got the NAACP got bond money now scattered around all through the country. They, they can't get—but they put up their bonds and everything. So I, I think that when it's all said and done that the NAACP done its job and my connection with the NAACP as president for about twelve years, and I served as State President two years, and I, I, I built a branch there from four hundred members to twenty-two hundred and fifty members or fifty-six members.

00:30:02:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

NIXON: Back, that time, memberships was a dollar—

00:30:07:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Nixon: —back in that time.

00:30:10:00

[cut]

Nixon: Definitely. You just can't get—

[hand slate]

Nixon: —something right in the streets everyday and said that we gon organize then with this thing. You gon have to have something to appeal to the people. Now, when I started talking about the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the NAACP right here at home, peoples thought I was crazy. And do you know that I've seen times that I be going down streets downtown and some of your professionals go to college round there be meeting me and two or three white people behind me. I don't have to look back to know that some white people right behind me, cause when I see him cut 'cross the street I know that's some white people behind me. And he don't want, he don't want to meet me and let the white people know that he know that radical. That's what they called me, then, that radical, see. And so—but it wasn't easy. It wasn't an easy thing. You'd have to start from an incident to give you an idea of what I'm talking about. I ran against a man for President of the NAACP one year. And I didn't know nothing about the thing right like I knew the next year. And I think he done me just like the white folks did, counted me out of that election. So what I let him go—so when I told, the man who was elected, I said, Mr. Matthews? He said, yes. I said, next year when you come

bring all the NAACP paraphernalia with you 'cause I'm gon [sic] carry them home next year. I said, you've got one year now to make up your mind what you going to do. Well, I—he didn't hear anymore from me. And so I, I got out and started about three months ahead of the election time and I'd go downtown every Saturday and I'd tell all the people I'd, I'd meet people on the streets down there and down on the back street there and I told them, I said, you know, these insurance people gon try to take over the NAACP. I said, I need your help. I said, the only way you can help me, you're going to have to spe—spend a dollar. You're going to have membership. All right, we fool around there and we built up to many membership. And I asked them, I said, now you gon have to come to meeting. You can't get me elected in the street. You're gonna have to come to meeting. So they—when they come—went to the meeting that day, that, this particular day, the church was filled up with peoples. The Pastor of the church got up and he says, I found one person can put more people in Holt Street than I can. Of course, the insurance peoples, they were together and all them made an effort to discredit, tear down what we was trying to do. So, finally, had a man who got up and made a motion. Mr. Chairman, I had appoint the man to hold the election of men now. We're getting up to the point to hold the election. I appoint the man to hold election. He said, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make a motion. He says, that depends on what your motion is. He says, I want to make a motion that we elect somebody to hold the election. He says, it's my understanding that the president appointed me to hold the election. He said, we have no president now. He said, all offices are vacant. Then I rose, I said, Mr. Chairman, I said, may I make an observation please? He said, Yeah. I said, this—I'm going to make this observation for those who don't know Robert Rule [sic]. I said, course, the gentleman who went to make—that wanted to make this motion, he knows it, but he think we don't know it. I said, now Robert Rule tell me that if you once elected, you shall serve till your successor has been elected and installed. I said, even though that I may lose the election today. Somebody hollered, you ain't gonna lose it. And I said, I'm still president till two weeks from now when the installation will begin. I said, therefore, with the power invested in me as president, I rule that we proceeded with the election, and so on. And everybody screamed, because I, I won seven to one, but I done my homework. I got out there and worked with the people. And I, and I encouraged them to pay the membership and encouraged them to come to the meeting. And every time that the tally sheet we got one for him, I had seven. But I, I done my homework. And you don't just do it sitting down. You—it takes long hours and you spend a lot of time, and, and—I—you take—I bet I've been to conventions and things where like NAACP, the Brotherhood more than any one man in this town. I spent a lot of time, a lot of money too. And yet that I enjoyed all that and I've been able to help peoples [sic], I'm living, enjoying some of it myself. *You see, when I first started fighting, I was fighting to keep, so that the children who came behind me wouldn't suffer the same thing I suffered. Then the night of the bus boycott on December the 5th, I told the people that I'd had been fighting like that for all these years. I said, tonight I changed my mind. I said, hell, I want to enjoy some of this stuff myself. And, man, you ought to have heard people hollering.* So I started fighting so Nixon could enjoy some of it. And I've been enjoying some of it. When you take right now that I, I served on most all the important org—organizations in the town. And I know a whole lot of them did put me on—they don't put me on because they'd like t have me on. I know that. Then a whole lot of them is disappointed after you find out I don't take all the things that would keep my mouth shut. A whole lot of them were disappointed in it. But I

sat on a whole lot of these boards and, and it all, it come by because of my technique and I— what I know about the organization, dealing with people, and, and you, you—

00:35:32:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID—TELL ME THIS. HOW DID YOU GET—IT SEEMS TO ME THAT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO DECIDE TO, TO BOYCOTT THE BUSES, BECAUSE IT WAS, IT WAS A REAL SACRIFICE AND IT WAS A REAL DANGER INVOLVED. HOW DID YOU GET PEOPLE MOTIVATED AND DID YOU, DID YOU REALLY GET THEM TO UNDERSTAND THAT IT WAS GOING TO BE LONG?

NIXON: I told them that, that Monday night. I said, this is gonna be a long drawn out affair. I said, 'fore [sic] it's over with somebody gonna die. I said, it may be me for all I know. I said, all I asked, if it me, don't let me die in vain. I said, but we have started this thing and we in here together and we gon hold out till be win. And, and we won. And you take one night that we was at the church one night and, and—see, everybody knew me there pretty much. And I, I saw a man come up the aisle walking fast and the eyes up on the rostrum. I was sitting on the rostrum. And I got up and met him to interrupt and he said, the fire department down there and this church is high from the ground in front. He said, fire department down there, said he got to inspect this church. I said, OK. Go back down there and watch them. Don't let them plant nothing. Get you a couple of men and watch them. Don't let them plant nothing, just like that. Then I touched the man who's talking, I, I don't know whether it was Rev. King nor Abernathy one or the other of them was talk—was talking. And I said, we gonna have to dismiss. I said, but let me make a statement so the people don't get excited. I said, how many people here know me? I said, hold up your hands. And hands went up all over the church. I said, I'd like to see the hand of any man or woman in here that can truthfully hold up his hand and say that I misled 'em. I said, I'd like to see that hand. I didn't see nothing. I said, all right. I said, now, I'm gonna to tell you something. I said, I want you to keep your seat. I said, and keep calm. I said, the fire department's down there. I said, they brought 'round the fire department out here with the bells ringing for you all to run down the steps and fall and break your leg or neck or something, so they get a chance to sue us. I said, we gon start up here at the front. I said, the first line to have seats here on this side gonna march outta of the audience, slowly. I said, and, and sing a song. And they started singing, "We Shall Not Be Moved." I said, next aisle, next aisle on this side come in and next on this side. Went all the way down and then me and all the ministers was on the rostrum fall—fell in behind the last row there and walked on down and then I went got to the last of the line and I walked over to the side of the guy who came up and told me what had happened, you know, the white detective standing over there. When I walked over there, he looked at me and says, you son of a so and so. But we, we done it so calm and everybody walked out of there so calm. When we got, got everybody down, I said, OK, there John, you can lock the doors. Everybody's out. And then we load the car and went on out. Then after we left, he left. But all they wanted us to do was run down the steps and fall down there and get somebody hurt and he could sue us and break up the bus boycott.

00:38:47:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE THE TREASURER?

NIXON: Yeah, I was the Treasurer. And I cut checks for four hundred fifteen thousand dollars during my time. That's a lot of money. And I—you know what—

INTERVIEWER: HOW MUCH MONEY WAS COLLECTED THAT FIRST NIGHT?

NIXON: That first night? Seven hundred and some odd dollars. And I—you know what I left here once? With eighty-seven thousand dollars in a briefcase. Stopped in Atlanta and I, I put some in the bank in Atlanta. Put some in the bank in Raleigh. Put some in the bank in Richmond. Put some in a bank in Washington. Put some in the bank in Philadelphia and put the rest in a bank in New York. Now, I wasn't even under bond. All I'd had to do was take the money and put it in the bank in an assumed name, I'd have been a no-good so-and-so and so for a while and after that people forgot it and I'd a been Mr. Nixon, but this was the Montgomery Improvement Association. And I, I just couldn't see any point of it. They would take a dime out, we need it to operate. And all the cars we had to operate on gas and all that kind of stuff. And, you see, you talk about the Treasurer, we've got a woman in this town, if you could see her name, Georgia Gilmore on the other side of town, big fat woman, very good worker. She brought a hundred dollars in every Monday night from the No-Name Club. We runned it down. She was the President, she was the Secretary, she was the Treasurer, she was all its members. Well, you just don't propose—don't suppose to get people like that. And I, I, I—whether they high or low in academics. I said, you oughta to use all our resources regardless to academic training and I still say so. I remember doing it at a bus boycott once that we had to see a white man for something, I didn't know him, and I forgot who the man was. Now it's been so long, but they had a man who parked cars down at the hotel named Bunch. He belonged to the same—me and him [sic] go to the same church, but I didn't know it at that time. So I went down that morning hoping that I—whoever the guy parking the cars that I'd know him and I got down there and I didn't recognized him. But he recognized me.

00:41:19:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Nixon: He knew me.

INTERVIEWER: THAT'S YEAH—

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:41:28:00

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