

Interview with **Gov. George C. Wallace**

March 9, 1986

Montgomery, Alabama

Interviewer: Callie Crossely

Production Team: C

Camera Rolls: 598-601

Sound Rolls: 1544-1547

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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*.

00:00:03:00

[camera roll 598]

[sound roll 1544]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARKER. THREE.

INTERVIEWER: GOVERNOR WALLACE, AS A BACKDROP TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOUTHERN SYSTEM OF SEGREGATION, I WONDER IF YOU COULD EX—GIVE US A LAYMAN'S EXPLANATIONS OF PLESSY VS. FERGUSON WHICH WAS THE LEGAL BASIS FOR THAT SYSTEM AND EXPLAIN WHY IT WAS SO DIFFICULT TO ENFORCE A SEPARATE BUT EQUAL STANDARD.

Wallace: Well, of course, most people in the South, the seventeen states when the, when that decision was made had segregation in the school systems. Also you had segregation in twenty in other states in the union. It was just a—the great mass of people, of white people felt it was the best interest of both races. It was not an antagonism towards black people and that's what some people can't understand. But we found out, as years passed by, that it was not the kind of system we ought to have, its gone forever, thank goodness, and we are a lot better shape than we ever have been as a result of it being done away with.

00:01:09:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANT TO ASK YOU A QUESTION ABOUT THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT. NOW, AT THAT TIME, YOU WERE A JUDGE—

Wallace: No, I was not, I was not Governor then—

INTERVIEWER: RIGHT YOU WERE A JUDGE AT THAT TIME.

Wallace: —I was not Governor and so I don't know anything about—just what I read in the newspaper about that.

INTERVIEWER: YOU HAD NO SENSE OF WHAT WHITE OPINION WAS ON THAT BOYCOTT AT THAT TIME? YOU WERE IN BARBER COUNTY, I KNOW, AT THE TIME, BUT I WONDERED IF YOU HAVE A SENSE OF WHAT THE RANGE OF WHITE OPINION WAS ABOUT THAT BUS BOYCOTT AT THE TIME.

Wallace: You mean the bus, bus, bus, bus thing?

INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU HAVE ANY SENSE—

Wallace: I was not Governor then, but I thought that the violence that was carried on by a few haters in Alabama was utterly repulsive and the people of this state did not like it at all.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THAT, THAT BUS BOYCOTT HURT THE CITY FINANCIALLY IN ANY WAY?

Wallace: I don't think so. Maybe to begin with a little bit, but Montgomery is a city that white and black have been together for so many years that, that problems are small compared to some of the other parts of our country.

00:02:19:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. I WANT TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT BIRMINGHAM NOW. IN 1963 WHEN YOU WERE INAUGURATED, YOU'VE HEARD THE FAMOUS SEGREGATION NOW, SEGREGATION TOMORROW, SEGREGATION FOREVER—

Wallace: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: NOW, LET ME JUST ASK THE QUESTION, WAS THAT, THAT SEEMED TO BE AT THE TIME, DEFINANCE OF FEDERAL LAW. IS THAT WHAT YOU INTENDED?

Wallace: What was that now?

INTERVIEWER: IS THAT—SEEMED TO BE A STATEMENT THAT WAS MADE TO

DEFY FEDERAL LAW. AND I WANT TO KNOW IF THAT WAS WHAT YOU INTENDED BY SAYING THAT.

Wallace: Well, at that time, really, I shouldn't have made any such statement as that, frankly, because I knew myself that it was not going to last forever and it shouldn't last forever, but I knew what happened at Ole Miss, I knew what happened in Clifton, Tennessee, when they integrated schools there and also in Arkansas. And I was determined nothing like that would happen in Alabama. So at the University of Alabama we had nothing but peace and quiet. We stopped all these minutemen and states righters, so called, I mean the, the thunderbolt folks and the Ku Klux Klan. None of them could get there. We arrested a bunch of those kind of folks from California between Busman and Birmingham and put 'em in jail. And I got on television and I said twice on statewide television, anybody who harms a hair on another man's head is not on the side of my fight for constitutional government. You stay away from the University Alabama. Nobody gonna be there, but those who's supposed to be there. There was never one bit of, of, of ugliness shown to those students. We were going to integrate it next year anyway. But I was there, but I kept peace. And I did not see the University torn up like it was in some other parts of the country, did not anticipate all these haters coming from all over the nation to, to stir up trouble.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN YOU—

Wallace: I'm so very proud of that.

00:04:17:00

INTERVIEWER: WHEN YOU STOOD IN THE SCHOOL HOUSE DOOR IT SEEMED LESS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE AND MORE A SYMBOLIC GESTURE.

Wallace: It was an act of legal resistance. It was not a physical resistance at all. One reason I had the National Guard there if, if we did have a, an occasion like Mississippi was not going to stand for it. What the good people of Mississippi did not anticipate all these folks from all over the country, all these hate groups the Nazi party, etc. coming to that city and almost destroying that great University and it was not going to happen at our University. In fact the Board of Trustees which had one man who belonged to a cabinet of the President of the United States urged me to come and stand there, because when I went on television, even the Ku Klux Klan leader got up and said, the Governor Wallace says stay away. He's gonna raise the constitutional question for all the people of Alabama. So you see, I violated no law. My resistance was legal and not violence. I do not believe in violence, it will not solve any problems.

00:05:22:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU SAID THAT DAY THAT YOU WERE STANDING THERE BECAUSE YOU REFUSED TO SUBMIT TO THE USURPTION OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TAKEOVER—FEDERAL INTERVENTION.

Wallace: That's, that's correct. I thought that I would have another case in court and we could determine that we would decide the guidelines when we would integrate, in what fashion, and when. We wanted to set the timetable and we were very upset at the Federal Government trying to set the, the timetable when we were going to integrate the next year. They said, no, you integrate this year. We gonna try to show them that the state had some supremacy in some rights under the Constitution of the United States and the Tenth Amendment.

00:06:06:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME ASK YOU THIS QUESTION: IF YOU COULD EXPLAIN FOR ME AND FOR ALL PEOPLE, WHO DON'T HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THIS IS ABOUT, THE STATES RIGHTS VS. FEDERAL INTERVENTION. GIVE ME A REALLY GOOD EXPLANATION OF WHAT STATES RIGHTS—

Wallace: All you gotta do is read the Constitution of the nation which says that—the Tenth Amendment says that all state, all power, not especially rele—delegated to the Federal Government left to the states or the people respectively of the states. That's the substance what it says. Now, I do not mean to say that that meant that we could have discrimination in the public school system. In fact, white southerners did not believe it was discrimination. They thought it was in the best interest of both the races. You cannot indict the whole southern part of our nation as being hached [sic], hatred, haters, they are not. We've had easier transitions towards segregation in the South, in Alabama, than we've had in the other parts of the country, and you know that to be a fact.

INTERVIEWER: SO THE SOUTHERN VIEW OF STATES RIGHTS WAS THAT THIS WAS A DECISION THAT THE STATE SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO MAKE, IS THAT CORRECT?

Wallace: Well, they had a right to do—determine the, the, the qualifications of attendance of school but—and that had been so declared prior, in a prior Supreme Court decision. But in the long run, that decision was wrong because integration must, must come—it could not, we could not—segregation could not last and it shouldn't have lasted.

00:07:45:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW MUCH TIME?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU HAVE ABOUT TWO MINUTES LEFT ON THIS ONE.

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET ME GO BACK TO BIRMINGHAM FOR A MINUTE. YOU—THE BIRMINGHAM DEMONSTRATIONS HAPPENED JUST THREE MONTHS AFTER YOU HAD TAKEN OFFICE AS GOVERNOR.

Wallace: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: AND I'M WONDERING WHAT INCIDENT DURING THOSE DEMONSTRATIONS CAUSED YOU TO GET INVOLVED IN IT AT ALL.

Wallace: Well, I was not involved in those except we finally sent state troopers there, but it was to maintain order. And the church bomb was, I said, the man who—people who did that ought to burn the bottom of the electric chair out. It really, it really shook me and the people of Alabama for somebody to have done what they did in that regard. Because that was something nobody accepted and that was my statement at the time that who is responsible for this ought to burn the bottom out of the electric chair in this state.

00:08:41:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME GO BACK TO THAT. WHY DID YOU SEND COLONEL AL LINGO AND THE STATE TROOPERS INTO BIRMINGHAM?

Wallace: To?

INTERVIEWER: WHY DID YOU SEND COLONEL AL LINGO AND THE STATE TROOPERS IN-INTO BIRMINGHAM?

Wallace: I sent Colonel Lingo there because they were—there was some trouble there. We tried to maintain law and order. We're not trying to maintain segregation there, it was a matter of law and order, and as I recall that nobody got hurt in any of the things—in the demonstrations except that whoever those evil mean, minded men were who had something to do with the blowing up of that church.

INTERVIEWER: DID—WOULD—DID YOU SEND COLONEL LINGO AT BULL CONNOR'S REQUEST OR DID YOU JUST SEND HIM IN BECAUSE YOU FELT HE SHOULD GO?

Wallace: Now what?

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU SEND COLONEL LINGO INTO BIRMINGHAM AT BULL CONNORS REQUEST?

Wallace: No, no, not at Bull Connor's request at all. In fact, I never talked to Bull Connor a time in that—during that time at all. The only people I talked to was the Mayor—was the Sheriff up there. And, frankly, at that time, he didn't think he needed him and, and I don't know that I asked him to send them or not, but I didn't, did not have any conversation with Bull Connor. Bull was a personal friend of mine, but I didn't agree with his tactics there in Birmingham.

00:10:08:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW MUCH TIME I GOT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I THINK WE, WELL, YOU GOT TIME FOR ONE MORE QUESTION.

INTERVIEWER: WELL, I'M, I'M JUST AFRAID I'M GONNA—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU HAVE ABOUT A MINUTE AND A HALF.

INTERVIEWER: OK. OK. HOLD ON ONE SECOND. WHO DID YOU TALK TO? THERE WERE TWO GOVERNMENTS IN, IN BIRMINGHAM. IF YOU DIDN'T TALK TO BULL CONNOR, WERE YOU IN COMMUNICATION WITH MAYOR ALBERT BOUTWELL AT THE TIME?

Wallace: I don't remember who I talked to that was so long ago, that I don't remember talking to anybody, but the sheriff and, and that's all I can remember.

INTERVIEWER: THIS MAKES ME NERVOUS. I'M GONNA WAIT TILL—[laughs] WE HAVE TO CHANGE MAGAZINE—

[cut]

00:10:42:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 599]

[change to sound roll 1545]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: GOVERNOR WALLACE, TAKE TWO, MARKER. CALLIE GIVE ME ONE SECOND TO SETTLE HERE.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, WE'RE ALL SET.

INTERVIEWER: OK. GOVERNOR, YOU TOLD ME YOU WERE TALKING TO SHERIFF MEL BAILEY IN BIRMINGHAM DURING THE BIRMINGHAM DEMONSTRATIONS. I'M WONDERING, HE SAID THAT, HE DID, AS YOU SAID, HE DIDN'T WANT THE TROOPERS THERE AND, IN FACT, HE SAID TO US THAT HE FELT THAT THE AGGRAVATED THE SITUATION BETTER THAN HELPING IT, DO YOU AGREE WITH THAT?

Wallace: Yes, sometime the Sheriff said that. He sure did. And, and I was young and brass, I suppose at that time, because I was worried about, I was worried about people getting killed and I didn't think the police force I thought they could use us, our force to sort of keep that

from happening. No, Mr. Bailey said, and Mel Bailey's a friend of mine. He publicly endorsed me for Governor in the last race for Governor and he'd been a fine Sheriff, but way back then, that's right, he didn't want 'em. And I sent them a day or so later any ways and I'm sorry that I probably—but I was worried about somebody getting hurt. I just didn't—I don't like violence. I was in violence in World War II as a combat veteran and that was necessary in those days, but I don't like to see that among our own people.

00:12:15:00

INTERVIEWER: SPEAKING ABOUT VIOLENCE, YOU'VE TALKED A LITTLE BIT EARLIER ABOUT THE 16<sup>TH</sup> STREET CHURCH BOMBING. MARTIN LUTHER KING SAID, AT THAT TIME, THAT HE FELT—HE BLAMED YOU FOR THAT. HE SAID YOU WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT BECAUSE OF YOUR WORDS AND WHAT YOU HAD SAID HAD CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE—

Wallace: I had never made any statement and you can look at any statement I have made, I've always said, that God made us all and he loves us all and anyone who attempts to harm the hair on another man's head in this matter is not on our side. I did not ever even a provocative talk about civil rights. I never talked provocative about Dr. King or anyone of that sort. Now listen, you know, you all come to me, but who is it I spoke like? I spoke like Lyndon Johnson spoke. He spoke the same way as a member of the Congress. Fullbright of Arkansas spoke the same way as a member of Congress. Senator Sam Irving, Senator Russell, Senator Hill, Senator Sparkman, Senator Goldwater on the civil rights matter. I do not have any statement or book I ever wrote, I have—or, or would like to withdraw from publication, because I have never made a statement that offended black people unless I said in those days I was for segregation. I have never made any statement about inferiority or anything of that sort, I don't believe that. I was born and raised among black people and they're my friend. Listen, if I had said anything that, as the Eastern Press said I did and did, no self respecting black would ever have voted me, for a hundred years. Yet I won 95% of the black vote in the last election in Alabama. I did so in 1974. The last two races I ran. So, when you can win the 95% of the Governor's race—in black vote in the Governor's race. They would not vote for a man that would have said or done or acted or felt as they said George Wallace felt. I love black people. I love white people. I love yellow people. I'm, I'm, I'm, I, well—all religions and I'm—believe in fair play to people that I know of in this country and I'm a Christian and, therefore, I don't have any ill feeling toward anybody because of the race cause our black people are some of our finest citizens.

00:14:41:00

INTERVIEWER: I THINK, THE, THE REASON I ASK THE QUESTION IS, I THINK WHAT HE MEANT BY THAT WAS, NOT YOU, PERSONALLY, BUT, BUT IN THE, THE MANNER IN WHICH YOU SPOKE LED OTHER PEOPLE SOMETIMES TO INTERPRET THAT IN A VIOLENT WAY BECAUSE THEY—

Wallace: I spoke my—vehemently against the Federal Government not against people. I talked about the, the Government of the, the United States and the Supreme Court. I never

expressed in any language that would upset anyone about a person's race. I talked about the Supreme Court usurpation of power. I talked about the big central government. Isn't that what everybody talks about now? Isn't that what Reagan got elected on? Isn't that all the legislators, electors, members of Congress and, and the Senate and House both say? I don't believe in a big strong Federal Government. I believe they're taking too many rights away from the people. Same thing I always said, except you see keep coming back to me, but Lyndon Johnson has filibustered and talked more against civil rights bills than I ever did in my whole entire life.

INTERVIEWER: LET'S—

Wallace: Yet, you, you, you re—re—rehabilitated him. You rehabilitated Fullerbright [sic]. You rehabilitated all these other distinguished fine Americans had no hatred in their heart for any man because of color. But you won't rehabilitate me.

INTERVIEWER: I WILL GOVERNOR [laughs].

Wallace: I can, I can tell you this and you must put this on your program. I—do you have an honorary degree from Tuskegee Institute?

INTERVIEWER: NO, SIR I DON'T.

Wallace: I have an honorary doctorate degree from the Tuskegee Institute and that's the most renowned Negro college in—black college, if you want to say it, in the world.

INTERVIEWER: I WANT TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT SELMA IN, IN 1965. WERE BLACK PEOPLE, AT THAT TIME, ANY—[phone rings] OH. CAN WE STOP THAT? WANNA STOP?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'LL STOP.

INTERVIEWER: YEAH.

[cut]

00:16:51:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: YOU GOT SPEED?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 3: SPEED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YEAH. GOVERNOR WALLACE, TAKE THREE,

MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SETTLE IN HERE. CALLIE, IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: OK. GOVERNOR IN 1965 WERE BLACK PEOPLE IN ALABAMA FREELY ABLE TO VOTE?

Wallace: Well yes. Black people allowed to vote except they had, you know, you had to read—be able to read and write your name and some of the other things that before that were really kept blacks from voting, but in my little home county of Barba which is 50% black, the first name in beat one on the voting list is a black person. But yes there were some discriminatory measures passed by other folks regarding voting not by myself. But we did believe that people ought to be able to read and write. Anybody in this day and time that cannot read and write, did not read and write because they didn't want to and we didn't think they could determine whoever, what they we were voting on and—but now we have universal suffrage, its all right, it's working well, and I've been elected under it, so I'm satisfied.

00:18:11:00

INTERVIEWER: IN 1965 IN JANUARY, MARTIN LUTHER KING TOOK HIS ORGANIZATION TO SELMA. NOW THIS WAS JUST TWO YEARS AFTER BIRMINGHAM. WHAT DID YOU THINK WHEN YOU HEARD HE WAS GOING TO SELMA TO BEGIN A CAMPAIGN?

Wallace: Oh, I just, I just felt very sorry for our state for have—I was worried about the march because it was so far across that and I was worried about some man of hatred might get in the woods there and shoot someone with a rifle. And I called on President Johnson for help in the matter of protecting the marchers. They had every right to march. It went off perfectly and then some man of ill will shot and killed Ms. Liuzzo. We were so glad that nobody got—that nobody disturbed anybody. The race was perfectly—the, the march was perfectly peaceful. The—and how glad I was of that. But the other was not the fault of the people of this state no more than the people of Maryland were at fault in me being shot in their state.

00:19:21:00

INTERVIEWER: ALL RIGHT. JOE SMITHERMAN WAS A BRAND NEW MAYOR AT THAT TIME AND HE SAID TO US, HE ADMITS TO US, THAT HE DIDN'T KNOW VERY MUCH ABOUT WHAT HE WAS DOING. HE DID—HE HAD SO LITTLE EXPERIENCE—

Wallace: He didn't know what?

INTERVIEWER: HE HAD SO LITTLE EXPERIENCE BECAUSE HE WAS A BRAND NEW MAYOR AT THAT TIME, JOE SMITHERMAN. AND HE SAID THAT HE

TURNED TO YOU FOR GUIDANCE. I'D LIKE TO KNOW, WHEN DID YOU START TALKING TO HIM AND HOW DID YOU HELP HIM?

Wallace: I don't recall when it happened. I talked to him, you know, that's been so long ago, but I'm sure I talked to him because we were very good friends. I do know that I gave orders not to let what happened at the bridge there—order the Colonel who was sick at that time not to go to, to Selma and put another a major in charge of the group and says, do nothing that would stir up any trouble there. Just don't let anybody attempt to hurt anyone. And one reason they didn't want 'em to go across the bridge, at that time, and Mr. E.D. Nixon, leading the civil rights man here in Montgomery brought Dr. King here because there was a group of people on the other side of the bridge who, we afraid, were going to, you know, so—*it was something that happened that, that enraged me because I didn't intend for it to happen that way.*

00:20:49:00

[cut]

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00:20:50:00

[cut]

Wallace: And I ordered them not to do any such as that because they were not fixing to march to Montgomery that was just a, just a march to the bridge.

00:20:56:00

[cut]

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00:20:57:00

[cut]

Wallace: *But I didn't want them to get beyond that point where there was some people that told me there might be some violence.*

INTERVIEWER: WE HAVE READ, IN FACT, THAT, THAT YOU MET WITH COLONEL LINGO A DAY OR TWO BEFORE AND TOLD HIM TO BE PEACEABLE THERE—

Wallace: I met with him a day or so before the day, day of the march and told him not to be there. I ordered him to stay home and on—I let him go a little short—not long after that,

but—one reason was disobeying an order another reason he wanted to run for Sheriff of another county, but the Colonel was sick. He had a bad, I don't know what you call it, bone something in one of his hands and he was taking pain medicine and he really been suffering—

00:21:49:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Wallace: —and I ordered him not to go but he went anyway.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE JUST RUN OUT.

00:21:52:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 600]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THIS IS GEORGE WALLACE. TAKE FOUR.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK, CALLIE IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: GOVERNOR IF YOU COULD JUST REPEAT TO ME WHAT YOU WERE SAYING THAT YOU TOLD COLONEL LINGO ABOUT TRYING TO DEAL WITH THE MARCHERS PEACEABLY BEFORE THE MARCH.

Wallace: I talked to Colonel Lingo the night, I think, before the—that sad affair on, on the next day and he was sick at that time with a bad finger of some sort, some problem with it, and he was taking some pain medicine. And I ordered him not to go to Selma. I put it in charge of Major Smiley, who is now deceased, and I told him I said for goodness sakes don't let anybody do anything to cause any disturbance of violence. Now this thing when it happened at the bridge, in my judgment, was just something that happened. But remember this not a single person was harmed to the extent of having to be go [sic] to the hospital. There was no violence, beating people down and put 'em in the hospital, not a single person was injured in that march. In that thing which I was enraged about because I had ordered them, but they told me that the people on the other side of the bridge they were trying to keep them getting to because they were afraid something might happen. But Colonel Lingo, I'm sure didn't mean it that way, but Colonel Lingo didn't stay with our state government long after that. He ran for mayor in Jefferson County and lost but I gave him orders for them to keep a low profile and please no, keep down any violence and, and, and if you had to arrest somebody white or black for violent [sic] use the least possible force necessary to put him

under arrest.

00:23:45:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU WERE PRETTY ANGRY WITH HIM AFTER THE INCIDENT.

Wallace: Yes, I was. I was. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT, WHAT, WHAT EXCHANGE DID YOU HAVE WITH HIM AFTER THE INCIDENT? BECAUSE THERE WAS ANOTHER MARCH PLANNED TWO DAYS LATER.

Wallace: Well, I told him, I said, I told you not to go over there, and he said, well, Governor I just felt like that I was the only one that could keep things from happening like they did happen and I'm sorry it happened. And I said, well, Lingo, you just shouldn't have gone, but he said, well Governor I apologize because really I don't think it was anybody's fault it just happened.

00:24:24:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, TWO DAYS LATER THE DEMONSTRATORS TRIED ANOTHER MARCH THEY CALLED—MARTIN LUTHER KING CALLED IN A LOT OF MINISTERS AND LAY PEOPLE OF THAT SORT AND THEY TRIED TO GO ACROSS THE BRIDGE AGAIN AND, AT THAT TIME, THE TROOPERS OPENED UP THE LINES AS IF THEY COULD PASS TO MONTGOMERY. I'M WONDERING WERE YOU ON THE PHONE? WAS THERE AN OPEN PHONE LINE, WERE YOU TALKING—

Wallace: I told them, let them march. I, I did not think they were going to—if they had intended to go to Montgomery starting at night, I probably would have asked 'em, ask 'em to please don't march in the night time. Because *we got a report of how much it would take to guarantee absolute protection for everyone and we didn't have the resources. So I called on President Johnson in Article IV, Section 4 of the Constitution to send us troops to help us maintain order.* So, so it was his folks that were here to help maintain order. And there was no disorder at all.

[sound roll out]

[cut]

00:25:29:00

[slate]

[change to sound roll 1546]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CAMERA STRAIGHT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THIS IS GEORGE WALLACE INTERVIEW FOUR "A."

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: IT'S ALL YOURS, CALLIE.

INTERVIEWER: GOVERNOR, YOU WERE TELLING ME ABOUT ASKING PRESIDENT JOHNSON TO PAY FOR THE TROOPS COMING TO ALABAMA. YOU MET WITH PRESIDENT JOHNSON TO ASK HIM THIS AND I WONDERED IF YOU COULD DESCRIBE THAT MEETING FOR ME.

Wallace: Well, the meeting I stayed with him three and a half hours but we talked about everything under the sun from education to, to the welfare program to, to national defense, Vietnam and all those things. I told him that while I would hope that we had—if the march was big enough we might not be able to contain it. I mean that is we were, we were worried about it if it was so big that we didn't have what it took to give a 100% protection between fifty miles of, of marching. And—but when we left there we felt like we could but then when I got a report from my own Public Safety Department it required five hundred policemen, several thousand not two thousand national guardsmen, twenty-five helicopters, so many mo—mobile toilets, etc. We didn't have the money to put out that kind of defense. So I called on him to send troops to help us be sure that no one got a hair on their head harmed. And nobody did in that march.

00:27:12:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID YOU THINK OF PRESIDENT JOHNSON DURING THAT MEETING, WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

Wallace: Well, we, we were not together politically, but we were personal friends and had always been. You see, I used to quote in my opposition the so called civil rights bill on the matter of, of interfering with the property ownership system and the free enterprise system. And I used to quote him in his speeches when he spoke against the civil rights bills. So, you see, he went in his presidency and got 'em passed. Now I'm glad they're passed and they we had no, no problem accommodating every one of them.

INTERVIEWER: GOVERNOR, WE ARE ALL DYING TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED IN THAT MEETING. YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO TELL ME MORE OF WHAT HAPPENED IN THAT MEETING WITH PRESIDENT JOHNSON. WE'RE JUST DYING TO KNOW WHAT YOU THOUGHT ABOUT HIM AND WHAT HAPPENED.

Wallace: I don't remember that's so far back. I don't—we talked about everything. We talked about the war. We talked about, we, we talked about—I told him I might run Lurleen for Governor and he was intrigued by that because his folks had supported Mar Ferguson. We didn't talk about this matter three and a half hours, no. But I was just telling him if I needed help I was gonna call him, as I recall, but—and I did call him. I think it angered him,

though, because then it was his troops that if anybody had to be knocked in the head, it would be by Lyndon Johnson's troops and not George Wallace's troops, cause I did not want anybody to—I went on television. I asked people to stay away from the march. They had a right to march. Let them march in peace and they did march in peace.

00:28:58:00

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU—WERE YOU NERVOUS WHEN YOU MET WITH HIM? YOU KNEW HIM BEFORE, BUT—SO THIS WAS NOT INTIMIDATING TO YOU TO MEET WITH THE PRESIDENT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WAS IT—

Wallace: Oh, I'd been with the President before that. And I had been with President Kennedy, in fact, I supported him at the Democratic Convention when he was try to be the vice-presidential nominee. I voted for him. Alabama voted for him for President. I voted for him for President.

INTERVIEWER: BUT PRESIDENT JOHNSON IS, YOU KNOW, WE, WE HEAR SO MUCH—

Wallace: Well, listen, Lyndon Johnson, is a most personable easy man to be around as a President. He'll make you feel at home just time you go in there—he put his arms around you and say, come on here George and sit down. Let's talk. I was not trembling and shaking. He makes you feel at home. Most personable president you probably ever knew.

00:29:54:00

INTERVIEWER: AT THE END OF THAT MEETING WHAT, WHAT DID YOU FEEL LIKE? WHAT DID YOU FEEL HAD BEEN ACCOMPLISHED AT THE END OF THAT MEETING WITH HIM?

Wallace: I felt like it was understanding that both of us were going to—that I was going to do what was necessary to keep peace in Alabama, nobody be harmed and that's what he said. I, I hope you'll do that. I said, of course, I'm gonna try to do that. I don't remember that's so long ago now. That twenty years ago, is that right, twenty years ago?

INTERVIEWER: YES.

Wallace: I don't remember everything I talked about twenty-five years ago. Twenty years ago.

INTERVIEWER: YOU SEE, WE'RE JUST SO NOSY. WE CAN HARDLY STAND IT. WE'RE, [laughs], WE'RE, WE'RE DYING TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED IN THESE SITUATIONS. THAT'S WHY I ASK YOU. LET ME GO FORWARD.

Wallace: Well, I know we talked about the safety of people marching and I told him I didn't think anybody in Alabama was going to bother anybody, which they didn't, and I asked 'em to stay away from the march and let it proceed in peace. I would not even had to make that statement to the people of Alabama, because they did not want any violence.

00:30:49:00

INTERVIEWER: WHEN THE MARCHERS FINALLY GOT TO MONTGOMERY AND MET OUT HERE THERE WAS A GROUP OF TWENTY-ONE PEOPLE WHO WANTED TO COME AND TALK TO YOU AT THE END OF THE MARCH, BUT YOU DIDN'T WANT TO MEET WITH THEM THAT DAY. WHY DIDN'T YOU WANT TO MEET WITH THEM THAT DAY?

Wallace: I don't recall why, but I do recall that I met with them a few days later. And I can recall this, they may deny it, I had some pictures here on my desk, small pictures and one of the leaders walked up and says, are these souvenirs? I said yes. He says how about signing one for me? So I said to my friend, whatever his name was, then some more came forward. One of them reached over and whispered to me and says, I've always voted for you. They may deny that now, but that's the truth. I'll take a lie detector test on that, nothing else.

00:31:56:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME, LET ME ASK YOU SOMETHING ELSE THAT JOE SMITHERMAN SAID TO US. WE WERE TALKING ABOUT THE VOTER—VOTING REGISTRATION PROCESS IN SELMA AND JOE SMITHERMAN SAYS THAT IT WAS COMPLETELY INAPPROPRIATE FOR THE DEMONSTRATIONS TO BE GOING ON IN SELMA, BECAUSE THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO THERE. HE SAID THAT IF THE SYSTEM WAS TO BE CHANGED IT HAD TO BE CHANGED UP HERE IN MONTGOMERY AND HE SAID, ACTUALLY, IT WAS IN YOUR HANDS THAT YOU COULD CHANGE THE SYSTEM.

Wallace: No, I couldn't change it. The Governor of Alabama cannot change laws and the, and the, and as I recall the requirements, though, though it was a long time ago was that you had to be able to read and write and sign your name. I don't believe it was a—before that it was a Constitution test which was unconstitutional in its face, it was not fair, but I do think that most Alabamians thought that anybody who voted ought, at least, be able to read and write—

00:32:53:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Wallace: —and understand what they were voting on.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'VE JUST RUN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OK. WE HAVE—

00:32:57:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 601]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ONE. GOVERNOR WALLACE, TAKE FIVE, MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: ALL YOURS CAL.

INTERVIEWER: GOVERNOR, I WANT TO GO BACK TO THE PETTIS BRIDGE INCIDENT AND ASK YOU WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE MEDIA'S HANDLING OF THAT INCIDENT? WHAT—DID YOU THINK THAT THEY FAILED TO REALLY LOOK AT THE COMPLEXITY OF THE SITUATION? WERE YOU UPSET BY THE MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF THAT INCIDENT?

Wallace: The media always taken—been unfair to the people of our region of the country. They look at the beam and mold in your eye, but don't take the beam out of their own eye. And I've, I've never, frankly, the media did play it up more than it ought to have been played up because it wasn't all that important, but they always have done that. In other words, even said one time that a fellow got shot was refused admittance to a hospital because he was black. And it happened to be a Catholic hospital. And the Catholic nuns came over and said, yes we did not have—we were just a small hospital. We didn't have the equipment nor the doctors there. The man needed to be to another hospital. He'd die before he got there. We couldn't handle him because we didn't—we couldn't perf—we were just sort of a first aid station and, in fact, my attitude toward blacks has been, been very bad that to the extent that if it was true, no self-respecting black would ever vote for me in any election from then on. You couldn't even apologize and say, I'm sorry, but I never said anything about anybody that, that sounded of hatred because there's no hatred among the mass of people in our state. And I hope and I know the southern people, the black people, they integrated more schools than did anywhere else in the country.

00:34:49:00

INTERVIEWER: WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE THE MEDIA COVERAGE WAS AS IT WAS BACK IN THAT TIME?

Wallace: It's always been that way about the South. Its always been we have been a nation of rednecks and low brow and I stood on my own on Meet the Press and Face the Nation and answer with the toughest folks that been on television. They think they're smarter than

anybody else. They think they're smarter than people down South. Most of 'em do. Some of them believe the South sort of, sort of ashamed of the fact where they came from. I'm proud of the fact that I'm a Southerner. I think if you look at what happened to us after the war between the states with no martial aid or lend lease like we give our enemies in recent days, which was the right thing to do, that the black and white people both suffered, but they all joined together and hung on until now we are part of the sun belt that probably, the, the—probably the most envy of the free world is the sun belt of which Alabama is a part of. Where it's a better place to live for black and white than you can find in many places in our country.

00:35:55:00

INTERVIEWER: WHICH LEADS ME TO MY NEXT QUESTION, GOVERNOR. I WAS GOING TO ASK YOU, IT'S BEEN TWENTY, THIRTY YEARS SINCE ALL OF THIS STUFF THAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT TODAY HAPPENED. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE LEGACY OF THAT TIME? WHAT'S, WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS, HAS, HAS BEEN LEFT NOW FOR ALL OF US TO DEAL WITH AS A RESULT OF THOSE TURBULENT TIMES?

Wallace: Well, I think the, the fact that they portrayed the Southern people as abolitionists portrayed all southern people instead of just the planters that they were against the holding the slaves, the abolitionists incited hatred in the North. All southern people or all majority who never owned any slave. Slavery's bad is going out, it ought to gone out, but yes they were always mislead people about the South and—yet southerners have held their own in the Congress for years and years in intelligence and you can't deny that. But I think they're coming around to realize now that we're a section of the country that's—is intelligent and as fine as they, they are themselves.

00:37:02:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DO YOU THINK—WHEN YOU LOOK BACK NOW ON THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, WHATS THE LEGACY OF THAT TIME? WHAT'S, WHAT'S BEEN THE RESULT OF THAT?

Wallace: I'd like to say that, of course, the civil rights are guaranteed in the Constitution, but the bill that passed, it works all right. And I'm glad to say that I have an honorary degree from Tuskegee Institute. An honorary doctor [sic] degree from Tuskegee Institute, because I have served on the Board of Trustees of that institution and, and I have helped that institution on many, many occasions and that's one of my proud achievements is serving on the Board and being granted an honorary doctorate degree at Tuskegee Institute.

INTERVIEWER: HAS—HAD—HAVE YOU SEEN A LOT OF CHANGE IN THE YEARS YOU'VE LIVED IN—HAVE YOU SEEN A LOT OF CHANGE IN THE YEARS THAT YOU'VE BEEN A SOUTHERNOR?

Wallace: Oh, there's been change among every people. In other words, change, change happens every day, every day, every day, and every day it tends to—beginning of

civilization. We all change. Yes we've changed. The people in our state if they were to vote on segregation. They would vote no for segregation. Let's don't go back to that again.

00:38:13:00

INTERVIEWER: IS THIS A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER?

Wallace: Oh it's certainly for the better. I recognize it was going to be for the better after the first year I was a Governor. I did object to some of the ways they wanted to artificially go about it by busing people back and forth which was opposed by black and white alike. I'm still proud that I have an honorary doctorate in Tuskegee Institute the most renowned college prob—predominate black college in the world.

INTERVIEWER: OK. HOLD ON.

[cut]

00:38:48:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THIS IS GOVERNOR WALLACE, TAKE SIX, MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: IS THIS THE LAST ONE?

INTERVIEWER: THERE ARE JUST A COUPLE MORE THAT ARE LINKED TOGETHER AND WE'RE WRAPPING NOW.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK.

INTERVIEWER: I HAVE A COUPLE GENERAL QUESTIONS I WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT MOOD OF THE SOUTH KIND OF THING. WHAT, DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS PERIOD OF 1954-65, WHAT DO YOU THINK WHITE PEOPLE FELT THEY HAD TO LOSE?

Wallace: To lose?

INTERVIEWER: TO LOSE.

Wallace: I don't think they had, had, had to lose anything. They have always been—there's a region of the country that did not like strong national simple government. And it was an exercise of that feeling that the Federal Government is taking us over and swallowing us up and becoming our master instead of our servant. That was what they thought they were losing. They didn't—the segregation issue was one of those things that was latched upon as the usurpation of authority, but we were going to do it ourselves, but they wanted to do it

themselves. And today, isn't that what everybody says, they run for Congress in Pennsylvania and New York, California. I am for more rights for California not the Federal Government taking over and writing all the guidelines. That's what everybody says now. That's what Reagan got elected by one of the biggest votes anybody ever elected by saying those very same things I said way back yonder when I ran for the Presidency myself and when I got shot.

00:40:13:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW LET ME ASK YOU THE FLIP SIDE OF THAT. AS A RESULT OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT WHAT DID WHITE PEOPLE GAIN FROM THAT?

Wallace: I think they have gained, I think they just generally gained anything when the impediment is removed from any people in our society who have been denied say the right to vote for so long. I think they felt a burden off themselves that this thing was now solved in that regard and they want to go on to solving other problems such as finding more industrial job opportunities and more educational advantages. And, and for blacks and whites and I was—our state was the last to give free textbooks. I did that in my first administration because the black dropout was so high and I didn't want to see them out. And I built these technical college and trade school all sections of Alabama. Drove them into school and back home so, so many black, white people could go to college and tech school. And that's the reason lot of people voted for me in the black race too.

INTERVIEWER: SO WHAT I HEAR YOU SAYING IS—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: STOP, STOP HERE.

[sound roll out]

[cut]

00:41:25:00

[slate]

[change to sound roll to 1547]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: GOVERNOR GEORGE WALLACE, TAKE SEVEN AND FINAL. GO BY THIS HERE AND THEN THIS HERE AND THEN THIS ONE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: WE'RE ALL SET. IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: OK. I JUST WANTED TO FOLLOW UP WHAT YOU WERE SAYING IN YOUR LAST ANSWER ABOUT WHITE PEOPLE FEELING LIKE THE BURDEN WAS LIFTED OFF THEM, THEY COULD TURN TO OTHER ISSUES.

Wallace: The burden of this continuous harping and marching and demonstrating. They didn't like that. They do not like disturbances. They like peace and quietude and solitude and peaceful relationships. I think they glad it was all over and all done with and, and they got that out of it knowing that we were still friends as black and white people because there never was a single confrontation between blacks and whites during that time in Alabama, not a single time, that happened in other states, but not in Alabama.

00:42:21:00

INTERVIEWER: SO DO YOU THINK THAT THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, IN EFFECT, BROUGHT PEOPLE TOGETHER AS A RESULT?

Wallace: I think it surely did, yes.

INTERVIEWER: IN, IN WHAT WAY? BE A LITTLE BIT MORE SPECIFIC.

Wallace: Well, in the sense that nobody feels anything, you know, like the separation of Chur—I mean of, of eating places. They didn't, the first place, mind just sit and eat with black people because we'd done it all our lives back in our work and our home, but because it was not the thing to do. But then when it was the thing to do, this just fell in so easy to be done because white and black people had been so close all these years before all this came up.

00:43:04:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. I HAVE A COUPLE MORE CAN I SQUEEZE ON? OK, GREAT.  
[laughs]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: REAL QUICK.

INTERVIEWER: LET ME RUN BACK TO THE 1950s AND I WONDER IF YOU COULD JUST GIVE ME A LITTLE WORD PICTURE OF WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN THE SOUTH IN THE '50s IN ALABAMA.

Wallace: In the '50s?

INTERVIEWER: IN THE '50s IN ALABAMA.

Wallace: Well, in the '50s we were—we had not become as mechanized in the farming as we are now and there were more blacks than whites living in rural counties than they are now. So there's, there's been that change, but, at that time, relationships were very fine between black and white. But it has changed in the sense of the economy. There, there are less people in rural areas than there used to be, because—

00:43:52:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Wallace: —the mechanized farming has gone out and cattle growing has come in. And so many of them that were farming had to go to other parts of the—

INTERVIEWER: I GOT YOU. I HEARD YOU. OK, OK. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:44:05:00

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