



Interview with **Jim Ingram**

Date: November 15, 1988

Interviewer: Sam Pollard

Camera Rolls: 2045-2047

Sound Rolls: 221-222

Team: b

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.

Interview with Jim Ingram, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on November 15, 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 #2045]

[sound roll #221]

00:00:12:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark one.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

See now [inaudible] Whoa!

Camera crew member #3:

Oh!

Interviewer:

Still rolling?

Camera crew member #1:

Yeah, we're OK.

Interviewer:

All right?

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

Camera crew member #2:

I'm fine.

Jim Ingram:

It's what I almost did.

00:00:35:00

Interviewer:

OK, [laughs] Jim. First question. Take us back to 1967 and then tell us about the arrest at the gas station. That and what happened when you got to the police station.

00:00:48:00

Jim Ingram:

It was the third afternoon since the rebellion had started that Sunday. I believe it was a Tuesday afternoon in '67. And I imagine it was July 25th, 'cause it started on July 23rd, that Sunday. And we were en route to picking up a young lady who was a friend of the family who had gotten stranded at her job because the buses had stopped running on orders of the mayor then, Jerome Cavanaugh. And we were riding with a, a man that we had just met, sort of an acquaintance of the family of the girl that we were going to pick up. And he needed gas and he stopped at a gas station on Verner and Shane, which is a fairly active area of the city. People—were throngs of people on the street. And we pulled into this gas station which was relatively empty, and that kind of caught me funny at the time because normally that gas station was full, but we saw that there were a couple of cars in front of us. One, a gentleman was pumping gas into a vehicle and he had on coveralls as if he was a service station attendant. And so, we were sitting there and it dawned on me and I said to the driver at the time that it dawned on me Hey, I think the governor has banned gasoline sales because of the, the possibility of people using that to make Molotov cocktails. I don't think we can get any gas here. So, an argument ensued with the four of us, Ross Mitchell, my brother Don, and myself, and the driver, and they were saying things like, Well, why is he selling

gasoline? And at that point, when someone made that point or asked that question, the guy jumped in the car and sped off. So, we knew he in fact was stealing gasoline and wasn't working at the station, just happened to have on a gasoline attendant, gas station attendant attire. So, at the point that he careened into the street and around the corner on two wheels, we looked to our right and here came the Michigan State Police, firing automatic weapons, semi-automatic weapons out of the window, and I just told the guys at that point, Put your hands behind your, your necks because they're gonna think right away that we're doing the same thing. And sure enough, they, after they saw that they couldn't really catch this guy who had sped off, they turned back into the station and trained their weapons on us and ordered us out of the car with our hands behind our necks. Course, we'd been sittin' that way for some thirty seconds already. And when we got out of the car, I spoke to one of the State Troopers who said that we were stealing gas. And I said, No, we were here trying to figure out what was going on and I was telling the driver about the ban and so forth. At which point he said, Well, we just gotta get some of you people off the streets. And I said, Well, you know, let us go and we'll be off the streets immediately. We just gonna go pick up this lady. [coughs] Since we don't have any gas, maybe we won't and we'll just go home. So, we we—he said, No, we just gotta get some a you folks off the street. So, he put us up against the wall and, and told us to lean there with our legs outstretched and we remained there for I guess ten, fifteen minutes until a Detroit Police paddy wagon came careening around the corner. Out jumped this, I guess he was an officer, he had no badge, he had a police-type uniform on, no insignias or anything, dark blue shirt, dark blue pants and a brown army helmet askew on his head and this really wild look in his eyes. And he jumped out and he said, Oh, so you niggers want to fight, eh? And we all kind of looked at each other like, you know, where, where is this guy coming from? So, at that point they handcuffed us, because we had just been standing there with our arms against the wall. They came out with all these pairs of handcuffs and handcuffed us and then told us to get one by one into the back of the van. As we got into the back of the police van, this officer proceeded to kick the first guy, Ross Mitchell. He kicked the driver, and then myself and my brother were last and my brother did a kind of little fake like he was going and the guy kicked at him and got off balance and he shot past him. So he didn't kick either one of us 'cause we both did basically the same thing.

00:05:18:00

Interviewer:

Can we cut? That's good. That's good.

[beep]

Camera crew member #2:

Sorry about the call.

[cut]

00:05:23:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark two.

[slate]

00:05:31:00

Interviewer:

OK. Take us back to '67 at the gas station.

00:05:37:00

Jim Ingram:

It was the third day of the rebellion in '67, in the afternoon. We were on our way to pick up a young lady who had been stranded at work because the buses weren't running. And were in this gas station 'cause the guy who was driving needed gas, and I realized that there was a ban on gasoline. The governor had posed a ban. And there was a car in front of us and a guy who looked like a service station attendant was pumping gas, and we discovered all of a sudden that he was stealing the gas because he jumped in the car and sped off around the corner on two wheels. [clears throat] At this point, a State Police car came flying down the street firing automatic, semi-automatic weapons at him, and I said, Oh heck, we're in trouble. You know, they're gonna think we're stealing the gas, and we, we were just sitting there discussing it. So, I told the guys, Put your hands behind your neck and we got out and the police came and ordered us out, Hands behind your neck, and they pointed these weapons at us. Lined us up against the wall and we told 'em, we, you know, we weren't stealing gas, we were tryin' to figure out what to do, what was going on 'cause we thought this guy was selling it. They said, We gotta keep you, get you people off the streets and we'll straighten it out later at the station. Ten minutes later, this Detroit Police van comes careening around the corner and this White male jumps out with a police-type uniform on, no badge, a brown army helmet askew on his head crosswise, a real wild look on his face and he yells, Oh, so you niggers wanna fight, eh? And we, at that point, looked at each other, what's, what's, what's, what is it with him? You know. And he directed us to get into the back of the van. As each one of us proceeded to get into the back of the van, he kicked the first two of us, as they went in, and my brother Don and I, we kinda did a little change of pace fakery and kinda caused him to go off balance and he missed kicking us, so we missed getting kicked. Had to sit in the van for some forty to forty-five minutes. They turned the heat up as high as it could go and we just sat there and sweated for, I guess, the better part of an hour.

00:07:43:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut one. Let's cut.

[cut]

00:07:45:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark three.

[slate]

00:07:56:00

Interviewer:

Ready? So, so tell me, what happened when you got down to the police station? What, what, what happened when you, when they got you down there in the paddy wagon?

00:08:04:00

Jim Ingram:

We were taken to the 7th Precinct, I knew that because the ride was very short, and the doors were flung open and somebody started yelling, Run niggers, run. And an officer started slinging us out of the van. I couldn't see that clearly what was going on in front of me, but I was the last one out of the van and I saw my brother in front of me being swung at. There were National Guardsman on the right and police on the left and they were swinging rifles and swinging these red, bright-redly painted, brightly painted red pick ax handles, and I was trying to dodge some of the swings. I don't know how I got through there with only being hit hard one time with a rifle barrel, and that's what broke my right arm. And we sort of ran, I guess, as fast as we could and tried to dodge those—some of them were really swinging quite wildly. But it was, it was an experience I'll never forget. It was like I was going to myself, What have we done? I mean they—we were guilty of Lord knows what in these guys' minds, you know. I mean they're treating us like we were hardened criminals or something, and all we were doing was attempting to buy some gas at a gas station. We were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

00:09:22:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop.

[cut]

00:09:24:00

Camera crew member #1:

And marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark four.

[slate]

Jim Ingram:

[coughs]

00:09:31:00

Interviewer:

You want some water or something? OK. Just tell us, tell us about what happened when you got into that cell with the other, the other guys who were in there, and then the story about when you were fingerprinted.

00:09:43:00

Jim Ingram:

We were placed in a holding cell which was rather large but still very crowded because there were so many people in there. At one point, we were all talking and they brought in this, this White kid. I guess everybody at that point was Black or Hispanic or whatever. And this young White kid came in and some of the younger Black guys, as soon as he got inside that door and the door was slammed shut, just charged him. And he, he apparently was fairly alert because he knew right away he was gonna be dead meat. He literally climbed the, the steel bars of the door and climbed almost all ways up, all the way up to the ceiling. I don't even know how he maintained his balance. At that point, Ross Mitchell and myself and several others just kind of prevailed upon the guys, you know, Hey, leave the kid alone. He's not

bothering anybody. He's in here with us. He may have been doing some of what, some of the things we were doing, you know, and he may in fact be innocent, so why are you tryin' to do something to him? You know. At that point, I began to think of myself that this really wasn't, couldn't be characterized as a race riot, although there was that White-Black thing in terms of the schism between the police and those they were locking up. And I guess they were hurling their resentment of the police back at this one kid.—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Jim Ingram:

—And I didn't think that was fair. We—

00:11:00:00

Camera crew member #1:

Rollout.

Interviewer:

OK, let's stop. Did you get it?

Camera crew member #1:

Last, the last line [inaudible].

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #2046]

00:11:05:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark five.

[slate]

00:11:11:00

Interviewer:

So, tell us the story again about when they took you to the cell and the, the White cat who they brought in.

00:11:16:00

Jim Ingram:

We were taken to a holding cell which was rather large but crowded. And I guess about five minutes after we were there, they brought this young White kid in and he was immediately set upon by some of younger Black males who were incarcerated in there with us. And the kid, I guess, was pretty alert 'cause right away, as soon as they slammed the door shut, he looked behind him and he saw these guys kind of converging and mumbling and grumbling, you know, and then they charged him. And even before they charged him, he went right up the, the, the steel bars on the that door, almost to the ceiling. I don't even know how he maintained his balance, but he somehow balanced precariously up on the top of that door, and I guess pressing against the ceiling and screaming and, at that time Mitch and myself, we prevailed upon the guys to you know, Hey, leave him alone, back off, this kid hasn't done anything to us. And that was when I began to, in my mind, characterize the, the rebellion as not a race riot in the sense that Blacks and Whites were out there being arrested together and doing some looting, I guess, together, from what I could tell. But I think that the hostility directed towards the White police and guardsmen, which were all White, kind of transferred to this kid, and I didn't think that was too fair.

00:12:36:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut.

[cut]

00:12:38:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark six.

[slate]

00:12:43:00

Interviewer:

So, tell us, tell us the story about when they, when you got fingerprinted later on.

00:12:48:00

Jim Ingram:

After a while they brought us one by one out of the cell. I know they brought me out to be purportedly fingerprinted. As I walked down that corridor, one national guardsman pointed a rifle at my head, and as I got to the end of the corridor another put an Army .45 to my temple. And I was going, What do they think I'm gonna do, try to escape? And they said, You've gotta be fingerprinted, nigger. So, they steered me to the left over to this little bench where they were, were fingerprinting people, and I, I remember I started trembling. One officer took my hand and squeeze-squeezed it real tight and told me, Relax your fingers. And I said, Well, ask him to take this gun from my temple. How can I relax? I mean, what do you think I'm John Dillinger or something? Totally surrounded by all you guys. Why the gun to my temple? And he says, Nigger, I'll show you how to relax, and he put a cigarette out on my hand, and, man, you talk about pain, I never knew that kind of pain existed. Just that little pinpoint fire that I felt was starting in my hand it almost made me lose consciousness, you know. I went limp, the guardsman who had the rifle up to my head sort of grabbed me, and I never really was fingerprinted.

00:14:03:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut.

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:14:05:00

Camera crew member #1:

Scene eight, take seven.

Jim Ingram:

The one with the, the, the pistol, he was really young. I see what you're sayin'.

00:14:09:00

Camera crew member #1:

Speed.

[cut]

00:14:14:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark seven.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

Do the thing with your hand again, too, Jim. If you hold your hand a little higher, possibly.
The cigarette in your hand.

Interviewer:

When you, when you say [inaudible].

Jim Ingram:

Oh, OK.

Interviewer:

You know?

Jim Ingram:

OK, yeah.

00:14:25:00

Crewmember:

Higher than that, actually. OK. Thank you.

00:14:27:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's, let's pick it up again when you were pulled out and you were fingerprinted—

Camera crew member #1:

Hold.

Interviewer:

A truck. [truck passes]

Camera crew member #1:

Let that pass. OK.

00:14:42:00

Jim Ingram:

Presently, they took us out one by one to be—

00:14:44:00

Interviewer:

Let's start it again. Now, you know, Later in the day they took us.

Jim Ingram:

OK.

Interviewer:

OK. Let's do it again. Go ahead, Jim.

00:14:52:00

Jim Ingram:

Later on they took us to be fingerprinted and I was taken down this corridor with a young guardsmen with a, holding a rifle to my head. I got to the end of the corridor and this really

young kid, looked to be no more than sixteen, put a .45 automatic to my right temple and I was asked to relax as I was led over to this bench where the police officer grabbed my hand and squeezed it real hard and said, Relax nigger. And I said, I can't relax, this guy's got—why don't you have him take this gun from my temple? What am I John Dillinger, gonna escape? I'm totally surrounded by you guys. I'm cooperating. And he said, I'll teach you, I'll show you how to relax, and he put this cigarette out right on my hand. And it was just a pinpoint fire that seemed to just shoot right up my arm. I never knew that kind of pain existed. I mean, it was excruciating. I lost consciousness almost. I remember the one kid with the rifle, he grabbed me and tried to hold me up. And I never was actually fingerprinted.

00:15:49:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut.

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

00:15:52:00

Camera crew member #1:

And mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark eight.

[slate]

00:15:57:00

Interviewer:

How did you feel after you were let outta there? Just tell me, Outta the jail—

Jim Ingram:

After I got out, I'd gone through so much pain and, and—

Interviewer:

Start again, after you got outta jail, after you were released from Wayne County. Where was it?

Jim Ingram:

The 7th Precinct.

Interviewer:

Right. Let's do it with 7th Precinct included. Go ahead.

00:16:19:00

Jim Ingram:

After I was released from the 7th Precinct and went home, I'd gone through so much mental, emotional, and physical pain. The physical pain was nothing compared to the deep emasculation and sense of having been dehumanized while in that holding cell and while also in the shooting range in the basement. I was just totally filled with rage and, and, and a sense of deep and profound injustice to the extent that I felt that this whole thing had happened to me so that I personally could join others in trying to just wipe out the White race. That they had, I mean, what they did was so incredible, to walk around and appear civilized, you know, by day and, and night and then under cover of the kind of, I guess you could call it darkness, being inside the station, they were doing all these incredible things to human beings. I just felt like the White race should be wiped out and have no possibility of ever reproducing itself. So, I thought that that's what I should do. Just try to kill as many of them as I possibly could.

00:17:31:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut.

[cut]

00:17:34:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark nine.

[slate]

00:17:38:00

Interviewer:

So, tell me about when you were released from the 7th Precinct, what your feelings were, what you—in terms of what you had been through.

00:17:45:00

Jim Ingram:

I left the 7th Precinct with a, a burning, raging fury inside of me that had resulted from the physical, emotional, and mental pain, primarily emotional and, and mental, of being so emasculated and dehumanized. And what I mean by emasculation, my manhood, I felt like my testicles were literally, physically being just crushed. You know, my father always taught me to look another man in the eye or another person in the eye. And we got to a point where if you looked at the guards, whatever expression the national guardsmen, or the police, whatever expression you might have had on your face was literally taken to mean something by them. If you tried to appear pleasant, like you were imposing no threat or anything, they'd say, Oh nigger, you think this is funny. If you tried to appear serious or somber, they would say, What the hell is wrong with you? Why are you glaring at me? And they'd on each occasion, take you, drag you out, and beat you with those bright red ax handles. So, my way of dealing with this was just to avert my gaze. Whenever they would say anything to any one of us, I wouldn't even look at them. At one point they call-called me and another guy out and didn't, didn't call us by name and he had to yell three or four times before I finally looked to see that he was talkin' about me. So, I left with this deep sense of, of a mission that there was so much inhumanity among the White race, these people whom I thought were, you know, guardians of the law and protectors of the people were in fact brutal, racist oppressors and I felt that they had to be wiped out totally. That I had a personal mission out of that experience that meant that it was my job, in conjunction with others, to, to see to it that they had no—to kill them all and make sure they had no chance of ever reproducing. That they were evil devils so much as, as the Muslims had said. And I along with eleven other people formed something that we called the Order of the Burning Spear, and that was our mission, that was our primary mission, to kill White people, beginning with the police and guardsmen.

00:19:58:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's cut.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

Once again, really precise.

Camera crew member #2:

Scene eight. Take ten.

[cut]

00:20:06:00

Camera crew member #1:

And marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark ten.

[slate]

00:20:11:00

Interviewer:

Take us back to Attica now and when you first went into D yard as an observer. What you saw and how you felt.

Jim Ingram:

We went through a, a series of corridors—

Interviewer:

Let's start again. When, when, when we, when we were going toward D yard we went through a series of cor-of corridors. Go ahead.

00:20:31:00

Jim Ingram:

When, when I entered D yard for the first time, in company with some members of the Fortune Society and this character Kenyatta, we went through a series of corridors that were lined with New York State Troopers and prison guards, all giving us these hostile stares, what we'd call the nigger stare, you know, that was common in the South. They would rack shells into the chambers of their weapons as we walked by, which I knew was just a trick of intimidation because either you already got your weapon loaded and, and ready and primed or it's not and you don't wait until we walk by, and we're not the enemy to do that, so—we went through this series of tunnels and approached what they call the demilitarized zone where the, the state left us, and we were then in the hands of the inmates, the inmate guards. There was a total dichotomy between the way that they behaved and the way these so called professionals behaved. I mean, there was a concern for our safety, and we were led immediately to this tunnel where brother Shango, who was from Detroit, ran up and embraced me and began to tell me about how he had, he was instrumental in getting me there as one of the observers on the original list of demands. As I entered D yard, I just had this great surrealistic sense of a dreamlike quality. I mean, I was enveloped by a dream. Everything was gray or black. There seemed to be no colors except for the, the little pinprick fires that we're hearing about. Twelve hundred men were out there along with the—

[rollout on camera]

[wild sound]

Jim Ingram:

—hostages. Over near the front, I came to the rear of D yard—

00:22:15:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop.

Camera crew member #1:

Out.

00:22:16:00

Interviewer:

OK [inaudible]—

[beep]

Interviewer:

—ask you again—

[cut]

[camera roll #2047]

[sound roll #222]

00:22:20:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark eleven.

[slate]

00:22:25:00

Interviewer:

Take us when you first went into D yard.

00:22:27:00

Jim Ingram:

As I was led into D yard by the inmate guards, I remember this—being enveloped by this vast and profound surrealistic sense of, of unreality, of, of being blanketed by this, this grayness and darkness. Everything seemed gray and black other than the, the little pinprick points of light that I saw. It, it was a vast yard and there was some twelve hundred men in there and they had their little bonfires stretched out across the yard. I was taken up to the front of the yard, having entered from the rear, where there was this long, long series of tables made into a, one table and a microphone or two, a television monitor, and all these people sitting at the table. And there were the inmate leaders and some of the other observers who were already in there. But I just remember that it, it just seemed like a, a, a nightmarish quality to the whole thing, but at the same time nightmarish it also seemed so totally unrealistic. And I kept kind of asking myself, Am I really here?

00:23:34:00

Interviewer:

OK. Let's cut.

[cut]

00:23:37:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark twelve.

[slate]

00:23:43:00

Interviewer:

So, tell us how you, how the observers were treated by the guards, I mean, and specifically the story about when you—the volunteer brought some food to you in Stewart's room.

00:23:55:00

Jim Ingram:

The prison guards, as well as the New York State, State, State Troopers, but especially the prison guards treated us with a great deal of hostility. They didn't say a whole lot, but the way that they would look at you, the curt responses that came if you asked them a question. The townspeople were totally hostile. I remember a, a civilian volunteer brought in some doughnuts and coffee, and I guess he thought that it was for the guards. When they brought it into our room, he looked up at us and he said, Damn it, if I'd a known that we were bringing it to you guys, I would have spit in. And he in fact did spit on a couple of the doughnuts, at which point we threw half the doughnuts away and began a little discussion about what if he did know in advance and had already done something to this coffee. But we'd been in there for twelve, thirteen, fourteen hours, some of us for two days without any sustenance at all, anything to eat or drink other than occasional water down the hall, so we went on and, and consumed it. But those people were extremely hostile. We'd come through the crowd assembled at the gate to the prison and we'd hear taunts of obscenities and nigger this and nigger that. And the guards themselves almost unconsciously referred to their billy clubs as nigger sticks. And they didn't seem to even notice that they were in the presence of New York State Assemblyman, at least one editor of *The New York Times*, myself a reporter, a United States Congressman. They just didn't seem to care or realize what they were, I mean how easily and loosely they flung that term nigger around.

00:25:35:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut.

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

[beep]

Interviewer:

That's good.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:25:41:00

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