Interview with **Ruth Batson**
Date: November 8, 1988
Interviewer: Jacqueline Shearer
Camera Rolls: 4044-4047
Sound Rolls: 418-419
Team: D

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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 II*.

[camera roll #4044]
[sound roll #418]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Timecode fourteen, forty-four. TND.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

TND.

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, settle.

00:00:21:00

Interviewer:

So, Mrs. Batson, when your kids were in school, were you satisfied with the quality of the education that they were getting?

00:00:28:00

Ruth Batson:

No, I wasn't, but I wasn't sure of why I wasn't satisfied. There had been a group that had been started in Boston called Parents Federation. And so because I was always interested in education, I joined that group and started going to some of their meetings. But then somebody came out and said that the, a couple of the members in the group were Communists, and so that broke up that group. In the meantime, I was living in the Arch Project Housing project, and two of my children were attending the Dearborn School. And I was very concerned with their education because I had the feeling from talking with other parents in other parts of the city that the education was different. And because I was convinced of that, I went up to the school, and I first talked to the principal. And he said, Oh, no. No. All the curriculum material is the same. I talked to the teacher, she told me the same thing. And then after a while, I noticed that the daughter that I was speaking about in particular began to get science projects. You know, she would come home. She'd have this science project. One of them, the first one she had was talking from room to room on one of, you know those can things? And, and I was very pleased. I said, Gee, this is nice. This is, is encouraging. Until I heard her saying, I don't know why I'm the only one with a science project. So, I thought this was strange, and I called, and I said, You're the only kid in your class have, with a science project? And she said, Yes. So, then I thought I'd ignore it. I was a young mother, three little kids. And I said, I, you know, at least I got this in my school. I'm not gonna worry about it. But it bothered me. And I read in the paper that an organization called the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had opened an office on the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Tremonton Street. So, one day I went up there, and I saw the president. And I told him the story, and I told him that based on the other meetings that I had attended that I felt that something was wrong with the school, and particularly in the schools where Black kids were. And the president said to me, Well, I'll tell you, he says, We have an education committee, but our committee deals with scholarships and counseling. We don't have a committee that deals with public school things. And so I'm afraid we can't be very helpful. You know, that was an answer that I found very strange. But I came out, and it was kinda discouraging trying to figure out, well, what should happen in this case. And about three days later, the president called me and said, Mrs. Batson, we've decided to set up a subcommittee which we will call the public-school committee, and we'd like to ask you if you would be the chairperson of that committee. Well, I was so excited. You know, I thought this was wonderful. But that determined my life. My whole life has been pointed in that direction and the improvement of education for Black kids.

00:03:31:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. Fabulous.

[cut]

00:03:34:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:03:39:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mrs. Batson, I want you to talk to us about what your work was as chair of that education committee, what you did, and talk about going before the school committee.

00:03:50:00

Ruth Batson:

When I first became chairperson of the NAACP public school committee, I gathered a, a group of people around me, and we sat down and, and decided how we would start. And one of the things that we thought would do, we would go around and look at the, some of the predominantly Black schools in Roxbury. And we did what we called a survey, 'cause we didn't even know that we were doing a survey. We just thought that we'd go around and ask these principals these questions about education of Black students. And, course in those days, they were, we were called Negros. And so we went to one school, and we found the principals just, oh, they were very free in telling us what they thought. They didn't, they didn't think there was anything to, they would say anything they felt like saying. And in one school, one principal said, Well, the question we would ask, Well, do you think that Negro students learn in the same way that Blac—that White students learn? Oh, no. Oh, no, she said. They don't, they don't learn as well at all, she said. And then in addition, she says, Do you know they all have different names? They come in when, in a family, in one family you can find three different names. She says, It's immoral, immoral. So, of course we left that school knowing what was happening to Black students there. And we went to another school where there was a male principal, and it was an all-boys school. And one of the things he did was lean back and said, Look at, look at all our trophies our boys win. You know, they're wonderful athletes. They run, and they do…and every time we tried to pinpoint him to talk about what was happening in, with academic studies, we couldn't get any answers. And this was repeated in different schools. And as our fame grew, we found that parents would start calling us up. And the biggest complaint from parents was that when their students left the public schools in question as honor roll students and went to other schools, to high schools, they would get these terrible marks. And when the parents would go

up and talk to the, the high school student—principals about it, they would say to them, Well, they're not prepared. They haven't had this. They haven't had that. They…so we started getting those kinds of complains. And we started writing them down. Today you would call documenting it. And, and then as, a teacher one time wrote us about, and sent us a Krueger Beer, a bill, billing pad paper, and she said, This is the kind of paper that I've been forced to use. A friend gave them to, gave it to me because I can't get enough money to buy paper. And then things started to mount. Well, in those days, if you wanted to transfer your student from one of these schools, you would merely have to go up to the new school and say, I want my child to move here. Then you'd go back to your old school, and you'd get the, the report card and the, and all of the records you needed and take your child. And suddenly this stopped when the school committee issued a statement saying that in order to transfer a child from its neighborhood school, the principal of the neighborhood school would have to call the other school to see if there was room. So, most parents would go to the principal. He would call the principal in the receiving school. And more than likely he, they would be told that there was no room. Now, if it was a savvy parent, somebody who knew their way around, they would then go to a politician. And suddenly the child could be moved. So, all of this evidence was mounting and mounting. And every time we'd go up to the school department and, and record some of our concerns, nope, this was not true. You, no, no. We're not doing that. No, it's not like that. It's real…so as things went on, we decided that where there were a majority of Black students, there was a neglect of the education of these students. And so with, with, we formed a negotiating team. I was chair of the team. Paul Parks and Mel King, both men who had been deeply involved in the education of a public school educational conc…education concerns joined me. And we sat down, and we decided that we would bring these complaints to the Boston School Committee. By this time, this was in 1963. My children were out of school at that time, but we decided we'd go on. And we made a nice statement out, and we listed fourteen points. It's important to remember that only one of those fourteen points dealt with segregation. And the, ***the statement that we made to the school committee said that*** we, we found as I said before ***where there were a majority of Black students, there was not concern for how these kids learned that there were crowded classrooms, temporary teachers, not enough books, and supplies were low, and all of that kind of thing. Even physical conditions were poor.*** We went into school systems in the basement, where we would find toilet tissue chained to the outside of the, of the, of the toilets. And I often wondered what happened to a kid who got in and didn't take tissue. These kinds of basic things were missing. So, we went before the school committee, and we said to them that this condition that we were talking about was called de facto segregation and that by that we didn't mean at all that anybody on the school committee or any official was deliberately segregating students, but this was caused by residential settings and so forth. But that we felt that this had to be acknowledged and that something had to be done to alleviate the situation. All of the other points de-dealt with educational issues such as intercultural education. We talked about the lack of, of Black principal. At that time, there wasn't a major American city that did not have a Black, a principal within its, its public-school system. We talked about class size. We talked about guidance courses. All of these things we talked about. So, we go prepared to the school system, and we were really innocent. We were naive. I think that even Paul and Mel would acknowledge that. We walked in thinking that we weren't saying anything so special. And when we got to the school committee room, I, I was surprised to see all of the, the press around. You know, I

thought this is just an ordinary school committee meeting. And we made a presentation, and everything broke loose. We were insulted. [laughs] We were told our, our kids were stupid, and this is why they didn't learn. We were completely rejected that night. We were there until all hours of the evening. And we left battle scarred. Because what we found out that we had brought to them a wonderful political issue and that this was an issue that was going to give them length, and breadth, and, and stability, give their political career stability for a long time to come.

00:10:54:00

Interviewer:

Great. I like that. Are we rolling out?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yes. Cut.

Interviewer:

That was fabulous.

[cut]

[camera roll #4045]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm.

00:11:06:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK.

00:11:08:00

Interviewer:

OK. So, let's give people a sense of what the Boston Public School Committee was all about.

Ruth Batson:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

You've described it as a political body. They weren't concerned with educational policy?

00:11:20:00

Ruth Batson:

When we left the, the school committee room that night, what we realized that, was [siren] that we had confronted this very unique political body. The school committee was an unpaid… [siren]

00:11:35:00

Interviewer:

Cut. I'm sorry.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Cut, right.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

And speed.

00:11:37:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:11:42:00

Interviewer:

So, can you describe the Boston School Committee as a political body for us?

00:11:48:00

Ruth Batson:

Well, it's important to note that the Boston School Committee was a unique political body. For one thing it had always been used as a stepping stone to a higher officer. The members were unpaid, and of course the only reason for them to serve was never their interest in education. Because I used to attend a number of school committee meetings, and the only things I would hear discussed would be promotions, and assignments, and things like that. Very seldom did you hear real educational issues discussed. Now, Louise Day Hicks was chairperson of the school committee at that time. And it's interesting to note that some of the people on the NAACP general committee felt that she would meet our concerns favorably. She had been endorsed by the Citizens for Public Schools before, and so they thought, they said, Oh, Louise will be fine. Well, [laughs] Louise turned out to be not fine at all. She was an enemy from the minute that we stepped into that door. And this shocked a lot of people. Somehow she was smart enough to know that here was an issue that she can hang onto and move, just move ahead. Well, after that meeting, we were asked to come to a private meeting with the members of the Boston School Committee. No press, just us and them. And so we would sit down, and we would talk. And one of the things that was interesting about her is that she would completely ignore me and talk to the men. She never addressed me directly. I would continue to address her, but she ignored me completely. And as we moved on, she became tougher. At one point, she said, The word that I'm objecting to is segregation. As long as you talk about segregation, I won't discuss this. Now, remember now, we didn't get past the de facto segregation issue. And so we would drop these little sentences saying, where there is a majority of Black students, these students are not being given the education that other people are given, and so forth and so on. And she would say, Does that mean segregation? And so the whole thing would be dropped. We went through all these routines with her. And the other thing that's interesting, you know, when we would come back to board meeting and report, there were some members of the board that said, Well, you know, the problem with this, the reason this is not being taken care of is that there are two women heading up this negotiation. And, you know, women are emotional and so forth. But I had wonderful coworkers on that committee, Paul Parks and Mel King. And they immediately debunked that theory. But these are the kind of things that we were getting. Plus which the press. The press came out, NAACP is wrong, this is wrong. We got very little public support, and we got absolutely no political support. I remember once when Martin Luther King came, I think it was 1976…I'm, I'm not sure. Came to Boston. And one of the things he was going to do when he was here was go visit the school committee, and go visit the mayor, and so forth. He never got to the school committee. But we did go to the see the mayor, who was Mayor Collins. And he made an appeal on the basis of peace and s…that,

we got no public support whatsoever. And so what the—then now the people in the community started to react. There were prayings outside, though we had a minister whose name was Reverend Vernon Carter who did a walk for I don't know how many days in front of the school committee. And then we decided one night to sit-in. And we went, and we sat there. And we were sitting there, waiting to be arrested. And the captain came and announced that if you're not gone in so and so minutes, you will be arrested. When Melnea Cass, that wonderful woman who was always called the first lady of Roxbury, walked in and sat right in with us, and of course nobody was going to arrest Mrs. Cass. We did all kinds of things outside the school committee. We did all kinds of, made all kinds of appeals. And they would do nothing. In the meantime, Louise Day Hicks' fame was spreading, [phone rings] and she was a cult hero. They loved her. [phone rings] And the only person that we had on that Boston School Committee who supported us was a man named Arthur Gartland. So, constantly we had these five to one votes, and of course he was vilified in the city. It was a horrible time to live in Boston. I also got all oh, kinds of hate mail. Horrible stuff. And, and also got calls from Black people in Boston, and they would call up. And they'd say, Mrs. Batson, I know you think you're doing a good thing. And maybe where you came from, there was segregation. But we don't have segregation in Boston. And I would say to them, Well, where do I come from? And invariably they would say South Carolina or North Carolina. Of course I was born in Boston. So, they were people who could not accept the fact that this horrible thing was happening to Boston, the city of culture.

00:17:02:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed.

[slate]

00:17:09:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, Jackie.

00:17:12:00

Interviewer:

What was the thinking behind wanting to desegregate the schools? Did you think that Black kids were inferior?

00:17:18:00

Ruth Batson:

It was very important in our mind to desegregate the, the Boston public schools. Now, we received a lot of criticism. One thing Mrs. Hicks and other White people would say, Do the…this was Mrs. Hicks' favorite statement. Do they think that sitting a White child beside a Black child by osmosis, the Black child will get better? That was her favorite statement. And then there were Black people and a lot of our friends who said, Ruth, why don't we get them to just fix up the schools and, and make them better in our district? And of course that repelled us because we came through the separate but equal theory. This was not something that we believed in. And we have, even now when I get, talk to a lot of people, they say, We were wrong in pushing for this desegregation. Well, I…we were not pushing for it because of the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of mankind stuff, but I believed that children should be educated with a whole lot of different people because I consider education basic, not just arth—reading, and writing, arithmetic, but the kinds of, of learning that you get from learning with a whole lot of people. So, that's my philosophy. But it was a very practical reason to do it in those days. When we would go to White schools, we'd see these lovely classrooms, small sizes, a small number of children in each class. The teachers were permanent. We would see wonderful materials. When we'd go to our schools, we would see overcrowded classrooms, children sitting out in the corridors, and so forth. And so then ***we decided that where there were a large number of White students, that's where the care went. That's where the books went. That's where the money went.*** In fact, we knew that there was more money being spent in certain schools, White schools. Not all of them but in certain White schools than there, than there was being spent in Black schools. ***So, therefore our theory was move our kids into the schools where they're putting all of the resources so that they can get a better education.*** We never seemed to be able to get that point across. But in, it's important to note that in spite of the fact that there were differences of, of opinion within the community as there always are, the community really stuck with us on that de facto segregation issue. I remember one night getting into a cab when they started talking about racial imbalance as the term and not de facto. And the cab driver said to me, Aren't you the de facto lady? And I said, Yeah. He said, Well, what you changin' that thing for? I just got that thing clear and understand what it means. Now you're changin' to racial imbalance. I was never in favor of, of changing the term because I didn't feel racial imbalance meant what de facto segregation meant. But we were supported by the community, by the Black community. Our membership went up, way up, more than it had gone up in years. And so we always felt supported. But it's important [phone rings] to have these differences and to discuss them.

00:20:25:00

Interviewer:

Good. Cut.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:20:33:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, Jackie.

00:20:34:00

Interviewer:

How come Black parents wound up in court?

00:20:38:00

Ruth Batson:

Well, after the, all of this hoopla, the sit-ins, and the stay-outs, and the meetings, and the, all kinds of things happen, right after that Operation Exodus came about. METCO was devised. These were some of the benefits. There were all kinds of independent programs that started in the community. New school for children, an experimental school. All of these, the Black community turned its efforts to trying to set up various programs to give parents options because we were not getting any place with the Boston School Committee. But then there were always students left in this school system. And so those parents began to mobilize, and they tried everything. They tried the appeals. [plane flies over] They tried going to the school committee. They tried going to everyone to get help. Til finally, they decided that the only recourse left to them was the court. You know, it's part of our history that the court will help us. And we had always looked upon the court as a friendly place to go at that time in these issues. And so they went to court.

00:21:42:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. Excellent.

[cut]

[camera roll #4046]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Forty, forty-six. Timecode, fourteen, forty-six.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:21:52:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, Jackie.

00:21:54:00

Interviewer:

After Garrity handed down his decision, did the Black community think that things were going to be easy?

00:22:00:00

Ruth Batson:

When Garrity's decision came down in June of 1974, we were sunk when we heard some of the remedies. The…one of busing to South Boston because, and Charlestown particularly ***because of those who had lived in Boston all of our lives knew that this was goin' to be a very, very difficult thing to pull off.*** And we knew that the people in South Boston, or at least we felt that way, that the people in South Boston and Charlestown would not be receptive to having Black kids bused into their city or to their little town or whatever they called it. And so we were fearful. But they had masters who were appointed to make the, the, the case and so forth. But somehow we knew that things weren't going to go well. And at that point, I think that we should have tried some kind of legal way of injecting ourselves into the case, but we didn't. The, you know, the parents were handling this themselves. And at that point, they were making their own decisions, and somehow we didn't feel as if we should do the—we would stay on the sidelines and watch this thing. Well, it's history. The kind of things that happened and the kind of response was just terrible.

00:23:23:00

Interviewer:

Can you go back to that summer? How was the community feeling? I mean, you were based at the Freedom House Institute, right?

00:23:28:00

Ruth Batson:

Yes. Well, you see, the, actually the, the, the decision came down in June 1974. The order really didn't go into real effect until September of 1975. And at Freedom House, it was decided that all of the agencies would meet there on a regular basis to discuss what was going to happen and discuss how we would work during that emergency. It was a wonderful group of people who gathered together under the direction of Muriel and Otto Snowden. And Ellen Jackson and I were chairpersons of this small group. And we would meet to get legal updates, finding out what was happening, where it was going. And there were all kinds of appeals coming in from the school system, so we needed to have that understanding. Well, in the meanwhile, I was director of a program called Consultation and Education at the Division of Psychiatry, BU School of, of, of Med…of Medicine. And along with my coworker, we sat down to try to figure out what we would do about it because we knew that there would be mental health issues that would come up during this transition. And so we went down to Washington, to the National Institute of Mental Health, and asked them for money to train people to work with the students during this period. [siren] We then set up a training program, which went into effect in the summer of 1975 whereby to, it was to develop teams of people who would work on buses, ride buses, work at various schools. And they couldn't get into all the schools, but they'd work at the staging areas. And they'd receive the children afterwards. In the meantime, the group at Freedom House where all of the, the institutions in that area, multiservice center, Lena Park, Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts, all of these schools and all of these agencies were still together…bringing in their resources to help these kids through this terrible time.

00:25:34:00

Interviewer:

Now, tell me why, why, why were you afraid of, of the reaction in South Boston in particular?

00:25:38:00

Ruth Batson:

Well, because as a child, we had encountered the, the wrath of people in South Boston. And I just felt that they were bigoted. I just felt that they made it very clear that they didn't like Black people. And I was prepared for them not to want Black students coming to school. Plus which they said. [laughs] They made it very clear. The other thing was that there was

absolutely no preparation made for this transition. There were a couple of athletes and other people who would go on TV, and they would say, You know, we have this thing that we have to have, have happen in our city. We're going to be busing kids and so forth and so on. And we have to be brave about it. And you would say to yourself, Well, what are they expecting? Here were little children that were going to a school, and they were talking about being brave as if some alien from some planet was coming into the school***. I never heard any public official on the state level or on the city level come out and say, This is a good thing. We should all learn together. We should all live together. There was no encouragement from anybody. I call it complete, official neglect.*** And so therefore there was no preparation being made. Then those of us who knew the police departments and so forth felt that many of them lived in South Boston, and how were they gonna divide their loyalties? And so we felt that this was not gonna be a happy occasion, and we were right.

00:27:16:00

Interviewer:

Now, can you paint a picture for us of riding a bus to South Boston? Tell us what you saw, what you heard inside the bus, outside the bus.

00:27:25:00

Ruth Batson:

Well, I remember the time that I rode the bus that stands out in my mind mostly because I was not on the bus at the very beginning of the year. But sometime in around October, I started riding the bus. I [siren] would always go to the stating area, see the kids onto the bus, meet our team. [Sirens]

00:27:44:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible] have to—

Interviewer:

Cut. Sorry. For the sirens.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:27:49:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, Jackie.

00:27:51:00

Interviewer:

OK, so let's pick up with your riding the buses to Southie.

00:27:55:00

Ruth Batson:

Well, beginning in October, I decided I would ride the buses along with some of the other team members to find out for myself, you know, what was happening. We would get reports from team members and from other members of our group like Percy Wilson, who would ride, and a number of people who would ride the buses. I hadn't done it, so I thought I would do it. And I remember the first morning I got on the bus, and the kids were like kids are on a bus. Boisterous, and laughing, and having a good time. And then they would sing, Here we come, Southie. Here we come. You know? And it was just a real ruckus occasion. And I remember as you start up that hill going to the school, seeing signs that people would hold out of windows, or they were on walls and so forth. And it really shocked me that this was going on. The other thing that shocked me as we pulled up to the school was the large number of women standing there making noises, and making gestures at these children. And, you know, it really bothered me because somehow I felt that, you know, women would be more understanding. And even if they didn't agree with what was happening that they would at least have this motherly feeling or [laughs] auntly feeling, some kinda feeling for these children. So, I was amazed at the number of women there. And then along with the, and these were older women. I'd say middle-aged women that I saw there. Then the other group that I saw, there was a large number of younger men who should have been working in my opinion. You know, they seemed to be in their early twenties, a large number of them. And then the other thing that bothered me was that ***as we went up the hill and approached the school, our students got very, very quiet. Where they had been just like any other kid riding a bus, making noise, laughing, talking. Suddenly as they approached this place, they got very, very quiet. And then they would have to stay there until the police came over, escorted them out the bus, and in through the metal detectors into the school. It was a…I began for the first time to say, Ruth, maybe you shouldn't have gotten involved. Maybe you shouldn't have urged this desegregation. It, it, it killed me to see our Black students go through that procedure.***

00:30:17:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, this is going to be a roll out on this sound roll.

[cut]

[sound roll #419]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:30:27:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Jackie.

00:30:29:00

Interviewer:

So, Mrs. Batson, you talked about how when the judge put Southie in receivership, that was a significant turning point.

Ruth Batson:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

Could you tell us the story of how that came to be?

Ruth Batson:

Well, I'm not sure how it came to be. But this was something that I felt had to happen. And I tried very hard to get our group, the Freedom House Group—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Could you say something about how, "I felt that putting Southie in receivership had to…"

Ruth Batson:

Oh, OK.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

00:30:55:00

Ruth Batson

I'll start again. OK. I believe that putting South Boston High School into receivership was the turning point in this whole case. I had long felt that this was an important step to take. And after my first trip to South Boston High School in October, I came back to our group at Freedom House, and I said, I want us to write a letter to the judge saying to the judge that we have to put South Boston High School into receivership. And they said, Oh, Ruth, he'll never do that. It's just a waste of time. He'll never do it. And I really pushed my argument. And, and they said, No, we'll just aggravate the situation. They'll never do that. Well, always being the kind of person that would follow through on what I felt, I said, Well, I'm gonna write the judge on my own. So, I wrote the judge a letter in October saying to him that I had been out to South Boston High School, and one of the things that I believed was that this thing would never be solved in, at the rate it was going because the people in South Boston felt that this was their school, that they owned this building. Somehow they had paid money for it. It was their school. And as long as this was a situation of turf that this was never gonna be solved. And I pointed out to him the kinds of things that I had seen happen in the school. And so I said to him, Judge Garrity, I really believe that this school will have to be put into receivership. Take it out of the hands of the people in South Boston, have an outside group look at it, and handle it until we get over this crunch. Well, lo and behold, it, it was really a big day for me when the judge came out with the ruling that South Boston was going into receivership. And I'm not by any stretch of the imagination saying that he was influenced at all by a letter that I would have sent, but it thrilled me to have this happen. Because for once, I said, somebody is looking at this situation—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Ruth Batson:

—realistically. And of course my coworkers and co-community activists were very impressed, you know, that I had this, this idea. And somehow they linked it up. But I, I'm not sure that, but the—

[cut]

[camera roll #4047]

Camera Crew Member #1:

—four, one, nine sound.

[slate]

00:33:10:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, Jackie.

00:33:12:00

Interviewer:

So, when you were growing up in Boston—

Ruth Batson:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

—was it your perception that this was a cradle of liberty in terms of race issues?

Ruth Batson:

As a small child in Boston, I think I had maybe a more unique bringing up, there…though, there was many people who I know had the same—back, let me, I'll start again.

Interviewer:

That's OK, you can begin again if you want.

00:33:38:00

Ruth Batson:

OK. I, when I grew up in Boston, my parents were from Jamaica. And my mother was a Garveyite. By that, she was a devotee and a follower of Marcus Garvey. And so every week, every Sunday, there were meetings held in a hall that was called Toussaint Louverture Hall. And my mother was one, one of the Black Star Nurses. And I would have to go with her to these meetings. And at these meetings, I heard Africa for the Africans at home and abroad, and we heard racial issues constantly being discussed. And so as I grew up, I was not swayed as much as some people I knew by this business of Boston being such a wonderful place to grow up, being such a great city, with the cradle of liberty. I knew even though I wouldn't have expressed it this way that there were flaws in the cradle of liberty. I know I used to go home and tell my mother things that the teachers said or did. And so…and she would go up to school and say something to them. But it was a, it was an unusual upbringing that I had. The thing that I remember most about being a little girl in Boston was that when my mother would take me downtown, you wouldn't see any Black people usually. You know, in the shopping area. And that when I would see somebody coming, a, a Black person coming, I would pull my mother's coat and say, Ma, there's a colored lady across the street, or, There's a colored man across the street. Because you saw very few Black people in certain areas of the city. And so I think I was always aware, and my mother talked about it constantly. She talked about people who didn't treat you right. I remember she used to say, If somebody calls you a name, just take up a, a, if you got an umbrella, take anything and hit them with it. And we used to laugh. You know, we didn't, didn't think she really meant it. One of my, my, my most serious memories about being a small child in Boston was one day I was taking dancing lessons, and we had to go over to the conservatory to rehearse for our recital. And I had money to go to the restaurant. There was a White Tower restaurant that sold hamburgers and hot dogs, and with some of my friends we walked around to the corner to get ourselves something to eat and to go back to the, to the conservatory. And all of us ordered hot dogs, something cold to drink. And the man put the hot dogs on the, on the counter. And when I bit into mine, it was raw. And I turned to the…my playmate at my side, and I said, This is raw. It hasn't been cooked. And she looked at hers, and I turned to the other one. And the other kid said, Well, I, I like, I always eat them raw. I always eat mine raw. I stood there, and the tears just came down my face when I realized what this man had done. And I never, never told my mother because I knew she would be ashamed that I sat there and paid for this hotdog. I've never gotten over that memory. So, you know, I'm, I'm not saying that this couldn't happy in any city, but it happened to me in Boston. And I remember remarks that teachers would make and so forth. And so I, I wouldn't say that this doesn't, as I said before, that this doesn't happen every place. But I was well aware that there were attitudes and that there were, that racism abounded here in Boston.

00:37:17:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:37:20:00