Interview with **Wyatt Tee Walker**
October 11, 1985
Interviewer: Callie Crossley
Production Team: B
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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.*

00:00:32:00

[camera roll 509]

[sound roll 1505]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: STICKS PLEASE.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: EIGHTEEN. LET ME GET SETTLED IN HERE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: EIGHTEEN. EIGHTEEN.

INTERVIEWER: OK. REVEREND WALKER WHEN WAS THE MOMENT THAT YOU FELT PART OF THE MOVEMENT AND, AND NO LONGER AN INDIVIDUAL?

Walker: When did I feel a part of the movement? I guess you—when, when you speak of "the movement" I suppose you refer to the halcyon days of the '60s. But I always felt as an individual that I was a part of that invisible fabric of black people who were struggling for justice and freedom. I grew up in a home with Fred Douglass on the wall. My daddy, a Baptist preacher like myself, was a race man. And, my first sit-in was at nine years old at a theater in a little town in southern Jersey where I grew up which didn't allow black folks, colored as we were known then, to come in. So, I've always felt involved in the struggle against systemic racism.

00:01:39:00

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE GOING TO ALBANY NOW. WHAT WAS SCL'S [sic] ROLE IN ALBANY?

Walker: ***Well, in Albany we were like firefighters. The fire was already burning and, I try to say this as charitably as I can, SNCC was in over its head. And they wanted the international and national attention that Martin Luther King's presence would generate, but they did not want the input of his organization*** nor his strategy altogether, which was considerably different from the methodology and strategy of SNCC.

00:02:20:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID DR. KING SEE HIS ROLE IN YOUR OPINION?

Walker: Well, he felt he was between a rock and a hard place. He could not say at, Dr. Anderson's invitation, that it, it won't work into my schedule or I can't come, because non-violent struggle is what Dr. King was about and it was under the aegis of his leadership that it was introduced on the American scene. It, it had been introduced before, but Dr. King introduced it on a mass scale. So it was a natural place for him to be, but without having organizational input and control. I don't think that's a bad word since he had more at stake than anybody else other than the community of Albany itself. I just—I know he was aware that it was a very difficult campaign for him.

00:03:14:00

INTERVIEWER: REMEMBER TO INCORPORATE THE QUESTION IF YOU CAN. WHAT WAS THE STRENGTHS AND THE WEAKNESSES OF THE ALBANY MOVEMENT?

Walker: ***The strengths of the Albany Movement was it was perhaps the first time in this period of struggle of black people that we had mobilized an entire community against segregation.*** You had the rather formidable resources in terms of people and resources of the black church of one accord. You had a community galvanized against a system to which they had been accustomed for so long. And the chief weakness was in my view—

00:03:56:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Walker: —was the internecine—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'RE OUT.

00:04:01:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 510]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED AND MARKING.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THAT'S NINETEEN. CALLIE WE'RE BACK.

INTERVIEWER: THE WEAKNESSES.

Walker: The weakness of Albany was that there was some internecine warfare, so to speak, or organizational jealousies which were understandable. But because Dr. King did not have veto power in the situation it got out of hand. The other weakness had to do with, I guess, an understandable error in judgment that the Albany Movement made in attacking anything that was segregated. It diluted our strength and we could not for the earlier weakness, deliver any sense of victory or reconciliation to the people of the Albany Movement and they just got tuckered out, so to speak. But it was a—in my judgment even though the late Lou Lomax, his assessment from nine hundred miles away that it was an utter failure, I think, it was one of the most significant movements in the whole development of non-violent struggle in the South and in the nation.

00:05:32:00

INTERVIEWER: WHY DO YOU THINK IT WAS SO SIGNIFICANT?

Walker: Well, for two important reasons. One, we learned how to mobilize an entire community for an assault on segregation and, ***secondly, we learned that valid and crucial lesson that you must pinpoint your target so that you do not dilute the strength of your attack.*** And had there not been an Albany we would not have had a Birmingham which, in my view, is one of the chief watersheds of non-violent struggle in this movement.

00:06:05:00

INTERVIEWER: BACK TO THE TENSIONS BETWEEN THE ORGANIZATIONS. IT IS SAID THAT YOU WERE THE PRIMARY REASON THAT THERE WAS TENSION BETWEEN SNCC AND SCLC. HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF?

Walker: Well, it has been said that I was the primary reason for tension among the organizations. If they need somebody to put it on my shoulders are broad enough to take it. That wasn't—that isn't really accurate. Because I was Dr. King's Chief of Staff then, of

course, I was the point man. In any kind of organization or movement your charismatic leader, in our tradition, there's always somebody who's got to make the tough decisions. And I was the organization man. And so, whereas they would not want to confront Dr. King in his presence, then, I became the lightning rod. But properly so, because I insisted that if you want Dr. King's presence and you want his resources, that is the money of SCLC, then Dr. King's got to have some say-so about the methodology and the strategy that's going to be utilized. And I was in charge of that. So, in that view probably so, but as I say, in my judgment, for sound reasons.

00:07:27:00

INTERVIEWER: AROUND 1960, WHAT WAS THE NEED DID YOU FEEL OF SCLC TO HAVE THE SINGULAR LEAD—LEADERSHIP THAT YOU SEEM TO FEEL IS SO IMPORTANT AND THAT SINGULAR LEADERSHIP BEING AROUND DR. KING?

Walker: I didn't think we had to have any singular leadership. I just felt if SCLC was involved that Dr. King ought to have say-so, input, and, if necessary, veto power on what was being done. We did have a different operations methodology. Ella Baker was the guru of the SNCC arena and she had a very strong view that you must have collegial leadership and it wasn't necessary to have a spokesperson. Well, I ask you on the American scene to point to any movements that have succeeded other than having a strong spokesman, e.g. John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers. I'm trying to think of the automobile fella, who, he—I can't, I can't think of his name now. But movements on the American scene, in the West and probably [laughs] in the East as I think of Deng Xiaoping, have always been more successful and productive when there is a spokesman rather than this collegial arrangement, e.g., the Politburo of the Soviet Union which keeps on stumbling along with its attempts at Marxist theory and what its production quotas are as far as feeding the people of their, of their land.

00:09:15:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANNA GO DOWN A HIT LIST AS IT WERE HERE AND ASK YOU TO RESPOND TO JUST THE NAMES OF THESE PEOPLE IN A VERY SHORT FASHION LIKE ONE OR TWO SENTENCES. CHARLES SHERROD?

Walker: Charles Sherrod, a very dedicated and earnest young man. Grew up in my church in Petersburg. For the record I helped him with his college education and he's still in the trenches in Albany, sits on the City Council.

INTERVIEWER: CORDELL REAGON?

Walker: I did not know Cor—Cordell Regan very well, but I knew he was an activist and very skilled in mobilizing young people and he's presently in New York and I never had any untoward relations with him of which I'm aware.

INTERVIEWER: YOU DON'T HAVE TO TALK ABOUT 'EM NOW. I'M JUST INTERESTED IN THEM BACK THEN. JAMES GRAY?

Walker: James Gray. That's the publisher?

INTERVIEWER: THE EDITOR OF THE ALBANY HERALD.

Walker: Well, typical southern—

INTERVIEWER: START THAT AGAIN.

Walker: James Gray was a typical southern racist journalist. A product of his times.

INTERVIEWER: BULL CON—I'M SORRY. WRONG PERSON. LAURIE PRITCHETT.

Walker: Laurie Pritchett posed as a sophisticated law enforcement official. A better, a more apt description would be slick. And he was not non-violent as I've seen some people write. He was non-brutal.

INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU EXPAND ON THAT A LITTLE BIT FOR ME?

Walker: Well, he developed the reputation that he was using Dr. King's non-violence to blunt Dr. King's campaign which was not true. The foil for our non-violent campaigns in the South had been the anticipated response of segregationist law enforcement officers such as Jim Clark in Selma and Bull Connor in Birmingham, Alabama. Laurie Pritchett was of a different stripe. He probably had finished high school, and, as I say, I, ***I think the apt description was slick. He did have enough intelligence to read Dr. King's book, and he culled from that a way to avoid confrontation and inducing the great ferment in the national community by being non-brutal rather than being non-violent. It's almost, it's bizarre to say that a segregationist system or a law enforcement official of a segregationist system could be non-violent. Because first of all you, non-violence works in a moral climate and segregation is not a moral climate.***

00:12:09:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT ABOUT THE LACK OF RESPONSE FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AT THAT TIME?

Walker: We were very disappointed in the lack of response of the federal government. One of the sad things of this era is that the federal judges who were appointed by Democratic administrations were the chief stumbling blocks to the enforcement of constitutional law. And I think it was Judge Robert Elliot in Albany who issued the injunction. Here again, Dr. King was in a, in a dilemma, because in the history of this republic, our court of last resort had been the judicial branch of our Federal Government. We never got very much from the Congress. We couldn't depend on anything other than rhetoric from the administration, but if we could get our case before the Supreme Court there was a measure of justice that we could anticipate. Now here in this very difficult campaign, on one of the traditional questions of segregation that affected customs and mores it was the federal judiciary that blocked us. And

it was crucial because in a campaign like ours which depends on mobilizing people it, it was definitely a ploy to kill the morale of the movement and drain it of its momentum while there was this so-called thirty or sixty day cooling off period, whatever it was at the time.

00:13:44:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT DR. ANDERSON, A REAL QUICK RESPONSE. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF HIM?

Walker: Oh, Dr. Anderson was an unusual lay Christian and osteopath physician in the Albany community. He was a Morehouse man which some say makes him special. And he had, at least, the dynamics of the preacher figure in his speaking style and in his verve for, for justice and equality. And so in a very real sense, he was a preacher figure. The strain of the movement got to be heavy for him to bear. And, you know, his house was the command headquarters and his family was involved and his practice was going to pot and he was receiving threats and—

00:14:47:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Walker: —that kind of thing, but a heroic figure without a doubt.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'VE JUST RUN OUT. WE DID— [coughs]

INTERVIEWER: OK.

00:14:55:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 511]

[change to sound roll 1506]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, GO.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS THE SOURCE OF THE TENSION IN YOUR

ESTIMATION IN ALABANY?

Walker: The root of the tension in Albany was connected to what I said earlier, is that—No?

INTERVIEWER: [laughs] DON'T SAY WHAT YOU SAID EARLIER. JUST SAY WHAT IT IS.

Walker: The root of the tension at Albany had to do with the absence of Dr. King having veto power on the strategy, e.g. the bus company indicated its willingness to desegregate the buses when there was a Court decision. SNCC's posture was all a loaf or none. The result was that the bus company went bankrupt and the black people who made up 70% of its ridership were inconvenienced and the Albany movement had no semblance of a victory. And that was—that caused the morale to deteriorate. Had Dr. King had the right of veto, he was—have acknowledged that this is not what we want. We can't have the buses desegregated tomorrow morning, but at least you've got the commitment of the bus company to desegregate when we get the ruling. And it had been—already been a legislative precedent in the Montgomery bus protest. So it would not have been of such long duration. And it was that that produced the tension along with some other minor things.

00:16:39:00

INTERVIEWER: AND JUST—IT SEEMS A DIFFERENT VIEWPOINT THAT SNCC HAD IN TERMS OF LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION AND—

Walker: Well, yes—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE NEED TO PAUSE HERE BECAUSE OF SOUND.

[cut]

00:16:47:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED AND MARK, PLEASE.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: TWENTY-ONE. TAKE ONE.

INTERVIEWER: OK, I WANT YOU TO GET TO A LITTLE MORE OF THE DIFFERENT VISION THAT YOU SAW AND HOW YOU RELATED TO SNCC THERE AND ON MAY 1ST?

Walker: The tension grew out of the different stance of the two organizations. SNCC was essentially a shock troop operation and they were well suited to that because they had no mortgages to pay, no jobs to go to, no prior commitments to wives and/or husbands and children. SCLC's stance had to be more measured because all of us came to Albany or to any

situation with some prior commitments as pastors of churches, as husbands or wives, as fathers and mothers of children. So we could not just pick up and go. The acid test of being committed to the movement so far as SNCC was concerned, as I perceived it, was that would you go to jail and stay? Well, I didn't particularly agree with that, then, and I don't agree with it now, you know. There are some other things that you may do other than go to jail. But SCLC's opera—operation in that sense was far different from SNCC's, and that made it almost impossible for us to work together cohesively.

00:18:18:00

INTERVIEWER: BIRMINGHAM. WHAT WERE THE SPECIFICS OF THE PLANNING THAT YOU DID FOR BIRMINGHAM?

Walker: Well, I wrote a document, I forget how many pages it was now, probably, seven or eight typed pages, called Project C. And I always had a little Madison Avenue streak in me and I gave things denotations of a sort. It meant confrontation. My theory was that if we mounted a strong non-violent movement, the opposition would surely do something to a) attract the media and b) in turn induce national sympathy and attention to what everyday—the everyday segregated circumstance of a black person was like living in the Deep South. We targeted Birmingham because it was the biggest and baddest [sic] city of the South. And Dr. King's feeling was that if non-violence wouldn't work in Birmingham then it wouldn't work anywhere. And I think we were cognizant of the fact and fearful that probably King, Abernathy, Shuttlesworth, Walker, and maybe Young would not get out of Birmingham alive. I know when I kissed my wife and four children good-bye in February and went to Birmingham to set things up, I didn't really believe I'd ever see them again.

00:19:51:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANT THOSE SPECIFICS. I READ THAT YOU DID STUFF LIKE COUNTING THE STOOLS IN THE, IN THE LUNCH COUNTERS—

Walker: Yes. Project C was about—

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME—WOULD YOU START LIKE WITH, WITH THE SPECIFICS OF THE PLAN I DREW UP OR WHATEVER. HOW IT, YOU KNOW—

Walker: The specifics of Project C had to do with making the presumption that we had three hundred people committed to go to jail to stay for a minimum of five days. My idea was that we could take that three hundred and march 'em at ten and twelve a day with the presumption that something would happen and it surely did which would in turn—people admire heroism and then they imitate it. That that would create a groundswell of support in a community was not totally committed to an all-out attack on segregation. ***Learning by the Albany circumstance, I targeted three stores. Positz [?] was one, I don't recall the other two stores now. And since the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was going to be our headquarters, I had it timed as to how long it took a youngster to walk down there, how long it would take an older person to walk down there, how long it would take a middle-***

aged person to walk down there, and I picked out what would be the best routes. Under some subterfuge, I visited all three of these stores and counted the stools, the tables, the chairs, etc. and what the best method of ingress and egress was. Now, it occurred to me that we might not get into the stores downtown. They might block us from getting to downtown so we had to have secondary targets. I then targeted the federal installations: Social Security, the Veteran's, where there were some eating facilities. Our tertiary targets, I had gone out into the surrounding suburban areas and looked at some variety stores. Woolworth's, M.H. Lampston, in these shopping centers as the third target. And I felt that with those primary, secondary, tertiary targets we would be able to do something. In addition to that I spent time with the lawyers, Arthur Shores, to be absolutely familiar with what the laws of the City of Birmingham, Jefferson County, and the State of Alabama, so that we could anticipate what the legal moves would be on the part of the law enforcement officials. And that was I think a judicious move, because when the injunction came we had expected it and we knew that we were going to break the injunction even before we came to Birmingham. So that—those were the essential pieces, the legislative research, the practical research so far as roots and whatnot, and then the recruitment and training of the people who were going to submit to jailing first.

00:22:59:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN I HAVE ANOTHER LITTLE SHORT HIT LIST, BUT LET'S START WITH JAMES BEVEL.

Walker: James Bevel had, had one of the best—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SIR, CAN I HAVE YOU START THAT AGAIN. I WAS—

Walker: All right.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU KNOW—

Walker: James Bevel had one of the best tact—tactical minds in our movement. And one of the best facilities for analyzing segregation as a system and what it does to black people. As you know, he was a native of Itta Bena, Mississippi and anybody who grew up in Mississippi in his generation certainly had all of the emotional and psychological scars of what segregation does to them. So he was hyper-sensitive to it and he drew very strong analogies as to how you had to fight the enemy. There was no one—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ROLLING. WE'VE GOT REAL PROBLEM ON THE MIC. CHECK WHERE YOU ARE IN THE CAMERA ROLL THERE, JON.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: LIKE THAT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YEAH.

[cut]

00:24:02:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SPEED.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: IT'S TWENTY-TWO. OK, I'M SET.

INTERVIEWER: I WANNA TALK ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN AND JAMES BEVEL'S DECISION TO DO THAT AND YOU RESPONSE. WHAT YOU THOUGHT ABOUT THAT.

Walker: Well, I was about to finish a sentence. I don't know if you want me to finish. There was no one any better at mobilizing young people than James Bevel. And had it not been for him and probably the supportive help of Dorothy Cotton with her song leading skills and Andrew Young, Andrew Young to some extent the influx of the school children into the Birmingham equation might not have taken place. I think he was a skillful tactician and without being immodest. I think the combination of James Bevel and Wyatt Walker was unbeatable.

00:25:03:00

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU KNOW YOU WOULD BE CRITICIZED FOR THE CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN? FOR THE USE OF CHILDREN?

Walker: We presumed so, but that didn't bother us. We knew we were right. One of the basic tenants of the non-violent philosophy is that it is the kind of struggle in which everyone can participate young, old, children, adults, blind, crippled, whole, lame, whatever, because it is a moral struggle. And I think someone quoted me as saying that six days in the Jefferson County Jail would be more educational to these children than six months in the segregated Birmingham schools that they were attending.

00:25:45:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I THINK ON THAT MARVELOUS NOTE WE'RE READY TO MOVE ON.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

[cut]

00:25:51:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 512]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND ROLL SOUND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SPEED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARKING.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: TWENTY-THREE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK.

INTERVIEWER: OK. WANNA TELL ME WHAT PART—

Walker: It's sad to me that even from this brief historical vantage point in history that we do not appreciate the significance of Birmingham. One must realize that the customs and mores that had been in place for more than a hundred years changed abruptly with the Birmingham campaign. And it just gets lost among other civil rights campaigns. For me, Birmingham is the chief watershed and is really as significant as the Civil War, but it was fought without guns and muskets and without the shedding of blood in the sense of the bloodletting that went on within the nation.

00:26:57:00

INTERVIEWER: A QUICK REFLECTION ON BULL CONNOR.

Walker: Well, he served our purposes well.

INTERVIEWER: START THE SENTENCE—

Walker: Oh. When I think about Bull Connor I always think of the baseball analogy that he gets an assist for Birmingham, because without the prototypical figure of a white racist law enforcement officer, it would, it would—the Birmingham movement would not have accelerated and built up the momentum as fast. I often wonder why Bull Connor didn't have somebody smart enough around him to say, let the niggers go on to City Hall and pray. You know, he would stop the march every day and our purpose was to go to City Hall and pray. If he had opened the police cordon and let us go down there after three or four days it's an old story. He never had enough intelligence or anybody around enough intelligence to let us do what we wanted to do. Instead he was fixed on stopping us and that became the flash point of the dogs and the hoses and of the national and international attention in the 1964 Civil Rights Bills.

00:28:10:00

INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE FIRST DAY HE USED THE, THE FIRE HOSES AND THE DOGS?

Walker: The use of the fire hose and the dogs were on two separate occasions. The dogs came early and were not used on demonstrators. Even the revisionists who write about Birmingham now have missed that. I stumbled on a ploy early on as to how to create a confrontation. I had promised Dr. King, he told me, you've got to find some way to create a confrontation. I said, I don't know what it is, Leader, but I'll find out. And our demonstration on a given Sunday afternoon was very late, two or three hours with morning services and whatnot and a crowd collected of a thousand people waiting to see what was gonna be done that day. And A.D. King and John Porter and Nelson Smith led a group of twelve or thirteen people and they were arrested in six or seven minutes. Now this crowd had been out there waiting for an hour or so and they, you know, nothing had happened and before long somebody was taunting the police dogs. They were out there in full array and that's what created the confrontation. The next day, UPI carried the story, "Eleven hundred March in Birmingham—Dogs Used." I got on the phone and called Atlanta, I said, Leader, I got it. He say, what is it, Wyatt? I said, what we're gonna do is delay the demonstrations until the people get home from work in the afternoon and let the, let the, let the onlookers collect. I said, and we can count on Bull Connor and his folks to do something silly. And that is how the confrontation began with the dogs. The water hose was another circumstance. By the time we got to D-Day plus 2 there was no place else to put people in jail. The Jefferson County jail was filled. The City Jail was filled. The, the Bessemer Jail, the Ainsley Jail. They had people out at the fairgrounds supposedly in jail under arrest and at the city auditorium. We had forty-two hundred people in jail. So they decided what they would do is break up the demonstrations before they got started and this was when the children came. And that's when they started using the fire hoses. The so-called "Battle of Ingram Park" was not a battle. It was a roman holiday. We were in the midst of negotiating whether the marches would continue and the onlookers had gathered. And the business of the fire hoses being used to skitter people down the sidewalk around Ingram Park were onlookers. They were not a part of the movement, so to speak, they were bystanders.

00:31:07:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT ABOUT THE NIGHT THE GASTON MOTEL WAS BOMBED AND YOUR WIFE WAS, WAS BEATEN? WHERE WERE YOU?

Walker: That was a, that's a, a very ugly night in my memory when I think about the night that the Gaston Motel was bombed. The agreement had been formally agreed upon early Friday morning and Dr. King and Shuttlesworth and Abernathy had issued a statement. This was the Friday before Mother's Day. The task then before me was to dismantle Birmingham. I had put it together. I had not been home to see my family in eleven or twelve weeks and Martin, almost as an afterthought, said, Wyatt, said, everybody's leaving, said, somebody from the National Staff needs to be here, and he asked me would I stay. I said, well, you know I haven't seen Ann and the children in eleven weeks. He said, well, I'll tell you what,

SCLC will pay for them to come to Birmingham. So my wife and four children were in Birmingham. My wife and two of the, the two eldest children—the two youngest children were in the Motel and two were staying out in the city with friends. And the Motel was bombed Saturday night. Well, I went first because I heard this explosion and someone called and said it was A.D.'s house and I went out there. While we there we heard another explosion and I feared the worst. It was the Motel. In the midst of that, I am told that the state troopers, who Al Lingo had brought in, told the people to go to where they lived and my wife turned to go to her motel room and this state trooper hit her with a carbine, split her head open, sent her to the hospital. And, of course, they had been in the Motel when it was bombed. A UPI reporter from Mississippi, I never shall forget it, Bob Gordon, who was a segregationist up to this time saved my life, probably, because I asked which state trooper had hit my wife. I was there within a matter of minutes. I'd been out fighting fires and he pointed him out and I started for him. And this white reporter from Mississippi, Bob Gordon, tackled me and threw me to the floor and held me until I, you know, it occurred to me that I—that, you know, they'd—this guy would take this automatic rifle and shoot me as quickly as he had brained my wife.

00:33:37:00

INTERVIEWER: I NEED TO ASK YOU ABOUT THE NIGHT OF—THE, THE MOB SURROUNDED REVEREND ABERNATHY'S CHURCH IN 1961. CAN YOU DESCRIBE THAT NIGHT, THE EVENTS THAT HAPPENED?

Walker: The night that the mob attacked Abernathy's church was during the break in the delayed Freedom Ride. Do you remember? The buses went to Anniston and got burned and bombed. And the students in Nashville led by Diane Nash, Bevel, and John Lewis came to Montgomery to pick it up. They said that they shouldn't allow terror and violence to stop it. And the SCLC gave the students their support and we were in a rally that night at Abernathy's church. I guess it was a Sunday night as I recollect. And this mob of Klansmen and other sympathizers came with a couple of truckloads of cinder blocks and they took sledgehammers and broke 'em into pieces. Their strategy was to throw teargas into the church and flush us out and as we come out they would stone us with the broken pieces of cinderblock. In the midst of this around ten-thirty or eleven o'clock, we were surrounded and Dr. King instructed me to get Bobby Kennedy on the phone. You know, we had our own sense of propriety. Dr. King was the President of SCLC and John Kennedy was the President of the nation and, in a sense, I was Dr. King's Attorney General so the Attorney Generals should talk to each other. So I called Bobby Kennedy and told him that our lives were in danger and there was this mob out there and he told me he had sent the FBI and tell him, it's hard to tell the FBI from the people in the mob. These federali—federal marshals. And then he asked to speak to Dr. King, so I let him speak to the President, you know, and somehow, Dr. King got what I thought was a weird idea that the only way to satiate the frenzy of this mob was for the leadership to go out and give ourselves up. And I knew this man was crazy, but even though I was scared to death and didn't want to go I went on out there with him. About the time we got out there the teargas was flying and a brick flew over Dr. King's head and hit Fred Bennett on the ankle and then a teargas canister came and Fred picked it up and threw it back at the mob. And by the time we got around front these four hundred marshals

against this mob of a couple thousand somehow repulsed them. So that's why we didn't die that night. We stayed in that church all night long and left at daybreak the next morning under the cover of the National Guard, which during those early morning hours, Bobby Kennedy had federalized under Brigadier General Graham, as I remember.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE HAVE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OH YEAH.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: EW, LET'S CUT.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:36:37:00