

Interview with **Donie Jones**

August 26, 1979

Washington, D.C.

Production Team: D

Camera Rolls: 7-8

Sound Rolls: 4-5

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

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize*.

00:00:02:00

[sound roll 4]

[extended wild audio]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK. THIS IS SOUND ROLL 4 CONTINUING MRS.—

INTERVIEWER #2: MRS. JONES.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MRS. JONES.

INTERVIEWER #2: MRS. DONIE JONES.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THIS IS VOICE OVER.

00:00:13:00

INTERVIEWER #1: HOW LONG HAD YOU BEEN HERE WHEN YOU, BEFORE THE, BEFORE THE BOYCOTT?

Jones: Oh, I had been here a long time before the boycott, 'cause Reverend Pettus was here when I came here, when I joined this church. Reverend Pettus was here, and this church wasn't nearly as large. But he was a good preacher.

00:00:34:00

INTERVIEWER #1: DID YOU EVER THINK THE BOYCOTT WOULD HAPPEN?

Jones: Oh no, uh-uh, uh-uh. I didn't think that would ever happen. But it did. It sure did. And I was on the buses, some of the buses was, was, were running, some of the city buses. I was worked at Maxwell Field then. And the bus driver, when I got on the bus one morning, you know, hadn't never had no trouble before, riding the bus, 'cause people would be talking— You know how if some of us get on the bus and talk so much and everything. But I would get on the bus and go and get me a seat and sit down. And we could never sit to the front of the bus. We had to go back by the back door, always if any white peoples was on there. They didn't want the Negro to sit opposite to them. So after the bus boycott come on, well, it hadn't took effect good here, but they was talking about the marching. Talking about Reverend King then was going all over, all over the world and trying to bring peace. Trying to desegregate people, the white and the colored. But he wasn't here then, but after the bus boycott, they went to squabbling about the colored peoples getting on the bus. I don't know how tired you be. You been awake the whole day long and be so tired, and you had to stand up from where you get on it there until somebody else get off, or, then you could get their seat. And the seats up front where the white peoples could start sitting right behind him are in back to the places where, you know, give the colored a chance to sit down too, but they didn't do it.

00:02:30:00

INTERVIEWER #2: DID YOU EVER HAVE ANY TROUBLE ON THE BUS?

Jones: One time. I got on the bus one morning and was going to work, and the man told me I was sitting from the back where I was sitting in the second seat from the back door up towards the front. And was a white man sitting over opposite me. Almost on the, you know, just like these benches here, but he was sitting over on that side and I was sitting over on this side. And the bus driver told me to get up and get in the back. I didn't say nothing when he first said it. Some of the colored girls say, did you hear what he said to you? I ain't studying him. [laughs] That's what I said. And he said, "I say, get up and get in the back." I say, "I ain't going nowhere." I said, "Now you make me get up and get in the back." "I get the police when I get round the corner, make them put you off." I said, "You do just that." And he said, "Don't say no more to me, or I come back there and, and put you off myself." I said, "Come on back here." I said, "Come on." He looked at me so hard, you know? I said, "Hobo your way back here, and I'll pay you back, pay your way back." [laughs] He didn't get up. He didn't say a word else to me from there to Maxwell Field. And that evening when I got on the bus, he was, he was still on the bus. He knowed [sic] me, because he looked at me so hard that morning, you know, when he was talking to me. He knowed me. Wouldn't even give me change when I got off the bus. [laughs] I didn't say nothing but just went on back from over him, and stood back there until somebody got on the bus that would change my dollar. Oh, it's been rough here.

00:04:31:00

INTERVIEWER: WHEN, WHEN'D YOU FIRST HEAR ABOUT THE BOYCOTT? DO YOU REMEMBER?

Jones: Uh-uh. Just when it come on. I never had heard of nothin' like that until it started here, 'cause I hadn't been no further than here. This, they ain't been my home always. I was born in Lowndes County, but I came here when I was about, I'd say about nineteen, and, well, I'd say about twenty, because when I came here and I went back home after I come here, and, and I think I was pregnant when I came here. And I worked a while out on the farm with some white people. I stopped and cooked and cleaned up for a long time, until the lady made me mad, and I quit there. Then I come here. And I worked down in, on Gray Street, we had a shirt factory here then, and I went to the shirt factory and worked there until I got ready to go back home. And I went back home and stayed there until the baby was born, and the baby was six or eight months old when I come back.

00:05:49:00

INTERVIEWER #2: WHERE WERE YOU WORKING WHEN THE BOYCOTT STARTED?

Jones: Oh, I was working out in, first I was working in Max-Field because that's the place I knowed that the white people would bother you, you know, about sitting on the bus. But after the boycott started and they had some kind of meeting here for us to stop getting on the bus, and then we went to walking.

00:06:20:00

INTERVIEWER #2: WHERE DID YOU GET THE NOTICE OF THE MEETING?

Jones: Right here. Right here at this church. We had the first meeting right here, and this church was so full, there were so many people. Reverend King was real thought of, because he lived down there off of, off of Cleveland Avenue, yeah, right off Cleveland Avenue, on this side of that church. Sure did. Him and his family.

00:06:48:00

INTERVIEWER: THAT, THAT NIGHT, THAT FIRST NIGHT, THE FIRST BIG MEETING, WERE YOU AT THAT MEETING?

Jones: Yeah, sure was.

00:06:52:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

Jones: Oh, it was like a revival starting. That's where, that's what it was like. And he preached so that night, I'm telling you the goddamn truth, you had to hold peoples to keep him from getting, getting to him. Reverend King was a God-sent man, and he was a good man. He was friendly to the white and the black. He didn't have no two peoples to be friendly to. There was so many white folks in here taking pictures, you know, they take all those pictures so when you be out on the road walkin', it just a very few would stop and pick you up. It'd be the white ladies. Wouldn't be no man. Guess a lot of 'em here wanted to have something to do with it, but they were scared. They were scarer [sic] than we were. So...

00:07:46:00

INTERVIEWER: WAS THERE EVER A TIME YOU WANTED TO TAKE THE BUS WHEN THE BOYCOTT WAS ON?

Jones: No, I didn't ever want to take it, because I didn't want no trouble. I'd rather to walk than to have any trouble. We kept down all the trouble we possibly could. And I showed them, I know I wouldn't do this, Reverend King, in a way. 'Cause what he took, I, I would fought back with it. I know I couldn't have stood it and I didn't try. Just like when Reverend King went somewhere up north and there was a, that woman stook [sic] him with that fingernail file. I 'spect I would have knocked her under the ground, not in the ground. [laughs] I'm so glad though that it wasn't me, it was somebody could stand it.

00:08:39:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE HERE THAT NIGHT, THAT FIRST NIGHT?

Jones: I don't know.

00:08:43:00

INTERVIEWER: FILLED?

Jones: It was round about a hundred. Might been more than that, 'cause it was a lot of peoples here. Really was.

00:08:52:00

INTERVIEWER #2: WAS IT HARD GETTING INTO THE CHURCH FOR THE CROWDS OUTSIDE?

Jones: No, uh-uh. You could get in the church. All of 'em didn't want to come inside. They get out the way and let you come inside. But they was from wall to wall all the way round in the church. The seats were full. And the pulpit was full just, it just was a lot of peoples here.

00:09:20:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS, WHY DO YOU THINK IT HAPPENED THEN? I MEAN, WHY, ALL THOSE YEARS, WERE PEOPLE JUST TIRED OF IT?

Jones: Well, I don't know, 'cause I hadn't, I hadn't been nowhere but here. I don't know what happened. But you know is, I hear a lot of people saying there are peoples in the world, or just like I was raised, well, the children come under me wasn't raised like me. They wiser. And, when you can meet some peoples and you can talk to 'em and be, you all can get things together, or you can solve some problems with some people. But you, you can't solve the problem with anybody. You got to talk to somebody that love and have been misused all of their life, most, and they see they're goin' continue in it. If you tell me, some say, Miss Jones, say if you come on over here, maybe we could make it better for you. So you won't come into contact with so many bad things. So I guess that's just how it was. He, Reverend King had been all over the world near, and he knowed the best. Then he had got a good sent [sic] from God what to do.

00:11:03:00

INTERVIEWER: ONE OF THE THINGS ABOUT THE BOYCOTT THAT'S SO AMAZING IS THAT IT'S, IT KEPT GOING SO LONG, I MEAN...

Jones: Yes sir, and still goin'. It's still goin'. They, they are marches up and down the street yet. It's still goin'. It just ain't as strong as it was then. And when they march from Selma here, I was living right where you picked me up from. Sure was, I be living right there.

00:11:29:00

INTERVIEWER: THAT, THAT YEAR—

Jones: And I wasn't walking, I wasn't working because I had fell and hurt myself that year, first of that year. I don't know what year was that? '65 or '66?

00:11:42:00

INTERVIEWER #2: '65

Jones: '65. And I had fell and hurt myself. And I was at home. Time was rough then. It wasn't so rough 'cause food and stuff wasn't high as it is now. You could take \$3 or \$4 and go and get you enough food to last you two, two or three weeks, but you can't do that now. But I sit right there in my house and kept babies everyday. I couldn't get around to work. Went to the doctor to put me on disability. Why we had to live out of that, see? I had three small children then. My oldest children, they were grown, and then I had their children there to look after. That's right. I had their children to look after and mine. And then I kept other folks' children. I thank the Lord 'cause he been good to me, and he still good to me.

00:12:43:00

INTERVIEWER: MISS JONES, DOES, WHEN YOU, WHEN YOU WERE WALKING, WHEN EVERYBODY WAS WALKING AND RIDING CABS AND COLORED TAXIS AND SOME PEOPLE WERE, THE CAR POOLS WERE GOING ON...

Jones: Mm-hmm. We used to meet at Bethel Baptist Church for the, Ms. Hubbard was the head of that. Head of the cab, you know, trying to get rides for the people. No, she, I didn't go there but once or twice, so I can't tell you nothin' about that 'cause—

00:13:16:00

INTERVIEWER #2: HOW DID YOU USUALLY GET TO WORK?

Jones: Walk. Walk. I walked to work, and I be to work on time, too. Sure did. I walked when I didn't have to walk. Sure did. I wasn't, wasn't taking my little nickels and dimes and puttin' it in the bus. I walked. I lived in on Overland Street. I lived over there fourteen years, and I walked most of the time. I would walk from down in town and tote my little grocery out here. Out there.

00:13:49:00

INTERVIEWER: THE, THE NIGHT, YOU KNOW, THAT THE, THAT THE DECISION CAME DOWN, DO YOU REMEMBER WHEN YOU WON, WHEN THE SUPREME COURT TOOK ON—

Jones: All, all of us was so happy. We were so happy.

00:14:02:00

INTERVIEWER: WHERE WERE YOU? WERE YOU HERE?

Jones: Yeah, I was at home.

00:00:14:06

INTERVIEWER: I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN HERE ALL THAT TIME, RIGHT?

Jones: Mm-hmm.

00:14:08:00

INTERVIEWER: BUT WHEN, DID YOU COME, WAS THERE A MEETING? DO YOU REMEMBER A MEETING THAT NIGHT?

Jones: I don't know whether there was a meeting that night or that Sunday or whether it was. I don't know. I can't tell you that 'cause I don't know. I can't remember what happened

when they come down to say that Reverend King had won [sic], won the bus, bus boycott. And they were sending, people from far and near was sending money for, for the people to get help, and get 'em outta jail, and all that stuff. They put so many in jail [unintelligible]. Sure did.

00:14:44:00

INTERVIEWER: MUST, MUST HAVE FELT GOOD WHEN YOU KNEW YOU WON.

Jones: Well, we all felt good. We felt like it was for a good cause, you see? It was, it was really good.

[cut]

00:15:01:00

[picture begins]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER #1: THIS IS MRS. JONES WALKING AND TALKING.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER #2: ROLLING. OK, START.

INTERVIEWER #2: MRS. JONES, WHAT WAS IT LIKE WHEN THE BUS DRIVERS WOULD STOP AND TRY TO GET YOU TO GO ON THE BUSES?

Jones: Well, we would go right on just like we didn't, they didn't stop. And then they would drive on off then. Walk yourself to death then. [laughs] That's all I'd hear. But we didn't. We would take our time and, and just, just come on and we walk all the time. We would take a slow gait, sturdy gait, and then we would always be, be walking together.

00:15:51:00

INTERVIEWER: AND DID THEY SOMETIMES OFFER YOU A FREE RIDE?

Jones: Yeah, they would. But we didn't ride.

00:15:58:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WOULD YOU DO, MRS. JONES? YOU HAVE TO TELL US. WE'RE NOT GONNA HAVE THE QUESTION.

Jones: They wouldn't say anything but just drive on. You know they'd be mad because they...

[cut]

00:16:10:00

[sync tone]

Jones: Sometime the bus driver...

INTERVIEWER #1: HOLD ON.

INTERVIEWER #2: WHOOPS, NOT YET. I'LL TELL YOU.

[laughter]

INTERVIEWER #1: START WALKING NOW.

INTERVIEWER #2: OK, AND THEN I'LL ASK YOU THE QUESTION. WHAT DID THE BUS DRIVERS DO?

Jones: They would drive up side of us and offer us a free ride, but we wouldn't accept. They would, well, say, well then, y'all don't want to ride then? We wouldn't say a word but just walk right on. That's what you did.

00:16:40:00

INTERVIEWER: AND DID THEY GIVE YOU FREE RIDES?

Jones: Oh no. Uh-uh. You had to pay if you got on the bus.

INTERVIEWER #1: [laughs] NOT BAD. THAT WAS PRETTY GOOD.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Jones: —the bus driver would—

INTERVIEWER #1: JUST A SECOND. WE'LL TELL YOU. OK, ROLLING. GOT PICTURE. OK, MRS. JONES.

Jones: You ready now?

00:16:59:00

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE READY.

Jones: Well, the bus driver would drive up side of us and stop, stop for us to ride, but we wouldn't ride. We would go right on just like they didn't stop.

[cut]

[wild audio]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER #1: CUT. GREAT.

[cut]

00:17:16:00

Jones: We had a lot of company. And the...

CAMERA CREW MEMBER #1: —NEED TIME TO FOCUS AND CHANGE, ALL RIGHT?

[cut]

[picture resumes]

00:17:28:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER #1: ROLLING.

Jones: Well, the peoples in the church was very good, and it was, church was full. We had nice meetings. And it was great, it really was.

00:17:40:00

INTERVIEWER #1: DO YOU, DO YOU REMEMBER, REVEREND KING SPOKE THAT NIGHT, DIDN'T HE?

Jones: Yeah, Reverend King preached that night. He sure did. He preached and then several of them got up and talked behind him. They did a great job. We all thought we was doing the best for the—

00:17:59:00

INTERVIEWER #1: DID YOU EVER, [laughs] DID YOU EVER THINK THAT, THAT IT WAS GOING TO WORK, THE BOYCOTT WAS GOING TO WORK?

Jones: Well, I believed it.

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU REALLY?

Jones: I believed, really.

INTERVIEWER #1: NO YOU DIDN'T.

Jones: Yes, I did. I believed it. If us hadn't of believed it we wouldn't have walked.

00:18:15:00

INTERVIEWER #1: YOU THOUGHT A GROUP OF BLACK FOLKS WERE GOING TO GET TOGETHER AND—

Jones: Yes.

INTERVIEWER #1: —AND STAY OFF THOSE BUSES?

Jones: But they, they deceive us though. We didn't think black folks was going to stay off, but they did. They stayed off it. And they didn't have nothing but white folks and so that made them didn't have a busload of people, see? Very few whites was riding, and the most was riding was colored peoples. And then after we stayed off the bus, the business went down.

00:18:38:00

INTERVIEWER #1: HOW MANY MILES DO YOU THINK YOU WALKED?

Jones: Oh, about seven, eight miles a day. Maybe long, further than that. Because you know, going and comin' it made a great deal distance.

00:18:51:00

INTERVIEWER #1: EVER TEMPTED TO TAKE A RIDE FROM—

Jones: No, uh-uh. No, but if sometime we would be out on the road comin' home, well, there'd be a white lady come along and pick us up and carry us so far, and we would thank her for it. We would be very glad. And we would offer her pay, but she wouldn't take it.

00:19:10:00

INTERVIEWER #1: WAS IT WORTH IT?

Jones: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER #1: THE BOYCOTT?

Jones: Uh-huh, sure, uh-huh. It was really worth it. It was hard, but it worth it after we got over it, 'cause now we can get on the bus and set anywhere we want. And nobody say get up. See, that's very good.

00:19:27:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE STILL ALIVE WHO WERE IN THAT, IN THAT MEETING?

Jones: Oh, there's a lot of 'em alive and there's a lot of 'em dead. There really is. A lot of peoples is still alive and a lot of 'em is dead.

00:19:39:00

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN MONTGOMERY KNOW WHAT, WHAT PEOPLE SUFFERED THROUGH?

Jones: Yeah, some of 'em know, some of 'em don't, but they learning. They really have. These young peoples here is really coming up from where they used to be. And they just make—Y'all should have been here last night.

00:19:58:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT?

Jones: We had a big music, here at the church last night. Sure did. Had a big music here last night.

INTERVIEWER: THAT'S GREAT.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:20:12:00

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