



Interview with **Clory Bryant**

Date: February 17, 1989

Interviewer: Judy Richardson

Camera Rolls: 2094-2095

Sound Rolls: 242

Team: A

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.

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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 #2094]

[sound roll #242]

[slate]

00:00:12:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark one.

[slate]

00:00:15:00

Interviewer:

What was your first impression of Chicago coming here as a 17-year-old?

Clory Bryant:

Well, I thought Chicago was one of the most—

Interviewer:

Excuse me. If you could just preface it with, when I came at 17, however, you know, get your age in there somewhere.

00:00:27:00

Clory Bryant:

Well, when I came here I was 17, and I was just out of high school and very young and idealistic and I thought I was gonna really to go Chicago and knock 'em dead. The, the beautiful tall buildings, I thought they were just fascinating. The bright lights, because I lived in the country and I was not used to lights, and to see lights burn all night long, I would just get up and look outta the window and look at the lights. I thought they were just beautiful.

00:01:00:00

Interviewer:

And talk about what your family was coming with. I mean, what were they leaving behind in Arkansas and what did they expect? What was the dream of Chicago?

Clory Bryant:

Well, we didn't leave much behind. We did have a house and—

Interviewer:

Sorry. If you could say something about what you left in Arkansas.

00:01:16:00

Clory Bryant:

Well, we left, what we left in Arkansas was segregation, poverty, lack of job opportunities. There was very little to offer us at all. And when we came to Chicago, we thought, you know, here's the land of opportunity. And as a little girl I had seen people come home on vacation from Chicago and they had on pretty clothes and they drove shiny cars and they had money. And I thought, yeah, I wanna go there and enjoy some of that. And, but when we got here it was different. It was not that at all. I guess those people must have saved a lifetime to come home and spend that kind of money. Jobs were hard to find, and housing was, was really poor. And even when there was housing, you couldn't meet the rent because you didn't have a job. Educational opportunities was also very poor. You could go to high school, but after that, then college, there was just no way.

00:02:28:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:02:30:00

Camera crew member #2:

Went a little off.

Clory Bryant:

You might say, how was it different from the house that—

Camera crew member #2:

[inaudible]

Clory Bryant:

—you had in the South?

00:02:35:00

Interviewer:

Well, you could end with that, but I also wanna—

00:02:37:00

Clory Bryant:

OK.

[cut]

00:02:37:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark two.

[slate]

00:02:41:00

Interviewer:

OK, how was, how was housing different for—from what you found as a Black family moving, from what White people had in Chicago at that time?

00:02:50:00

Clory Bryant:

Well, most Blacks lived in kitchenette apartments, and these apartments were—normally what Whites had were six-room flats. And when Blacks took over that, those communities, they became apartments about four to each flat, cut up apartments, and you had to share a common kitchen between four different families. And—

00:03:18:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Cut just a second. If there's a way that you could say [beep] that—

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—that's a gorgeous dress for this.

Clory Bryant:

Thanks.

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

You look great.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

[cut]

00:03:28:00

Camera crew member #1:

And we're marking.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark three.

[slate]

00:03:31:00

Interviewer:

OK, how was the housing different from the way Whites had it and the way it was for Blacks when they arrived?

Clory Bryant:

Well, when Whites had it, they were six—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. If you could say, When Whites had the houses.

00:03:40:00

Clory Bryant:

When Whites had the houses, they were like flats, six-room or seven-room, eight-room flats. When Blacks took over that housing, each bedroom became an apartment where you shared a common kitchen and you shared a common bathroom with four and five, sometimes six individuals or families.

00:04:07:00

Interviewer:

And was that different from the way you had known it in the South?

00:04:10:00

Clory Bryant:

Oh, sure. Even in the South you, you probably had a shack, but it was your shack. You know, you didn't share it with anybody else.

00:04:20:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

00:04:22:00

Camera crew member #2:

Yeah, I think that's fine.

[cut]

00:04:23:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark four.

[slate]

00:04:26:00

Interviewer:

OK, how was housing different for, from what it had been for Whites and Blacks when they arrived?

00:04:31:00

Clory Bryant:

Well, in those communities where apartments were like flats, they were six, seven and eight-room flats when Whites had it. When the Blacks moved into those same housing, each bedroom became an apartment. And so, consequently you shared the kitchen and bathroom with five, six other individual families. Even in the South, you had maybe a shack, but it was your own shack and you didn't share it with anybody else, and that made an awful lotta difference.

00:05:08:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Lovely. Yes.

00:05:10:00

Camera crew member #2:

That's fine. Get you a card soon.

[beep]

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] [laughs]

Clory Bryant:

[laughs]

[cut]

00:05:14:00

Camera crew member #1:

And we're marking.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark five.

[slate]

00:05:17:00

Interviewer:

In a couple of choice sentences, how would you describe the Daley machine?

00:05:21:00

Clory Bryant:

Well, the Daley machine was, well I guess I could do that best by trying to describe Mayor Daley. He seemed to many to be omnipotent. He took a Machiavelli approach to government. He was in control. He was strong, demanding, and ruthless. And certainly racist.

00:05:47:00

Interviewer:

Why do you say that he was racist?

00:05:52:00

Clory Bryant:

Because Blacks who were here in this city and who worked and to support the machine always wound up getting the crumbs while someone else ate at the banquet table. We got what was thrown aside, the bones and the crumbs.

00:06:10:00

Interviewer:

And you had some particular instances where you, you remember specifically being—running as an Independent, and you mentioned some specifics of that Daley power. You talked about a neighbor who needed a Christmas tree. I was wondering if you could talk about that story.

Clory Bryant:

Well, yes. That was in the early '60s. I was running for public office and I had asked a neighbor of mine—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. If you could preface it by saying you were running as an Independent against the Daley machine.

00:06:36:00

Clory Bryant:

Oh, I, I was running as an Independent. In the early '60s, I was running as an Independent against the Daley machine. I had asked a neighbor of mine was she going to vote for me. As a matter of fact, I says, I know you will vote for me, and she said, No, I'm afraid I can't because my alderman always gives me a Christmas tree for my vote, and, and I know you can't afford to go around buying these many trees, so I'm just gonna vote for him because I'll have to have my tree. And so, I didn't get her vote.

00:07:13:00

Interviewer:

And talk about what happened in terms of the public housing when you were in, in public housing and you had a problem because you'd gone to a meeting, I think?

00:07:21:00

Clory Bryant:

Yes. Well, having run for public office, a lotta people in the community saw me as a leader and, of course, if something would go wrong, they would come to me. And this group came to me about housing, they were being asked to move. And I went to that meeting that night and addressed the group, and in doing so I said a few things that might've not been right with the powers that be. And, of course, by Tuesday I had a notice in my mailbox that my rent had gone up from sixty-one dollars a month to a hundred and seventy-eight.

00:07:59:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

00:08:01:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark six.

[slate]

00:08:04:00

Interviewer:

OK, talk about what happened when you spoke out at a local meeting.

00:08:07:00

Clory Bryant:

Well, it was, it was during the time that I was living in, in Chicago public housing. And there was some people had been asked to move and they didn't want to move or couldn't move or whatever. They asked me if I would come to this rally that night and, and, and help them to organize to protest that move, and I did. On Tuesday, I had a, a notice in the mail to come down to the Chicago Housing Authority Office, and I was informed when I arrived there that my rent was going from sixty-one dollars up to a hundred and seventy-eight dollars. And I'm sure it was because of the statements that I had made at the meeting several nights before.

00:08:53:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

[cut]

00:08:55:00

Camera crew member #1:

And mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark seven.

[slate]

00:08:58:00

Interviewer:

OK, talk about running again as an Independent and the problems you had in speaking at your own church.

00:09:03:00

Clory Bryant:

Again when I was running as an Independent, I had approached my minister and asked him if I could speak five minutes before or after service on Sunday morning to drum up votes. And he said he would discuss it, you know, with some of the church members and see what we could do, but then I was denied. And when I was told why, they said that the ward boss had bought the very seats that we sat in on Sunday morning and that I had a lot of nerve to ask them to stand in that pulpit and to speak against him. And, of course, I was denied the right to speak, and that was in my own church.

00:09:49:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

Sure know how to co-compress, it's wonderful [inaudible].

[beep]

00:09:55:00

Camera crew member #1:

Good answers.

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:09:57:00

Interviewer:

I'm gonna ask you—

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

—about Dr. King coming and the problems you may have had with—

[picture resumes]

Interviewer:

—where he based his support.

Clory Bryant:

OK.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark eight.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

[inaudible]

00:10:06:00

Interviewer:

[coughs] Excuse me. OK, what, what problems did you have in terms of where Dr. King based his support from in the Chicago campaign?

00:10:15:00

Clory Bryant:

There were, there was a group of people who were concerned that Dr. King did not work as close with the grass roots as they had hoped. There was influence from some of the city's biggest universities, from some of the political bosses in the Black community with whom he aligned himself that we were, well, I don't know if they were political bosses, but let's say they, they called, they were set up as brokers for the Black community. And they were not always, as we used to put it, on the square, and we had reasons to, to mistrust them. And we had hoped that Dr. King would not align himself with those people, but he did. I don't know if it was because he was not well informed. I'm sure that's, that's probably the reason why because I cannot think of another person on earth that was anymore fair than Dr. King.

00:11:17:00

Interviewer:

Did you have any problems with the summit agreement, with the accords that were reached around housing?

00:11:23:00

Clory Bryant:

Oh, yes. You know, when you say summit agreements, that's the problem I had. I, I don't like summit agreements and covenants and things like that because they're too easy to duck out on. I would like to have seen something much more concrete. A, a contract, an agreement with a time frame—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Clory Bryant:

—and some signatures.

00:11:53:00

Interviewer:

OK, we can cut.

Camera crew member #1:

We ran out.

Interviewer:

OK.

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #2095]

00:11:58:00

Camera crew member #1:

And mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark nine.

[slate]

00:12:01:00

Interviewer:

K. Tell me why you had some problems with those who were deciding things at the summit.

Clory Bryant:

Well, we, first of all we felt they were deciding for us.

Interviewer:

OK, if you could say something—

Clory Bryant:

We lived—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Start again and say something about the summit.

00:12:14:00

Clory Bryant:

Oh, because they don't hear your question, right, OK. Ask me again.

00:12:18:00

Interviewer:

OK. Why did you have pe—problems with the people who were at the summit deciding issues for you?

00:12:24:00

Clory Bryant:

Those people who sat in on the summits with the housing department were not the people of our choice. We felt that those people who lived in Chicago public housing, those people who were emotionally involved, those people whom Chicago housing was a way of life should have been involved, and, and who were a articulate enough to say what the problems were and who was involved enough to know and concerned enough to care. And those are the people we had wanted because *we don't care about summits taking place without us. We don't care about covenants. We want contracts in Black and White with some hard answers for us, with some signatures and some people we can hold responsible to, and some time frames. But none of this was, was there.* Again, it was just another piece of paper.

00:13:25:00

Interviewer:

And you said something about the people there didn't know public housing except through movies. Can you—

00:13:29:00

Clory Bryant:

Except those people did not know, who sat in on those summits and negotiated these deals for us, nothing whatsoever about public housing except what they had learned from the movies and from what they had read in the papers. And that is the, the extent of their knowledge.

00:13:50:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Yeah.

[cut]

00:13:53:00

Camera crew member #1:

Little lower. Hit it.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark 10.

[slate]

00:13:57:00

Interviewer:

OK. Give me a description of the staging of the Cicero march and how you didn't think you were gonna go, you were just bringing your daughter. OK.

Clory Bryant:

Well, we had kind of agreed. We went to the march on Cicero—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. If you could just mention your daughter.

Clory Bryant:

With my daughter that, both of us wouldn't go to jail.

Interviewer:

Sorry. Let me start from the beginning. You can go ahead.

Clory Bryant:

You know what you asked me the other day that was good.

Interviewer:

Why don't we cut for a second?

Clory Bryant:

Wait a minute, you said, oh, how did you ask me that?

[beep]

Clory Bryant:

You—

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:14:24:00

Interviewer:

Okie dokie. So, we're ready to roll.

Camera crew member #2:

Yeah, you wanna say the day of the Cicero march, my daughter and myself.

Interviewer:

Oh, yeah.

Clory Bryant:

What'd you say?

Interviewer:

The day of the Cicero march.

Clory Bryant:

OK.

Interviewer:

My daughter and I.

Clory Bryant:

OK.

00:14:35:00

Interviewer:

Yeah.

[cut]

00:14:36:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark 11.

[slate]

00:14:39:00

Interviewer:

So, the day of the Cicero march, what happens with you and your daughter?

00:14:43:00

Clory Bryant:

The day of the Cicero march, I went to take my daughter to the march. And I was not to march, only she was gonna march. And I was going to take names of people who were going to go in to Cicero, and then we'd be there when they come out to take their names to be sure that all of our people came back safely. And [laughs] *we got there and, with such few, we became a little frightened. And we kept standing around and finally it was twelve o'clock, I believe it was twelve o'clock, and all of a sudden guys started getting out of cars and people started coming out of doorways and they said, OK, Lucas, step off time.* And I just couldn't believe it, all these beautiful warm bodies were there to support us and we didn't know it all this time. So, they started to march and I felt so good. I said to my friend, Let's, let's walk over and see what's gonna happen. So we went in behind them a little piece, but by the time we got there we noticed that the National Guards and the Cicero Police—Chicago Police and everybody else was there with guns and bayonets pointed at the marches [sic], and instead of

pointing at the people who were, were throwing the bricks, so we were afraid to go back, so I was forced then to go on. But I'm glad I went. It was a beautiful experience. I was scared all the way, but we kept walking. And people from the post office where Lucas worked joined us later on into the march. And when we knew anything, they were just thousands. And it was the, one of the most successful marches that had taken place in the city of Chicago.

00:16:31:00

Interviewer:

And why was the character of that march so different from Dr. King's marches?

00:16:35:00

Clory Bryant:

Well, it was not a King march. You know, we just went out there on faith and we didn't have the, the bigwigs flanking us on either side, you know. *We just went, little people.* And, you know, Dr. King's marches were, like, kind of staged where you knew who was gonna be involved, everybody who was gonna be involved, the organizations, the ministers and, and the other people, you know, were there to, to support him. We didn't have that kinda support. The only support we had was those community people who just heard about it and saw it on TV and on the radio and just got in their cars and came. *And that was the difference. It was a ground swell of grassroot people.*

00:17:24:00

Interviewer:

And was—talk about the difference between the nonviolence and them throwing the rocks back.

00:17:29:00

Clory Bryant:

Well, that's another thing. The Cicero march was different in that nobody there really believed in nonviolence. We went along with it, but that was not our really, that was not our belief. *And when they throw bricks, they got 'em back. We caught 'em and we threw 'em back. And so, it was give and take in Cicero for, oh, a mile or so. And I'll never forget it.* It was, it was one of the most outstanding things that I have seen accomplished in the civil rights movement. Cicero, *you don't know what Cicero meant to people in Chicago.*

00:18:16:00

Interviewer:

What did it mean?

00:18:18:00

Clory Bryant:

You don't go into the viaduct, honey, because if you do you may not get back. Cicero was on the other side of the viaduct, and you didn't walk through Cicero alone. You didn't let your car break down in Cicero and get out to change a tire. You just didn't go in Cicero if you were Black.

00:18:36:00

Interviewer:

So, what did it mean to march through there?

00:18:39:00

Clory Bryant:

Well, it let the world know that together we can do anything we want. If you can march through Cicero, you know, you can accomplish almost anything, and I think people felt that. And from that point on there was no turning around. We, we really went on and began to accomplish things like electing a Black mayor.

00:19:00:00

Interviewer:

Did you think that by going through Cicero you, you were saying something to the people of Cicero, too?

Clory Bryant:

Yes, to the people of Cicero and the people outside of Cicero.

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. If you could say, That from—

00:19:09:00

Clory Bryant:

You know, we, we, by ma-marching through Cicero, I think we made a statement to those people who lived in Cicero and to those people who did not live in Cicero. Because for those Blacks who told us we were foolish to go, you made a statement that we can go if we go together. To the people in Cicero, we made a statement, we are coming, and we are here. And nothing happened, few bricks. People in Cicero were not what we thought they were.

Interviewer:

Cut.

00:19:46:00

Camera crew member #:

Cut.

00:19:46:00

Interviewer:

OK. Let me—

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—just ask one question [inaudible].

[beep]

Interviewer:

OK. I'm gonna ask you to just do the last thing about why this march was different from the King marches.

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

Clory Bryant:

OK.

Interviewer:

You had said at the interview that it's because the march took on the character of its leaders, and King's was—

Clory Bryant:

OK.

00:20:06:00

Interviewer:

—different 'cause it was led by King and it had a certain character to it.

[cut]

00:20:12:00

Interviewer:

What is that?

Camera crew member #:

Mark 12.

[slate]

00:20:13:00

Interviewer:

OK. OK. Why was, why was this mar—the Cicero march different from Dr. King's marches?

00:20:22:00

Clory Bryant:

The Cicero march was different from Dr. King's march because it took on the character of the leaders, and those were local people and were militant people and people who did not necessarily believe that nonviolent was the only way. You know, it might have been one way, but then there might have been other ways, and they tried the other way.

00:20:52:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Yes, that's it.

Camera crew member #2:

Wow. That's it.

Interviewer:

That's absolutely it.

[beep]

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:21:00:00

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