

Interview with **Georgia Gilmore**

February 17, 1986

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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

[camera roll 198]

[sound roll 1149]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED AND MARK.

Gilmore: Oh.

INTERVIEWER: OK THE FIRST QUESTION I'M GOING TO ASK YOU WHEN WE START IS HOW YOU HEARD ABOUT THE BUS BOYCOTT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK. ALL SET.

INTERVIEWER: YEAH?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YEAH.

INTERVIEWER: OK, FIRST I WANT TO ASK YOU MRS. GILMORE, CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU HEARD ABOUT THE BUS BOYCOTT THAT WAS PLANNED FOR DECEMBER 5, 1955, HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT IT AND WHAT DID YOU THINK WHEN YOU WERE?

Gilmore: Well, in the beginning we, Mrs. Parks was arrested and she being one of the senior

citizens and a very nice person, they decided to get together because we had gotten tired of having so many things happen and nothing being done about it. So they got together and decided to have a mass meeting. And after they had the meeting, they decided that they wouldn't ride the bus until they could get something done about it.

INTERVIEWER: BUT HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT, FOR EXAMPLE MRS. PARKS' ARREST, DID SOMEONE-

Gilmore: They all had it on the news, it was on the news, on the radio, on the news.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU, CAN YOU SAY THAT YOU HEARD ABOUT HER ARREST ON THE NEWS.

Gilmore: I heard about her arrest on the news.

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE PLAN FOR THE MASS MEETING?

Gilmore: Well, it was broadcast over the negro radio station.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU HOLD ON A SEC?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: LET'S CUT?

INTERVIEWER: YEAH.

[cut]

INTERVIEWER: OK?

Gilmore: Mm-hmm.

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKER.

00:01:28:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU DESCRIBE FOR ME HOW YOU HEARD ABOUT THE MASS MEETING AND WHAT THE BROADCAST SAID?

Gilmore: Well, the mass meeting was planted on the radio, and they made the announcement and they wanted all the people who were interested in, being at the meeting to come to the Hope Street Baptist Church on Monday night at 7 o'clock. And that's what really happened.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE DAY OF THE, THE FIRST DAY OF

THE BOYCOTT AND WHEN YOU FOUND OUT IT WAS GOING TO BE SUCCESSFULL AND NOBODY WAS GOING TO RIDE THE BUSES?

Gilmore: Well at first we thought that they were gonna ride. And we had, you know we didn't feel as if everybody was going to participate but we was really surprised when everybody the first week didn't ride the bus, and then we knew then it would be a success. And so on that Sunday they announced that they would have another mass meeting.

00:02:25:00

INTERVIEWER: THAT WAS A VERY BIG SURPRISE WASN'T IT?

Gilmore: *It was really surprising, because we thought, well, maybe some of the people would continue to ride the bus. But, after all, they had been mistreated and been mistreated in so many different ways until I guess they were tired and they just decided that they just wouldn't ride.*

INTERVIEWER: WHY DO YOU THINK THAT THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN MONTGOMERY WAS READY FOR SUCH A BIG BUS BOYCOTT?

Gilmore: Well, you know, you can take things, and take things, and take things and you know we were dealing with a new generation. And they, this new generation had decided that they just had taken as much as they could. So they had, they went and made plans and they went and tried to talk with their higher ups and they decided that they didn't want to give any decent answers to the questions that they wanted answered and so they decided they wouldn't ride the bus until they change and that they, there may be, we'll have negro bus drivers and some, something could be done about the way that the people would be treated. And then they wanted to, add another plan that said that first come, first serve and if you were seated, in a seat that you didn't have to get up and give it to someone else even though you had paid for it, And before then it was always said even after you paid you would have to go around to the back door to go in. And they decided that they was tired of it and they wouldn't do it anymore.

00:04:00:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW DURING THE BUS BOYCOTT YOU WALKED, DID YOU, YOU DID WALK?

Gilmore: Yes, I walked.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS THAT LIKE, THE WALK, DID YOU WALK BY YOURSELF?

Gilmore: Well, sometime I walked by myself and sometime I walked with different people and I began to enjoy walking because for so long I guess that I had, had this convenient ride and until I had forgot about how well it would be to walk.

INTERVIEWER: DID THE BUSES TRY TO PICK YOU UP?

Gilmore: No.

INTERVIEWER: HOW FAR DID YOU WALK WHEN YOU– [phone rings]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MUST HAVE MISSED–

INTERVIEWER: HOLD FOR A SEC. CAN WE STOP FOR A SEC?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OF COURSE.

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SPEED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: MRS. GILMORE HOW FAR DID YOU HAVE TO WALK IN THOSE DAYS?

Gilmore: Well say, maybe a mile, maybe two miles some days. Going to and from.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU START WITH SAYING I HAD TO WALK.

Gilmore: Well, I had to walk say if I'm going to town or walk from Dericote Street to Dexter and back and maybe some days though we would ride a cab.

INTERVIEWER: HOW FAR WAS IT, HOW FAR WAS THAT DISTANCE IN TOTAL DO YOU THINK?

Gilmore: Maybe a mile, a mile and a half.

00:05:23:00

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU REMEMBER ANY THINGS THAT HAPPENED WHEN YOU WERE WALKING ANY FUNNY THINGS? OR ANY STORIES THAT JUST HAPPENED WHEN YOU WERE WALKING IN THOSE DAYS?

Gilmore: *Well, yeah, you know, a lot of times some of the young whites would come along and they would say nigger don't you know it's better to ride the bus than it is to walk? And*

we would say no, cracker, no we wanted to walk. [laughs]

[cut]

[slate]

INTERVIEWER: –ARREST A COUPLE OF PEOPLE AND I WAS JUST WONDERING–

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SLATE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: –WHEN THINGS WERE MOVING ALONG, HAD YOU EVER THOUGHT THAT MAYBE THIS WASN'T GOING TO WORK OUT OR MAYBE YOU JUST LOST– CAN YOU HOLD ON SEC? ARE YOU SET?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YEAH. WE'RE ROLLING.

00:06:09:00

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU EVER GET TIRED DURING THE DAYS WHEN YOU WERE WALKING, DID YOU EVER THINK THAT MAYBE THIS WAS IN VAIN AND IT WAS NOT GOING TO WORK OUT, YOU WERE WASTING YOUR LEGS?

Gilmore: No, in fact it was really something that was a good experience for you. Because you know for so long you had gotten where you had depended on certain things and you felt like you couldn't do without them. But after awhile you became acquainted with what was in for you and you decided that you would just do it. And you would pray and the Lord opened so many ways for me but see because before the bus boycott, I couldn't drive. But after the bus boycott began I was able to drive. And then I was able to save enough money to get a car. And then I was really a big shot. Because I felt like that I had come up in the world, being able to drive a car and say well, I own the car and after being, going to the mass meetings, and listening at Reverend King tell you how to be and not to be mean and hateful and to always pray and ask the Lord to give you spirit whereas you wouldn't do things that you would regret later. And listening at him changed my whole life because I was the kind of person who would be fiery. And I didn't mind fighting you, I didn't care who you was, white or black, but listening at him [sic] I began to realize some of the things that my mother had taught me in the past. That you think twice before you do some things, because some things you do, you will regret it later. And so by me being able to control my temper, I made a lot of friends that I never thought that I would have, white and black.

00:08:21:00

INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU SAY IT'S TRUE THAT BLACK WOMEN IN MONTGOMERY WERE REALLY VERY IMPORTANT IN KEEPING THE BOYCOTT GOING ON?

Gilmore: Yes they was.

INTERVIEWER: WHY WOULD YOU SAY THAT?

Gilmore: Because you see they were maids, cooks. And they was the one that really and truly kept the bus running. And after the maids and the cooks stopped riding the bus, well the bus didn't have any need to run, because the majority of the maids was in Cloverdale and Capitol High and Oak Park, and so instead of riding the bus, they would walk. And then they began to form a carpool. And once the carpool began they lost completely interested [sic] in the bus. So that's why the bus boycott was a success.

INTERVIEWER: WAS THERE PRESSURE ON THE MAIDS TO NOT RIDE THE BUS, I MEAN NOT RIDE THE CARPOOL TO GET—

Gilmore: On some there were, but then they did, disregarded it.

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE STOP FOR A SEC?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YEAH.

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SLATE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKER. IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: OK. WE ALSO HEARD THAT YOU GAVE MONEY AT THE MASS MEETINGS EVERY WEEK. NOW HOW DID YOU DO THAT AND WHY DID YOU DO THAT?

Gilmore: Well, in order to make the mass meeting and the boycott be a success and that keep the car pool running, we decided that the peoples on the south side would get a club and the peoples on the west side would get a club and so we decided that we wouldn't name the club anything, we'd just say it was the club from nowhere and I had a lot of white peoples who contributed.

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE STOP FOR A SECOND?

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CAMERA ROLL 199. MARKER. OK IT'S ALL YOURS.

00:10:26:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU WERE TELLING US ABOUT GIVING MONEY TO THE MASS MEETINGS, TO KEEP THE BOYCOTT GOING, CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT HOW YOU ORGANIZED THAT AND WHY?

Gilmore: Well, we decided to ask peoples who didn't attend the mass meetings for donations and they said they would and we decided that we would get a club started on the west side and I had it on the south side, which is this side and on the south side would always try to have more money than the west side and so we decided we would name it the club from nowhere. And so the club from nowhere was able to report maybe a hundred and fifty, a hundred and twenty five or seventy five or maybe two hundred dollars or more a week, and which was very nice of the people because so many of the people who didn't attend the mass meetings would give the donation to help keep the carpool going.

00:11:20:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT BEING A COMMITTEE OF ONE?

Gilmore: Well, being a committee of one you didn't have to worry about somebody taking or somebody doing something that would cause a disturbment or something and so I decided that we wouldn't have any officers, it would just be one. And I collect the money and they would give it to me. And we would, and I'd always report it at the mass meetings, the same day that they would give it to us, and so there never was any conflict.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WERE THE MASS MEETINGS LIKE, I GUESS YOU ATTENDED A LOT OF THEM WHAT WERE THEY LIKE?

Gilmore: Well, *I attended just about all of them. I was really very interested in it because you could go and you could learn about so many things that you didn't know exist, and so many people would tell you how they was being mistreated and they were glad that they were able to come out and not have to take the same treatments that they once had taken and was afraid to admit.* And then they would have the prayer meeting and then they would have great speakers. And Reverend King, Reverend Abernakin [sic], Shuttlesworth, and just all of them, is very good speakers.

00:12:39:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANT YOU TO THINK BACK TO THE VERY FIRST MASS MEETING AT HOPE STREET THAT EVENING AFTER ROSA PARKS WAS ARRESTED, WHAT WAS THAT LIKE AND HOW DID YOU FEEL TO BE THERE?

Gilmore: Well, it was something, something that you can't really express, it's something that was just all over you, and it was just something that you was good to be able to participate in and I think the very first song that they sang was, when I'm going the last mile of the way.

INTERVIEWER: WERE THERE LOTS OF PEOPLE THERE?

Gilmore: There was quite a few peoples. In another word it was so many of them the church wouldn't hold them all. They were outside as well as inside.

INTERVIEWER: HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO GET A SEAT?

Gilmore: Well, I would always go early. The mass meeting was supposed to start at seven but I would always get there between five and five-thirty. And I had my own special seat where I would sit all the time so if I wasn't early enough to get the seat somebody would save it.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU TELL US FINALLY ABOUT, LET'S STOP FOR A SECOND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SURE.

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: OK. FINALLY, CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT WHAT IT FELT LIKE GETTING BACK ON THE BUSES WHEN THE ANNOUNCEMENT CAME THAT THE BOYCOTT WAS OVER AND THAT THEY WOULD BE INTEGRATED IN MONTGOMERY.

00:14:17:00

Gilmore: Well, we felt that we had accomplished something that no one ever thought would ever happen in the city of Montgomery, and being able to ride the bus and sit any place on the bus that you desire was something that hadn't ever happened before. And it was a queer feeling. In the beginning you thought well maybe it wouldn't last. But still you would give it a try. And we did. And we didn't have any incidents and nobody you know, created any kind of disturbance or anything and that was why it was a success.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN DID YOU FIRST KNOW THAT THE BUSES WERE GOING TO BE INTEGRATED? WHEN DID YOU FIRST HEAR THAT THE BOYCOTT WAS GOING TO BE OVER AND GOING TO BE A SUCCESS.

Gilmore: Well, that was when they had the city council meeting. And they made the announcement. And on WCOB and WSFA TV stations and the news would come on and when anything special happened they always would interrupt and bring it to you, you know so that you would know what was happening. And that was when it was.

00:15:31:00

INTERVIEWER: WAS THERE A-

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: I'M GOING TO HAVE TO RELOAD.

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2. AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THANK YOU SIR. [coughs]

INTERVIEWER: OH NO, NO, NO NOT YOU.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: OK, YOU WERE GOING TO TELL US AGAIN HOW YOU WERE COOKING AND HOW YOU HEARD-

Gilmore: Well, I was cooking and they made the announcement. And I didn't believe it, so I ran out and I called the lady next door. And she was looking at it, and she told me yes it was true. And so they decided then that they would have a meeting and they had called a meeting and they had this mass meeting. And everybody was praising Reverend King and the rest for being able to make something happen that had never happened before without any conflict [thunder].

00:16:24:00

INTERVIEWER: LET'S STOP FOR A SECOND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: IT WAS [INAUDIBLE] [LAUGHING].

INTERVIEWER: TRY AND MAKE SURE YOU SAY THAT-

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: OK. CAN YOU START AGAIN ABOUT HOW YOU WERE COOKING?

Gilmore: Well, I was cooking, and I was listening to the gospel music. And they had said that they stopped to say that the boycott would be ended and it would have a mass meeting. And so I decided that I was just so excited, I just didn't believe it so I ran and turned the TV on and it, just as I turned the TV on they were telling that the boycott had ended and that we would have the mass meeting as seven o'clock. And I ran outside and asked my neighbor and she said yes, and we were so happy about everything happening and no conflicts and nobody hadn't been, you know, rearrested and put in jail or anything [thunder].

INTERVIEWER: GLAD YOU GO THAT RIGHT THEN [LAUGHING].

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SHOULD WE CUT HER.

00:17:29:00

INTERVIEWER: I HAVE ONE OTHER QUESTION. WHAT IF THERE HADN'T BEEN A BOYCOTT? WHAT IF THERE HADN'T BEEN A BOYCOTT WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IN MONTGOMERY?

Gilmore: Well, I believe Montgomery would have been integrated but without a boycott because the peoples had gotten tired of the way they had been mistreated. For instance, my son, he worked at the Jackson hospital and ever since he had started working he had walked to work and he was on his way to work to Jackson hospital and some police mens was in there and they got him and they beat him and arrest him and put him in jail and said that he was trying to integrate the parks. And we didn't know exactly what to do and so we went and we talked with the several peoples, and so they decided that they would put in a suit.

INTERVIEWER: BUT DO YOU THINK THAT INTEGRATION WOULD HAVE OCCURRED ANYWAY?

Gilmore: Integration would have occurred anyway because the younger generation wasn't going to take the things that the older generation take, had taken. And it was better to have had the boycott than to let the younger generation take it over because it would, might have been a lot of conflict.

00:19:00:00

INTERVIEWER: IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO TELL US THAT YOU THINK WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE BOYCOTT AND YOUR EXPERIENCES, ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO ADD TO THAT?

Gilmore: Well, the only thing I can say, I was glad it was a success and nobody didn't [sic] get killed or injured or anything and after the boycott we had a lot of white friends that we didn't realize that were really and truly interested in. But they were interested but they were

afraid to let it be known because they would be isolated [thunder] from their peoples.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU, CAN YOU START THAT AGAIN? TELL ME ABOUT THE WHITE FRIENDS THAT YOU HAD.

Gilmore: I said I was glad, we was glad because we discovered that we had a lot of white friends that we didn't realize that were interested in us, and the only reason that they couldn't let it be known in publicly before the boycott was because they thought that maybe they would be isolated from their white friends. So after the boycott was and then they found that we had so many white friends, then they could let it be known that they were really and truly interested in you as a human being, not of your color, but as a human being.

INTERVIEWER: WERE THERE WHITE SUPPORTERS DURING THE BOYCOTT?

Gilmore: Quite a few.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THEM?

Gilmore: Well, they were, they were very active in helping you anything that you started that they thought was worthwhile, they would help you and help you make it be a success.

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE STOP?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE ARE ABOUT TO RUN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: YEAH—

[cut]

[end interview]

00:20:42:00

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