

Interview with **Sheriff James Clark**

February 19, 1986

Interviewer: Prudence Arndt

Production Team: C

Camera Rolls: 594-597

Sound Rolls: 1541-1543

Interview gathered as part of *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.

Preferred Citation

Interview with Sheriff James Clark, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on February 19, 1986, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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 594]

[sound roll 1541]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ROLLING.

INTERVIEWER: I'M ASKING PRETTY SPECIFIC QUESTIONS—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARKER.

[slate]

INTERVIEWER: —SO YOU CAN JUST GIVE ME FOUR TO FIVE SENTENCES AND THEN, AND THEN WE CAN FINALLY START. ARE WE READY?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE ARE READY.

INTERVIEWER: OK, THINKING BACK TO THE 1960s BEFORE MARTIN LUTHER KING CAME INTO SELMA IN JANUARY, BEFORE SNCC CAME INTO SELMA, WHAT WERE RELATIONSHIPS LIKE BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES IN SELMA? CAN YOU JUST GIVE A FEW SENTENCES?

Clark: They were very good. We—

ARNDT: I'M SORRY, JUST START AGAIN AND SAY THE RELATIONSHIPS YOU KNOW, SPELL IT OUT FOR ME AGAIN.

Clark: OK. The relationships were very good. They had lived there peaceably for 100 to 150 years between the blacks and whites did, and they, there was no discontent on the part of either one as far as we could tell.

00:00:53:00

INTERVIEWER: SO IT WAS A SURPRISE WHEN THINGS STARTED MOVING IN THE SIXTIES?

Clark: Well, it was not a great surprise that things started but because we read a lot about it in the newspapers but we had no indication ever that the that the local black people were going to take part in it, in fact, even after it started full blast, they took very little interest in it. They, a few young ones, a few radicals, joined in but the majority of the black people didn't, did not enter into any of the demonstrations or anything until they were more or less forced to.

INTERVIEWER: FORCED. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THAT? WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY WERE FORCED?

Clark: Well, the, one time, there was a march of the school teachers that came down to protest and they readily admitted that they were told that they had to come down or they would suffer for it.

00:01:53:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, WHEN, WHEN THOSE TEACHERS MARCHED TO THE COURTHOUSE AND THE CAMERAS WERE FILMING, AS YOU PUSHED REVEREND REESE DOWN THE STEPS, CAN YOU GIVE ME YOUR EXPLANATION OR DESCRIPTION OF THAT WHOLE INCIDENT? THERE'S FOOTAGE OF THE TEACHERS COMING UP TO THE COURTHOUSE AND THEN I THINK HE ALONE GOES UP THE STEPS AND THERE'S AN ALTERCATION BETWEEN THE TWO OF, YOU A VERBAL EXCHANGE. DO YOU—

Clark: I did not move until I had a lawyer there to advise me on it, and I did not make a move at all until he advised me that they were in violation of the law. They were creating a breach of peace because the court, they didn't even come until after the courthouse was closed.

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY, CAN YOU BACK UP AND JUST SAY WHO DIDN'T EVEN COME.

Clark: The teachers did not come until after the courthouse was closed, and it was at the end of the day and they insisted on coming into the courthouse. The Sheriff's office was still open but everything else was closed. The Board of Registrars hadn't even been in session that day

and they insisted on coming in and I tried as easy as possible to push them back. I understood their situation that they were being forced into the, into that situation and I pushed them back but I did not do that until a, a lawyer who volunteered to advise me on it came down and he told me that they were in complete violation as, and I just pushed them back on the sidewalk and kept them from coming into the courthouse.

00:03:31:00

INTERVIEWER: STILL, REGARDING THAT SAME INCIDENT, AT THAT POINT AN OFFICIAL OF THE SCHOOL BOARD CAME TO THE COURTHOUSE AND APPARENTLY SAID SOMETHING TO YOU. DO YOU REMEMBER THIS? AND, AND THE, WHAT I'M TRYING TO GET AT IS WHY YOU DIDN'T ARREST THOSE PEOPLE?

Clark: The, well the representative of the school board, I believe, was this, was a lawyer, Edgar Stewart, and he was, I was going by his advice and that was his advice, was to push them back and not arrest them.

INTERVIEWER: WHY NOT ARREST THEM?

Clark: I don't know, that was his decision.

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT RIGHT THERE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK.

INTERVIEWER: HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera roll to 593]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER. TAKE TWO.

INTERVIEWER: OK, CONTINUING FROM THE, FROM THE FIRST QUESTION ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES IN SELMA, HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN SNCC CAME IN, IN 1963 AND STARTED WORKING WITH BLACKS TO GET THEM REGISTERED TO VOTE?

Clark: We recognized the fact that SNCC was organized by Martin Luther King as the agitation group and they continued to agitate and then Martin Luther King controlled them, that let them loose, and then he came up and told them no, you children, we're going to do

this in a peaceful way although he had sent them out to agitate first. And that was, he was playing both ends against the middle so-to-speak.

INTERVIEWER: BUT WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE WHOLE ISSUE OF THE, THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY AT THAT TIME?

Clark: They were, the blacks were allowed to vote, register to vote when they could qualify, according to the laws of the state of Alabama. After the federal registrars took over I sent several prisoners that were felons, down with jail uniforms on, printed Property of Dallas County Jail, sent them to the federal registrars and they were registered to vote. I did not believe that people with that sort of reputation should not, should be allowed to vote, nonresidents were there in the lines, children below the age of 18 were in the line and it was just a complete farce, even after the federal judge ruled that they had to be registered they wouldn't go into the registrar's office at all, they'd go up to the door and put on an act like they were being turned back for, that was for the benefit of the cameras and they it was just a complete farce as far as the whole act was and the press, the media, television, went right along with it.

00:06:32:00

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU THINK THE WHOLE VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE THEN WAS UNNECESSARY?

Clark: Well, I, it was I believe that we should have stayed with the laws of the state of Alabama because they, they—

INTERVIEWER: SORRY, CAN YOU BACK UP AND JUST SAY, WE'RE TALKING BEGIN WITH THE, WHETHER YOU THOUGHT THE WHOLE REGISTRATION DRIVE WAS, WHATEVER YOU THOUGHT IT WAS, IN OTHER WORDS, I NEED TO HEAR THAT MENTIONED.

Clark: The registration drive was unnecessary because it was a ruling of the federal judge that gave the black people the right to vote and overruled the laws of the state of Alabama, allowed anybody, re— nonresident or regardless of background, to register to vote but it, the drive continued on and on.

00:07:26:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT RIGHT THERE, THAT'S GREAT.

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera roll to 594]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CAMERA ROLL 594, JIM CLARK TAKE THREE, MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THANK YOU SIR.

00:07:32:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, HOW DID, HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN JOE SMITHERMAN FIRST, WAS FIRST APPOINTED WILSON BAKER TO BE PUBLIC SAFETY DIRECTOR? WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THAT WHOLE MOVE?

Clark: Wilson Baker was as they used to say about him in Selma, was anybody's dog that would hunt with him. He had joined the Klan, Ku Klux Klan publicly back in 1958, along with Lady Bird Johnson's Aunt, at a meeting there, and was a very active member of the Klan when he was during the years, and then when Martin Luther King came to town, well he went up and, and met with him and had breakfast with him every morning and they laid out the day's program for what they were going to do and how they were going to do it. I just did not think that he was the person for the job.

INTERVIEWER: WHY DID YOU THINK HE WASN'T QUALIFIED AT THAT POINT?

Clark: As far as education and experience he was, but it was the fact that he, he, he went along with the wishes of Martin Luther King and the—

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY, LET'S START AGAIN USING HIS NAME.

Clark: OK. Wilson Baker went along with the wishes of Martin Luther King and the other people, the other outside agitators that came in. He was the one that arrested Martin Luther King, even though I got blamed with it, he arrested him and put him in the city jail and Martin Luther King held a press conference every morning at Wilson Baker's office. He, I, I don't think anybody of that caliber should be in offices in the office of Director of Public Safety.

00:09:32:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, THAT'S, THAT'S FINE, NOW JOHN LEWIS REPORTED ONCE THAT YOU SAID TO HIM ONE DAY IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS, THE VOTER REGISTRATTON DRIVE IN '63, NOW YOU SAID-JOHN LEWIS, YOU'RE AN OUTSIDE AGITATOR, AND AN OUTSIDE AGITATOR IS THE LOWEST FORM OF HUMANITY. DID, DID YOU REALLY SAY THAT? AND IF SO, IS THAT WHAT YOU FELT AT, AT THE TIME?

Clark: I don't remember. I remember that John Lewis made many untrue statements. John Lewis was raised in Troy, Alabama, and I was raised in Elba, Alabama only 30 miles apart. I did not think he had any business in Selma because he was not a resident there, but I don't remember saying anything to him like that.

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S MOVE ON, LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND.

[cut]

[wild audio]

00:10:27:00

INTERVIEWER: THE QUESTION IS, AND YOU CAN JUST GIVE ME THREE OR FOUR SENTENCES, THAT IN JANUARY IN '65 WHEN—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SOUND 4.

INTERVIEWER: —MARTIN LUTHER KING FIRST CAME INTO TOWN, I WANT A QUICK FEW SENTENCES OF WHAT DID YOU THINK OF HIM.

00:10:37:00

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: PUTTING YOURSELF BACK IN '65, WHEN HE'S FIRST HITTING SELMA, YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT HIM, OBVIOUSLY, BEFORE, BUT—

Clark: Yes, he came to Selma—

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY, START WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING.

Clark: Martin Luther King came to Selma several times before then and it was building up. We had a plan that we had obtained saying that he was going to wind up in the Dallas County Jail and this is after the bombings have started, and the violence started, and so on and so forth, and we knew he was there with the Student Nonviolent so called, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, to agitate things, and—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I'M SORRY, WE'VE JUST RUN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET'S STOP.

Clark. Ok, I think I—

00:11:21:00

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: JIM CLARK, TAKE 5, MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK, LET ME GET-

INTERVIEWER: AS SOON AS HE GETS SETTLED-

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: -LET ME GET SETTLED HERE

INTERVIEWER: -WE CAN START, BUT MAKE SURE YOU MENTION KING IN THE SENTENCE.

CAMERA CREW: OK, WE'RE ALL SET, IT'S ALL YOURS.

00:11:32:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, GO AHEAD.

Clark: I was in Birmingham under orders from Governor Wallace when Martin Luther King was there in 1963 when the famous time that Martin Luther King was there with three white prostitutes and it was all a matter of record. I had heard about this and his agitation, I had seen A.D. King in action starting a riot in Birmingham, and now he had the SNCC to do his dirty work, and I felt like that he was coming in with a crew there to agitate things along with the American Nazi Party and other organizations, they were all joined in together, so to speak, even though they probably wouldn't appreciate my saying that, stirred up the whole area and then Martin Luther King was there to quiet it down so to speak, and, and claimed to be a man of peace, when he had actually agitated it to begin with.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU JUST SUMMARIZE THAT A LITTLE BIT MORE CONCISELY AND JUST TALK ABOUT HIM COMING INTO SELMA, CAUSE IT SOUNDED LIKE YOU WERE STILL TALKING ABOUT HIM IN BIRMINGHAM. CAN YOU JUST-

Clark: Well, you asked me what I thought about him personally so-

INTERVIEWER: RIGHT, OK, I'M SORRY.

Clark: The well, I, I knew that he, his tactics were to come in and-

INTERVIEWER: GIVE ME HIS-

Clark: Mar, I knew that Martin Luther King's tactics were to bring his agitators in first and stir things up and then he tried to appear as a man of peace later on to calm him down when he had actually precipitated the agitation himself.

00:13:20:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, THAT'S FINE, GREAT, WE'LL MOVE RIGHT ON. NOW YOU, YOU SAID TO JIM DEVINNEY WHEN YOU SPOKE TO HIM ON THE PHONE THAT YOU, THAT YOU HAVE A QUICK TEMPER WHICH SOMETIMES GOT YOU INTO TROUBLE. WAS THAT WHAT HAPPENED WITH REVEREND C.T. VIVIAN ON THE, THE STEPS. THAT WAS IN FEBRUARY OF '65 WHEN THAT, THAT, WHAT'S NOW A WELL KNOWN INCIDENT. HE, HE WAS SORT OF PROVOKING YOU VERBALLY AND YOU RESPONDED. WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENED IN THAT INCIDENT?

Clark: Vivian led a crew up a, steps, there was a large number, I don't have any idea how many there were, to the top of the steps and I went out to meet him and I had a night stick in my hands as, at parade rest, *and he started shouting at me that I was a Hitler, I was a brute, that I was a Nazi, I don't remember all everything he called me, and I did lose my temper then* and it seemed that a red skin came over my eyes and the next thing I knew he was on the, at the bottom of the steps picking himself up and that the Deputies helped him. *I don't re-, remember even hitting him but I went to the doctor and got an x-ray and found out I had a linear fracture in a finger on my left hand.*

INTERVIEWER: WOW. DO YOU FEEL LIKE HE PUSHED YOU INTO THIS SITUATION?

Clark: Very definitely, yes. He pushed me into it, he was, I, I, I just don't even remember hitting him to this day I don't, I, even though I saw it on television that night I didn't remember it.

00:15:05:00

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW: MAY WE STOP THERE PLEASE?

INTERVIEWER: YES, STOP.

[cut]

[wild audio]

Clark: --was when Jackson, Jackson, Jackson was killed.

[slate]

[change to camera roll 595]

CAMERA CREW: THIS IS THE HEAD OF SOUND ROLL 1542, CAMERA ROLL 595, JIM CLARK, SOUND TAKE 6, MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU JUST BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE, THE DAY YOU ARRESTED AMELIA BOYNTON, JUST CAUSE OFTEN NOW IT'S CREDITED, THAT INCIDENT IS CREDITED WITH BRINGING THE BLACK COMMUNITY TOGETHER BEHIND, YOU KNOW, BECAUSE OF HOW MRS. BOYNTON WAS HANDLED, SO CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY?

Clark: She led the group to the court, Amelia Boynton led the group to the courthouse and directed them to come inside and to take over the offices and to urinate on top of the desks and throw the books on the floor, and she was the one that was telling them what to do and how to do and, and I went out and, and tried to persuade her to leave the premises and she would not and I laid my hand on her shoulder to indicate that I was putting her under arrest and told her she was under arrest and they, she started trying to run from, out from under my hand, and screaming, where are the cameras, where are the cameras, take my picture, take my picture. And so I, to quiet things down, and since she was a leader well I was forced to arrest her.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT ABOUT THE, THE FACT THAT LATER THAT WAS GIVEN SO MUCH PUBLICITY AS SOMETHING THAT PUT THE, BROUGHT THE BLACK COMMUNITY TOGETHER IN SELMA?

Clark: Well it, she was a tall woman, the best I remember, but it may look like she was a tiny woman from the angle of the cameras, and that I was taking advantage of her. But there was no violence there at all, it was just purely, I just laid my hand on her shoulder, which is a common indication that a person's under arrest and told her that she was under arrest.

00:17:06:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, WHAT ABOUT THE, THE DAY THAT ANNIE COOPER WAS ARRESTED? CAN YOU DESCRIBE THAT, 'CAUSE THAT WAS A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT SITUATION, DO YOU REMEMBER THAT?

Clark: Well, I had my back to her and-

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY, REMEMBER TO USE THE NAMES 'CAUSE THIS IS WE'RE I-

Clark: Anna Lee, I had my back to Anna Lee Cooper. I had never, I had heard of her before, but I didn't know, had no connection at that time and she started screaming obscene words as I started turning around, she hit me in the head with her purse, that had a, a horse shoe in it, and it knocked me to my knees and she grabbed the night stick off my belt and I was stunned and I came up and we tried to take the night stick away from her and I remember that Newsweek magazine printed it as if I was trying to stab her in the chest with the night stick when I was actually trying to pull it out of her hands. I, from then on I wore a hard hat.

00:18:15:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARK.

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED, SOUND 7, MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: OK, WHY DON'T YOU START RIGHT WHERE YOU BEGAN BEFORE THAT THE TIME OF THE NIGHT DEMONSTRATIONS IN MARION.

Clark: Well, it was in Marion, I was there just strictly as an observer, since it was not in my county and I saw Jimmy Lee Jackson come through the crowds screaming and yelling and running circles, and they finally subdued him and then I saw a trooper come behind him with a, a round wound in the side of his face where I learned later on that Jimmy Lee Jackson had ground a broken beer bottle in the side of his face and last time I saw the trooper, he still had scars of that, and they took Jimmy Lee Jackson to the Marion Hospital and then moved him to the Good Samaritan Hospital which was a, at that time, a total, totally black hospital, and he was operated on by a black doctor and a black dentist, and he was he got progressively worse and on the examinations and recommendations of doctors, even that there, they, they, the recommendations were ignored and the autopsy showed that he had not received any antibiotics at all after the operation and he died from infection.

00:19:48:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU GIVE ME A COUPLE SENTENCES BRIEFLY ON THE, THE ATMOSPHERE AT THAT TIME, LIKE THE NEXT DAY FOLLOWING ALL THESE EVENTS, AND THE DAYS WHEN, AFTER JIMMY LEE JACKSON HAD DIED?

Clark: I didn't notice any change from what it had been all the time.

INTERVIEWER: WHICH IS WHAT IN THAT WHOLE PERIOD?

Clark: Well, everything was tense, it was, it was tense in the section of town and other parts of, of Selma. The people didn't even know what was going on.

INTERVIEWER: OK, YOU SAID THAT YOU WERE OUT OF TOWN THE DAY THE TROOPERS TURNED BACK THE DEMONSTRATORS ON THE PETTUS BRIDGE. WHEN DID YOU GET BACK AND, AND WHAT DID YOU SEE WHEN YOU GOT BACK?

Clark: I came, came back just as the troopers were advancing on the demonstrators, and I saw the demonstrators come up with ice picks and straight razors and, and one of them even had a piece of glass, I don't know why. And they started pushing them down and they just voluntarily lay down on the ground as the troopers came up, then that's when they started on the troopers with the weapons.

00:21:00:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU JUST TELL ME HOW YOU FELT ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY, BUT START WITH THE PETTUS BRIDGE, I MEAN MENTION THAT.

Clark: Well, it was completely blown out of proportion. The headlines and the newspapers showed that the said that there were 17 broken legs alone in that, that day. And we made a survey of every clinic, every hospital—

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY, CAN YOU BACK UP, AND JUST START MENTIONING THE, THE WORD THE PETTUS BRIDGE, OR THAT DAY, OR WHATEVER IT WAS, SO WE KNOW WHERE WE ARE.

Clark: Oh, on the day of the Pettus Bridge incident the headlines the next morning said that there were seventeen broken legs plus other injuries. And we made a survey of all the hospitals in the area, all the clinics and all the doctors and the only broken bone we could find in any, any hospital there was a com—incident that happened completely on the other side of town and was just a private altercation, that was the only broken bone.

00:22:01:00

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU SURPRISED THEN AT THE NATIONAL REACTION TO THE PETTUS BRIDGE?

Clark: Yes, I was because I didn't think that people would be duped.

INTERVIEWER: START AT THE BEGINNING ABOUT, YOU REMEMBER YOUR STATEMENT HAS TO STAND BY ITSELF SO WHY DON'T YOU BEGIN WITH THE NAT—YOU WERE SURPRISED AT THE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'RE ABOUT TO RUN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: JIM CLARK, TAKE 8, WE'RE AT THE HEAD OF ROLL 596, AND MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: OK, WAIT JUST ONE SECOND, HE'LL FOCUS IN ON YOU AND THEN YOU CAN START.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: DOING ABOUT SEVEN JOBS AT ONCE HERE. OK, WE'RE SET.

Clark: I flew in from Washington after being on a television show and came into Selma not knowing what had been going on after. I'd been away for several days and I, the troopers were lined up across the highway, at, at some distance from the bridge and the marchers were coming over the bridge when I got there and as they came on down the troopers, they, well, they were ordered to return and they didn't do it and the troopers moved out, and as they did, the marchers fell to the ground and as the troopers moved on to them, that was when they attacked the troopers with ice picks and straight razors and knives and even broken glass, and that was when they used tear gas on them and they started retreating across the bridge at that time. The reports came out in the newspaper the next morning that there were 17 broken legs alone plus the other injuries-and there was no record at any hospital, clinic or doctor's office where there was any broken bones at all except just a private altercation.

00:23:51:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, THAT'S GREAT, WE'LL KEEP GOING. AL LINGO WAS ACCUSED OF BEING A, A TROUBLE MAKER AND A, A RABBLE-ROUSER AND THE MAYOR, WHEN THE MAYOR BROUGHT HIM IN, DID HE WORK FOR YOU OR DID HE WORK FOR THE MAYOR?

Clark: Al Lingo was Director of State Troopers under Governor Wallace. He was a great man in my estimation. He was, a lot of things he did was distorted and was blown out of proportion, but Al Lingo in my estimation, was a great law enforcement officer and under the situation that, that was there, I think he did a great, great job.

INTERVIEWER: SO YOU THINK THAT, THAT CRITICISM IS TOTALLY UNFOUNDED ABOUT HIM.

Clark: The criticism that he received was, as a result of published stories in the paper, not from his actual deeds.

00:24:48:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW YOU, WERE YOU AT THAT TIME GETTING ORDERS FROM THE GOVERNOR OR WERE YOU TALKING TO WALLACE THROUGHOUT THIS WHOLE INCIDENT ON THE BRIDGE IN THE NEXT, THE, THE FOLLOWING DAYS? WERE YOU TALKING TO GOVERNOR WALLACE?

Clark: Well, I did not receive any direct orders from the Governor, except we had a plan of action that was set up for everybody and it was a result of talking to District Attorney and judges and my personal lawyer, friends, and also Governor Wallace's advisors. We, we tried to have a meeting of the mind but we never knew what Martin Luther King was going to do so sometimes we had to throw it all out the window.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DO YOU THINK, WHAT, WHAT DO YOU THINK GEORGE WALLACE'S PLAN WAS?

Clark: To maintain the peace.

00:25:44:00

INTERVIEWER: BUT YET IT KEPT GETTING BROKEN?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU'D BETTER HAVE HIM SAY THAT AGAIN WITH GEORGE WALLACE'S NAME.

INTERVIEWER: OK, I'M SORRY, YEAH, WHY DON'T YOU JUST START WITH GOVERNOR WALLACE'S PLAN?

Clark: Governor Wallace's plan was just like all of the law enforcement officers. He's the top law enforcement officer in the state of Alabama, as Governor, and his job, just the same as it was as mine, was, as Sheriff, was to keep the peace, which we all endeavored to do but with the agitation that we received and the laws constantly being broken we were just stretched beyond imagination in trying to keep the peace without just making mass arrests and which we were forced to do sometimes.

00:26:30:00

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU WANT TO SAY ANYTHING ELSE? OK, NOW AT THAT TIME IN, IN JANUARY OF '65 WERE YOU AWARE THAT THE, THE SCLC WAS ALREADY TALKING ABOUT MOVING THEIR CAMPAIGN ELSEWHERE BECAUSE NOTHING WAS HAPPENING IN SELMA, CAUSE THEY COULDN'T GET THINGS GOING, AND THAT SPECIFICALLY, AT THAT TIME, YOU WEREN'T RETALIATING SO IN A WAY YOU, IF YOU HAD, IF THINGS HAD KEPT QUIET YOU COULD HAVE POSSIBLY BEATEN THEM AT THEIR OWN GAME. WERE YOU AWARE OF ALL THAT?

Clark: We were trying to keep a low profile as law enforcement, and to keep everything quiet as possible and to, to just, just well, keep, keep in the background so to speak, and they, we had things pretty well handled at the county courthouse when they started holding the federal court across the street and the they started demonstrating against the federal judge, Judge Thomas and sent out an order that I had to come over to arrest the demonstrators around the federal courthouse, they were not on the federal grounds but on the sidewalk around. And he

even charged me with, not doing my duty because I had not arrested them and that was when the agitation started again.

00:28:02:00

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU EVER FEEL AS IF YOU, IF YOU HAD YOU ONLY NOT LOST YOUR TEMPER AT CRUCIAL MOMENTS, COULD HAVE HELD THINGS TOGETHER?

Clark: I don't think I ever lost my te-, temper, except the time with oh, the C.T. Vivian incident.

INTERVIEWER: OK, NOW THERE'S, LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SURE.

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: LET'S SEE, WE ARE WITH SHERIFF JIM CLARK, WE'VE JUST CHANGED TO SOUND ROLL 1543, THIS IS SOUND TAKE 9, AND MARKER.

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S WAIT ONE SECOND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I NEED TO SETTLE IN HERE.

INTERVIEWER: YOU CAN BEGIN WITH TALKING ABOUT, SPECIFICALLY MENTIONING

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ALL RIGHT.

INTERVIEWER: SELMA, AND CATTLE PRODS, SO WE KNOW WHERE WE ARE AND WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK, WE'RE THERE.

INTERVIEWER: OK, YOU CAN START.

Clark: We were, in Selma we were criticized because we used night sticks a whole lot so we decided that probably we'd receive much more effective action by using a so called cattle prod, and the ones we had had only two small flashlight batteries in them and they produced a mild electric shock and left no bruises, no marks, no burns, and I was well familiar with them because I had been in the cattle business and it was much safer. There's not anything as strong as what they call a stun gun today, there's no comparison between the two of them.

And we found that the fear of that cattle prod was the biggest thing, we didn't have to touch very many before we the people were ready to move. We tried not to use any more force than was absolutely necessary and this was a way of, of getting the getting, getting the people to move along without actually injuring them. The news media blew it completely out of proportion when they compared it with the big long cattle prods that we used in to actually handle cattle in pens and ch-, cattle chutes and that sort of thing, but there's really no comparison there.

00:30:20:00

INTERVIEWER: BUT YOU'RE STILL USING SOMETHING THAT'S USED AGAINST ANIMALS AGAINST PEOPLE.

Clark: No, these were designed for use against people, they had only two batteries, where the ones they used against cattle have 6, 7, 8 large flashlight batteries.

INTERVIEWER: OK, DID YOU EVER REGRET, HAVE ANY REGRETS ABOUT HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT WAS HANDLED DURING THAT WHOLE PERIOD, YOU PERSONALLY AS, AS SHERIFF? CAUSE THERE'S SO MUCH SO MANY TIMES WHEN THINGS BROKE OUT OF CONTROL.

Clark: My only regrets were that they did got out of control sometime, but basically I was under orders from the laws of the state of Alabama and the constitution of Alabama, to enforce the law, and to use what force was necessary to do it. And if they didn't obey lawful orders then I had to take further action.

00:31:20:00

INTERVIEWER: AND TELL ME AGAIN HOW YOU FELT WHEN MARTIN LUTHER KING FIRST CAME INTO SELMA SPECIFICALLY? YOU KNEW, YOU KNOW, YOU KNEW A WHOLE CAMPAIGN WAS COMING WITH HIM.

Clark: I knew we had a paper that went out to all the organizers, we obtained a copy of it to, that described that he was going to come to Selma and—

INTERVIEWER: EXCUSE ME.

Clark: —that they were going to start agitation, that Martin Luther King was coming to Selma and was going to start agitating and it was all written down and in this paper which was, we got a copy of it in October before the January, before Martin Luther King came to town and it was plainly stated in there that after the violence started and the bombing started that, and Martin Luther King would be arrested and, and put in a Dallas County jail where he would write a letter from the Dallas County Jail. And we decided at that time that he would have to commit a pretty serious crime in order to get in jail, but he was obliged by Wilson Baker and was put into the city jail.

00:32:26:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT RIGHT THERE.

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CAMERA ROLL 597 SOUND 10, MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: LET ME GET SETTLED HERE. ALIGHT FOLKS, WE'RE READY TO GO.

INTERVIEWER: OK, JUST GIVE US A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SELMA BACK THEN, LATE FIFTIES, EARLY SIXTIES.

Clark: Selma was a town of about thirty thousand people at the time, it was at the fall line of the Alabama River, that's where the boats used to come up the Alabama River and as far up as they could come for twelve months out of the year, sometimes they could go on up to Montgomery, but most of the time they stopped at Selma. That was where the, it was built there to haul along docks were built there to haul cotton down the river, the city was founded by United States Vice President King, about 1830s, and was just more or less a lazy town, and everybody seemed to be happy outwardly, and they, nobody ever got in a hurry, there was a lot of big trees there, a lot of old homes, a lot of old buildings and it was 50 miles from Montgomery which was the cradle of Confederacy. The last battle of the between the North and South in that area was fought in Selma and I think that's probably the reason that it was selected because it was 50 miles from the cradle of Confederacy. Also, it was, the date almost coincided exactly 100 years from the day of the Battle of Selma.

00:34:15:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, THAT'S GREAT, WE'LL MOVE RIGHT ON NOW. WHAT ABOUT WHERE YOU WERE AND WHAT, WHAT WAS GOING THROUGH YOUR HEAD WHEN YOU HEARD LBJ ON TV TALK ABOUT, WE SHALL OVERCOME?

Clark: Lyndon Johnson had never voted for a Civil Rights Bill the whole time he was in the Congress or in the Senate. In fact, he fought against them. His wife's people were from the Selma area. He had a lot of relatives there, His wife had a lot of relatives. The, he grabbed the ball and ran with it, even after the federal judge ruled that the, the Board of Registrars had to register anybody that came along to register to vote and they, Lyndon Johnson went ahead with the demonstrations, pushing them and singing—We Shall Overcome. He had to get in on the act, he had been left out up until then and then he wanted to get his finger in the pie, so to speak, too.

00:35:27:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT RIGHT THERE.

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SOUND 11, MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: HANG ON JIM LET ME--

INTERVIEWER: WAIT ONE SECOND. HE'S--

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: REMEMBER, YOU CAN DIRECT YOUR ANSWERS OVER TOWARD, TOWARD THE CREW. [truck in background] LET'S LET THIS TRUCK--

INTERVIEWER: THE SOUND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: --GO BY, OK.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: IT'S ALL YOURS.

Clark: I'm against all public protest, demonstrations in the street, anything that violates the law because it, it makes, it makes targets of law enforcement and puts them at a ba-great disadvantage because they, they just have no way of, of handling it without violence, even though they're called peaceful demonstrations, it's still a very tense time and all it takes is just one little spark to make the whole thing blow up and I just don't believe that law enforcement deserves that sort of action. We have law making bodies that are founded by the Constitution of the United States and the constitution of, of different states, and I don't see where in a democracy such as ours, that we have to have to have demonstrations. We just need to have the right people in, making laws.

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT, THAT'S FINE.

[cut]

[end interview]

00:36:49:00

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