



**Interview with Dolores Torres**

Date: October 31, 1988

Interviewer: Louis Massiah

Camera Rolls: 3055-3058

Sound Rolls: 326-327

Team: C

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.

**Preferred Citation**

Interview with Dolores Torres, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on October 31, 1988 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. 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 II*.

[camera roll #3055]

[sound roll #326]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:00:16:00

Interviewer:

OK. Mrs. Torres, I want you to talk a little bit about your, your children and the school system. How did you know the schools weren't working back in 1967?

00:00:28:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, I had three children in the district at the time. This was in district 23, school district 23. And they all were attending PS 144. I also had a niece at the time that I was raising. She was also attending. Well, what happened was they told us the kids would have to go on double shifts. I had two going in the morning and two going in the afternoon. The school was overcrowded to an extreme whereas there wasn't much learning. There wasn't much

education going on. All right, so we started going to PTA meetings and meeting with other parents to decide what to do about this. At the time, we lived on Park Place between Howard and Ralph. PS 144 was a block and a half away on Howard. PS 191 was underutilized. That was a block and a half past Ralph Avenue, which was out of our school district. We wrote numerous letters. We spoke to numerous parents. We spoke to teachers, to principals, to find out what we could do to remedy this situation. Well, finally we decided to organize, and we parents went down to 110 Livingston Street. They gave us three minutes to speak, which we felt wasn't adequate. We couldn't seem to get our point across. And we were totally ignored or told to take it to our local school board. At the time, we had an organ-organization that was called CUSA. It was Christians United for Social Action, and we dealt with problems in the community. With housing, with welfare, with the schools, with drug addiction...anything that pertained to the community, any problem that was there. And more and more people were coming in and complaining not only about this, what was going on at 144 but what was going on at other schools in the district. And we decided to go into a local school board and present our case to them. So, we went into the local school board that represented...supposed to represent our district. We found not one person on that board lived in our district. Most of the people on that board were White. We were a district of mostly Hispanic and Black families. The ones that did have children in public schools went to public schools in good neighborhoods. We were a poor neighborhood. We found a lot of the teachers were in agreement that we needed to do something to get the kids switched over to 191 because the teachers were having it hard also. As a result of this part time school day, a lot of the children had to go to summer school to try to make up, which they did, thankfully. We continued to go down to 110 Livingston Street, to the Board of Education, present our case, and they kept telling us to go to the local school board. And these people, we felt, did not represent. They had no children in the schools in our district. We felt they weren't paying any attention to us because we were the ignorant people. These were the educated people. These were the people with all kinds of degrees. And we felt that they didn't care about us or our children.

00:03:51:00

Interviewer:

OK. What was the plan in '67 in Ocean Hill-Brown, Ocean Hill-Brownsville? Could you talk about, you know, the eight schools? What was the plan and organization for community involvement?

00:04:00:00

Dolores Torres:

The plan was to get people that lived in the neighborhood, that had children in the schools so they could properly represent the people and especially the children in that neighborhood. Also we felt that we were getting the short end of the stick as far as teachers were concerned. And as principals were concerned. We felt that there were people in our schools that didn't, didn't need to be in our schools. We had CRMD classes where we found, this is a, I forgot the exact interpretation of that, but it was a class where children are supposed to be slow or

hyper, hyperactive, unmanageable. And they were given the, the drug Ritalin. And these were things that we were finding out, and investigating, and going from school to school. We found out most of these children didn't need this.

00:04:49:00

Interviewer:

OK. Let's talk about, so the plan was for community...

00:04:52:00

Dolores Torres:

The plan for community control was get people on the local school board that represented these kids and would represent us. In other words, people that lived in the community, had children in the community, and lived in the community.

00:05:07:00

Interviewer:

Right. Describe the process of, of electing the governing board. How did it work? I mean, what, just talk, talk me through that.

00:05:14:00

Dolores Torres:

All right. We decided that there was too many schools to take over the complete district. We would have an experimental district of eight schools. Two junior high schools, six elementary schools. And what we did was we met PTA presidents, presidents of these schools. We found out the complaints of the parents in that school. We found out how some PTA's were run by the principals. We found some PTA's were run by teachers. And we found out a lot of the, a lot of the PTA's were run by parents that weren't satisfied and felt that their hands were, were tied. We asked them would they like a better voice, more voice in the education, education of the children in the neighborhood. They said yes. We had to find a way to do it. And we kept...we had meetings at each and every school. Numerous meetings in each and every school. And we had put fliers out explaining the situation, what was going on in the schools, what wasn't going on, whether there was learning going on, whether there wasn't, whether we [background noise] had principals that really were running a good ship. Some were, weren't. And we wanted to get input from the parents what was going on with their child, was their child learning, did they feel their child was on grade level, did they feel that their child could leave a junior high school and get into a good high school, say at Dewey. Be prepared.

00:06:39:00

Interviewer:

Let's just stop for one second. Stop camera.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

Some [unintelligible]—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Rolling and speed.

00:06:47:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:06:49:00

Interviewer:

OK, so go ahead with this election process.

00:06:51:00

Dolores Torres:

OK. Then as a result of that, we asked the parents from each school that belonged to the PTA's to elect a person that they want to sit on this local school board. And they did. And they wanted a parent to represent each school, and then they wanted a couple of community representatives. Although I had children in the school, I was a community representative because I worked during all of the different work with the problems we had in the community, as did Father Powis. To be frank, we did not want any politicians on the school board. We did not want any teachers on the school board. But we were told that these people have a right to run, being they do work and live in the neighborhood. They do have a right to

have a seat on the local school board. All right. There were teachers that we were willing to have on the school board, some we weren't. As a result, we got a politician. Now they're talking about there shouldn't be any politicians on the school boards, but they made us have somebody like this on the school board. We got...it was mostly teachers. I mean most parents. And we held elections because we had been meeting with people from other areas in New York.

00:08:13:00

Interviewer:

OK. Just describe how those elections work for the school board?

00:08:18:00

Dolores Torres:

We had an election like an ordinary primary election. We had trucks going around. We were speaking to people coming into the office. We rode around, speaking on a loud speaker in the streets. We had people campaigning for us. We made sure that nobody that voted...rather that anybody did vote for us, for us was, was [laughs], was, you know, was a registered voter. We had like a, a regular election like a politician has. We knew what the problems were because we lived there, and we felt that with the people's help that we could make a change.

00:09:03:00

Interviewer:

OK. Could you describe ho-how did you choose Rhody McCoy? You were at that meeting when he was interviewed.

Dolores Torres:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Describe that selection process.

00:09:11:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, we wanted a person that could relate to our kids. We knew that our kids had a lot of problems. We wanted also a person that could give some input as to where [car horn] and how we could get principals.

00:09:28:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's just start—

Camera Crew Member #2:

There's only gonna be one.

Interviewer:

OK. Once again, describe how, the process, how, how was Rhody McCoy selected? You were at that meeting.

00:09:34:00

Dolores Torres:

All right. We wanted a person that could relate to our children. That was the first thing. As I told you, there were plenty of problems with our kids in the neighborhood. We wanted a person that could give us some input, some information, some suggestions on good principals without having to go to the list. You have a principals list, you have to pick the first three all the times. We wanted to go off of the list. We wanted to find out where he came from, how he dealt with children that had problems. And we asked the same questions of everybody that we interviewed. And at the end of the interview, we met the parents from all eight schools, and we gave the information that we had on these people. And it was practically unanimous, they voted for Rhody McCoy.

00:10:20:00

Interviewer:

OK. Again, there...you said there were teachers—

Dolores Torres:

Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #1:

We have to change rolls.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] change rolls—

[cut]

[camera roll #3056]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Timecode thirteen, fifty-six.

00:10:29:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:10:31:00

Interviewer:

OK. Why did the community governing board, why did they like Rhody McCoy? What was it about him?

Dolores Torres:

Well, they felt that he could relate to the kids in the neighborhood—

Interviewer:

OK, once again. Make sure you say, "the community governing board," "Rhody McCoy."

Dolores Torres:

OK.

Interviewer:

Why did, why did the community governing board like Rhody McCoy?

00:10:46:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, the reason the community board liked Rhody McCoy was we felt that he could really relate to the problems that we had with our children in the schools. He came from a school that was a 600 school. This is what we at the term...at the time deemed the board of ed's throwaway schools. This is where the kids were put when they figured no other school would have them. And he understood the problems. Also his qualifications were good. We found also that he would be able to help us to pick principals that could relate to our children, too, and really see that there was a good education going on in the schools. And to do so, we would have to pick principals not from the first three on the list, we might have to go out of, off the list.

00:11:32:00

Interviewer:

OK. What do you mean by the list? Talk about that.

00:11:34:00

Dolores Torres:

The board of ed states that any principal [subway passes] that's selected for the school has to be one, two, or three.

00:11:40:00

Interviewer:

Just stop for one second.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

[cut]

00:11:43:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:11:46:00

Interviewer:

OK. You, you were saying...the list. How did the list work for choosing principals?

00:11:53:00

Dolores Torres:

All right, according to the Board of Education and the council of supervisory personnel, to pick a principal for any school in the public schools, you have to pick from the first top three. Now, suppose you don't like anyone from the first top three. Suppose you don't feel that they qualify, or suppose you don't feel that they can relate to your school and make the necessary changes for your children. Suppose there's somebody, number fifty, on this list. And you want that person. You can't do it. You have to pick from the first three. Eventually none of the principals, principals that we picked were from the first three. So, we did, you know, we were able to do that. And McCoy helped us a great deal in that.

00:12:35:00

Interviewer:

Could you talk about the process of how you interviewed teachers? What...new teachers that came, what were the questions you would ask? What was that like?

00:12:42:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, first of all, we wanted to know where they came from.

00:12:47:00

Interviewer:

OK, may, I mean, in interviewing new teachers, OK, could you talk about the process of interviewing new teachers?

00:12:53:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, we wanted to, when we were interviewing these teachers that wanted to come in to teach in our district, we wanted to know where they came from. We asked them also for

qualifications. We asked them how did they feel about teaching in a school where the majority of the children were not White, what did they feel about coming to work in a neighborhood that was predominantly Black and Hispanic, did they feel that our children could learn as well as anybody else's children in say a White neighborhood, an affluent neighborhood. We wanted to know did they have...did they feel especially that if a child wasn't able to learn a subject one way could this teacher, would she be willing to teach an alternative. If a child could not say grasp math in the way it's supposed to be taught, could she find another way to teach this child? We also wanted to know about writing. We wanted to know did this particular teacher, would she give the children a lot of work that consisted of writing. Because our children were not writing well. They were not reading well. And in order to do math, they would have to know how to read and write. So, we would have to take and have reading in a math class. And a lot of the teachers were agreeable. They felt if you couldn't teach a child one way you would try something else—

Interviewer:

OK, so—

Dolores Torres:

—but that all children could be taught.

00:14:21:00

Interviewer:

—stop camera one second.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

Interviewer:

Could, could something—

[cut]

00:14:25:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:14:27:00

Interviewer:

OK. Could you describe the process of hiring those teachers that wanted to come into Ocean-Hill Brownsville? And, and make sure you say, "teachers who wanted to come into Ocean Hill-Brownsville."

00:14:35:00

Dolores Torres:

All right. The teachers that wanted to come and teach in our schools had to be interviewed. And the parents, the parent representatives and the community representatives of the local school board, which was us, had to interview them. We asked them many questions. How did they feel about coming into a Black neighborhood, Black and Hispanic neighborhood? How did they feel like, how they felt about teaching in classrooms that were predominantly Black and Hispanic? ?ad they ever taught in such a, an environment before? Were they afraid to come into the neighborhood. If they had a chance, would they care to live in the neighborhood? We really asked them some, maybe sounds like outrageous questions, but this is the way we got a concept of how these people would feel teaching in our schools. We also asked them if they felt a child was having a problem being taught one way, were they willing to teach a child another way? Did they feel that our children could be taught? It was just, it was questions along that line. We also wanted to know where they had taught before, why did they leave? What new ways of teaching could they think of, of to bring into the schools in our particular school district.

00:15:54:00

Interviewer:

OK. Could you talk about some of...after the teachers were hired, some of the new ways you related to teachers, the fact that teachers would call, the fact that...

Dolores Torres:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

And, and the new ways you related to the principals who came in...the ones, during the experiment.

00:16:07:00

Dolores Torres:

All right. As I said, the whole thing was the local school board is always in touch [car horn] with the parents in the neighborhood, with the teachers. Each parent that was on the school board represent their...that school. So, that parent was there every day. We as community representatives had to visit all eight schools to get the feedback that the PTA pres-presidents were giving to the local school representative and also attending all of the PTA meetings that night. And we found that a lot of the teachers that we had hired, a lot that were there before, were never asked, Would you come to a PTA meeting? Would you like to come to the house for coffee? [siren] Were never told, If my child is giving you a problem, would you mind calling me? But I don't get home from work until the evening. Could you call me in the evening? Or if possible, could you come out? We found principals that were willing to do this, teachers that were there the whole time that were willing to do this. And a lot of the young new teachers that came were willing to do this, and they did. We had meetings in our homes. We met teachers and principals in their homes. We went out to dinner with them. [siren] And it was, it was like a family. We didn't always agree. We didn't always agree on a lot of things. But we had to find mutual ground where we could say, OK, I might not agree on that way that you're trying to teach my child, but if it works, you know, after you've tried it, we would like to implement that. If it doesn't work, would you be willing to do away with it and try another avenue? And these, these teachers and the principals were.

00:17:57:00

Interviewer:

OK. Why did the, the governing board, or why did the community decide that those nineteen teachers had to be transferred in May of 1968?

00:18:04:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, [sighs] these were people that had been there. These were none of the new people—

00:18:06:00

Interviewer:

OK. And again, make sure you say, "the nineteen..."

00:18:09:00

Dolores Torres:

These nineteen teachers had been there. These weren't any of the new people that the governing board had hired. We went over records of people that had been taught by them, also previously we had looked in our classrooms where the teachers were teaching. And we

felt that they really, they were there. But what they were doing was baby-babysitting. We didn't feel that they really had our children's best interest in mind. Some of them we found had the union's interest. They cared more what the union thought or what the union told them to do than what we were asking them to do and what we were telling them to do. We were the local school board. We had hired professionals that agreed like we agreed that our children had to be taught. And a lot of these people did not feel that. They felt that the union told them, Well, you don't have to do this. You don't have to do that. *We were asking teachers to make an extra effort to get along with our kids, to teach our kids. If there was any problem to possibly visit in the homes. Well, [subway passes] the union didn't, this wasn't in their contract. They didn't have to do any of these things*, and we felt that these people were not doing as we asked. They weren't, they wouldn't even compromise. We had bells ringing at three o'clock for dismissal, and teachers were out of there before the kids were, so we felt that they weren't making any effort to try to change their way of thinking and teaching. And we felt that we couldn't put up with it anymore.

00:19:52:00

Interviewer:

What do you think the, the union shortly went on, went on strike soon after that.

Dolores Torres:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

What, what was the heart of the conflict as, as you saw it? The conflict between Ocean Hills-Brownsville community and the teachers? What was it, really at the heart of the conflict?

00:20:06:00

Dolores Torres:

The heart of the conflict was this, the unions were running the school. The UFT was running the schools. And we felt that the parents on this local school board should, should be the ones to run the schools. They were doing what the union told them to do. They were very strong union people. They felt they didn't have to go and do a little extra work or little extra in their community, and we felt that our children were being used. They were just, they were there, they were collecting their paycheck. They were running back to the union, telling everything that we were doing. And we felt that they were undermining everything that we were trying to do. And see, the thing of it was we did not fire these people. We could not fire the nineteen teachers. We had no power over firing. We had power over hiring. We could not fire anybody, so we really didn't have that much power. The only way you can have total power is to be able to hire and fire at will, OK? We did not have this power. All we did was dismiss these teachers. We reassigned them to 110 Livingston Street. We did not have the power to

fire them. The UTF said we fired them, and they called the teachers in all of New York out on strike because we dismissed or reassigned nineteen teachers to 110 Livingston. But we had no power to fire—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

OK.

Dolores Torres:

We couldn't fire. All these years, our kids were stuck with teachers that didn't have their interest at hand.

00:21:40:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's stop.

[cut]

[camera roll #3057]

[sound roll #327]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Timecode thirteen, fifty-seven.

00:21:43:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it please.

[slate]

00:21:45:00

Interviewer:

In the summer of '68, you knew that there was gonna be a strike that following fall after the teachers had been transferred. What were the plans that were made to, to keep the schools open? You also knew that 350 teachers had walked out after the firing. What were the plans made that summer?

Dolores Torres:

Well, we organized parents and people from the community that we knew to come in and run schools.

Interviewer:

OK. Could you just begin in the summer of, that summer of '68.

00:22:09:00

Dolores Torres:

All right. We still held meetings. We held meetings in different organizations. We had the Brownsville Community Council down the hill from Brownsville. They had a big hall. We had meetings there. We had meetings in churches. We had meetings in the homes. We had meetings in store fronts.

00:22:23:00

Interviewer:

OK, just, just give it the time, you know...

00:22:26:00

Dolores Torres:

OK, what we did was organize parents and ask them would they be willing to come in if it meant stoking the furnace...whatever it meant. Would they be willing to take over class, classes. Men and women. Parents that had kids in the schools. And all of the parents said yes. We had no school, no class that was left unattended. Most of the children came to school. We had children from other communities coming into our school because their schools were closed. And this is what we did. And it worked quite well.

00:23:00:00

Interviewer:

OK. Who were some of the other, these other teachers that were coming in? And you just, you know, you talked about before the, the hippie teachers came in—

Dolores Torres:

OK.

Interviewer:

—could you just describe them, how they looked and how people received them?

Dolores Torres:

Well, the parents, we had a few teachers coming in that we had interviewed. [background noise] Can you hold on a minute?

Interviewer:

Let's stop here. One second.

Dolores Torres:

They're getting ready to come in.

[cut]

00:23:19:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:23:22:00

Interviewer:

OK. That summer of '68, a numb—you also recruited some teachers. What I want you to say is, "in the summer of 1968, we did this and that." Could you talk about some of the other teachers that came in and how you recruited other teachers to keep the school open, as well as the parents?

00:23:37:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, in the summer of '68, we knew that we would have to have more teacher coverage in the school than we were gonna have with the teachers that stayed that were not, were not gonna be out on strike. And we interviewed teachers that summer to come into the schools, and a lot of them were young people. And I guess at that time, well, we called them hippies. They had long hair, the men and the women. We weren't used to that. I mean our kids went for the afros, but these were young, White people with long hair. They wore jeans. But they seemed like they weren't afraid. They weren't afraid to try something new in teaching our kids to get them to learn. Especially the reading, and the math, and the sciences. And we found that they spoke our language, and they weren't afraid to come into the neighborhood. And we had one teacher, he was, he was just great. He moved in with his, his wife into our neighborhood. And he found in 144 where the kids were having a problem with the special class supposedly because they couldn't sit still. They were on that, I call it a narcotic, that Ritalin. And they had them on that. And after visiting the homes and having the parents take the children, have the children examined at the hospitals, found a lot of these children really didn't need this medication. And he lived in the neighborhood [laughs] for a good while. And he also was instrumental in finding out about the particular principal that we had, we had selected for 144, that he had another teacher clocking in for him while he was teaching down at Brooklyn College.

00:25:15:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's, just a sec, we're gonna go on a little bit. Could you—during the strike, the fall of '68, can you just describe what you saw outside the schools with the police and the teachers pickets? And you're, you're approaching the school, one, one of those days. What, what would you see?

00:25:31:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, [sighs] it's...it was horrible. I mean I'm talking about we felt that we weren't paranoid about it. When I came out of my building, there was a chopper overhead, and the chopper followed me. And this was going on with other parents also. If I went to IS 55, I mean, I'm talking about precincts, we had cops from precincts all the way up in the Bronx standing around. They weren't doing anything. They were just standing there. Our parents were manning the doors, making sure that no one went in. If the teachers that we had sent back to Livingston tried to get in and the parents kept them out, they were charged with interfering with governmental procedure. The principals were in the schools. The teachers were in the schools, but the cops, there were about five thousand cops. I mean, you had wagons. You had the, the trucks. You had the mounted police all over for a little group of parents. A small group of parents. Another time we went over to junior high school 271, and what was going on there was, was crazy. I mean, parents were trying to stand in front of the school to keep people out, and they were getting hit. I went into the school to make a telephone call. Before I could make the call, I looked through the window, and I saw a young man from, from a,

from a newspaper. He was beat up and bleeding. I didn't come out. I went back and got a washcloth. I came out for him. Before I can get outside, they had hit one of our warriors. I call her a warrior. This was a woman that was a teacher, Thelma Hamilton. She was a teacher. She knew what the problems were in the schools. She knew what the problems were in the schools when she was in the schools teaching. She was a community activist. She was instrumental in starting a lot of programs in the neighborhood. This woman, at the time I believe might have been in her 60s, was struck in the stomach with a stick by a policeman and knocked down.

00:27:46:00

Interviewer:

OK. Why were you trying to...once again, why you were trying to block the entrance to the school? Why were, why were you trying to keep people from going in?

00:27:54:00

Dolores Torres:

We were trying to keep the nineteen that we had reassigned out because we, we reassigned them. We felt they had no business coming back in the school. We felt that they should be charged with trespassing. We reassigned them.

Interviewer:

OK, let's stop—

Dolores Torres:

We could not fire them.

00:28:09:00

Interviewer:

—one second.

[cut]

00:28:12:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Scene eighteen.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:28:16:00

Interviewer:

OK. Could you tell the story outside IS 271, what, what were you doing? What were the parents doing? What were the police doing? What was going on?

00:28:26:00

Dolores Torres:

The police were just there. They were there. I guess if we tried to keep anybody from going in...any of the nineteen or at that time the ten teachers from going into the school then I guess then we would have been arrested. But there was no one going in. But we were there to make sure that no one did. At that time, I had gone into the school to make a phone call to let the radio station know what was going on. When I came back before I got outside, I saw a reporter from a newspaper, paper, paper beaten and bloody on the ground. I went back inside to get a washcloth. Before I got back out of the door, when I looked through the window, I saw Ms. Hamilton get hit in the stomach by a pol-policeman with the stick. He stopped. He didn't hit her anymore. He stopped. And when I looked before I could pull open the door, across the street from the school, there was a line of Black Panthers just standing there with their arms folded. The police made no further move on any of the people that were there.

Interviewer: OK. Could you just tell that story once again? Just a little briefer.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible] time.

00:29:36:00

Interviewer:

All right. So, what happened? Tell me the scene that you saw outside IS 271.

00:29:44:00

Dolores Torres:

What I saw outside the school 271 was a reporter that had been beaten and was laying on the sidewalk bloody. When I turned to go back into the second door of the school to get a washcloth and come out to help him, before I could get out the second door I saw through the window of the door Mrs. Hamilton being struck in the stomach with a policeman's club. Before I could open that door, across the street, a line of the Black Panthers had showed up and were standing there with folded arms. As a result of that, no one else got hit that day by the policemen. They didn't do anything. They just stood there, but no one else was struck by a policeman.

00:30:25:00

Interviewer:

Generally during that fall, who were the police protecting...from, from your vantage point?

00:30:31:00

Dolores Torres:

I don't think they were protecting us. We didn't need any protection. I think that they were protecting and they were there on the orders of 110 Livingston and the United Federation of Teachers. We didn't need any protection. From who?

00:30:42:00

Interviewer:

OK. Once again, but make sure you say, "the police." Who, who were the police protecting?

Dolores Torres:

They had to be there to protect the teachers. They were not there to protect us. We did not need any protection.

Interviewer:

OK, again, make sure you, you say, "the police."

Dolores Torres:

OK.

Interviewer:

So people can understand what [siren] you're referring to. Who were the police protecting?

00:31:01:00

Dolores Torres:

The police there had to have been protecting the teachers. The police were not there to protect us. We didn't need any protection. [siren] So, they definitely were there to protect the teachers. No teachers got hit. No teachers got arrested. No teachers got charged with interfering with governmental procedure. It was just the parents.

00:31:20:00

Interviewer:

All right. Do you remember that march across the Brooklyn Bridge that day in October?

Dolores Torres:

Yes.

Interviewer:

It was, how did that begin, and you just tell me your memories of it and, and the chants that you heard on the bridge, and how you felt when you heard those chants?

00:31:32:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, there was a chant going around, "Black Power." And the chant, there was people from all over, but the chant that I, I felt most strongly about was "People power." Because we felt that we didn't have any power. We were the people. We had no power. And as we went across that bridge, it just seemed to, to me it just felt like it was building up. We were accomplishing something because we were standing. We were united.

00:31:56:00

Interviewer:

OK. Once again, going across, it, I think it was "Power to the People," people were saying—

Dolores Torres:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

—And, and, and “Black Power.” So, you heard these, you’re walking across the Brooklyn Bridge, and you heard this chant of “Black Power” and “Power to the People.” Just describe what you heard at, at that, that march. [sirens]

00:32:11:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, as we were crossing the bridge, that were chants going on of “Power to the People” and “Black Power.” And it just was, to me, just [sirens], to me it was great because we were people, but we had no power. And it just made us feel stronger. A lot of us had maybe felt like giving up.

00:32:33:00

Interviewer:

OK, let's just stop a second.

Dolores Torres:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

[cut]

00:32:37:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:32:40:00

Interviewer:

OK. Could you talk about the march across the Brooklyn Bridge? It, it began at city hall and went to 110 Livingston and then into Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Just talk us through from the beginning across the bridge and then into Ocean Hill-Brownsville.

00:32:53:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, as we were going across the bridge, *there was a lot of people yelling “Black Power, Black Power, Power to the People.”* I don’t necessary care for the, the slogan that they had, “Black Power.” I, I...the *“Power to the People” I liked because I think that what we were going through any poor neighborhood regardless of the ethnic makeup was going through the same thing.* Poor neighborhoods get teachers that maybe aren’t too qualified. They get principals that maybe have been demoted and demoted for fifty million times. *So, I liked “Power to the People.” People really needed to have some, some power, and we really needed as, as a school board to have power* because without it, who was gonna run the schools. We definitely...we’d be figureheads, you know, for the unions or for the board of education, so “Power to the People” is what I really liked.

00:33:48:00

Interviewer:

Did you ever see Ocean Hill-Brownsville as being a, a racial conflict, as being, having primarily racial components to it.

Dolores Torres:

No. No. A lot of times the media tried to make it so.

Interviewer:

OK. Just, “I, I never saw Ocean Hill-Brownsville as a racial thing.”

Dolores Torres:

No.

Interviewer:

Could, could you just say...?

00:34:02:00

Dolores Torres:

I never saw Ocean Hill-Brownsville as a, any kind of racial incidents or racial conflict in the neighborhood. There was no racial issue in our neighborhood. We were one people. We were parents fighting for education for our children.

00:34:15:00

Interviewer:

What about the issue of anti-Semitism? Do you think that played a role in how parents were feeling about some of the teachers in the area?

00:34:21:00

Dolores Torres:

No. No. I don't think there was any kind of racial hard feelings there. I mean every teacher that we, we had wasn't Jewish. All of the nineteen that we reassigned, they weren't all Jewish. I don't think there was any kind of anti-Semitism.

00:34:41:00

Interviewer:

OK. OK, let's go back inside the...that school year. And we're, we're gonna go backwards in time. What, what was your best memory? What were, what were you most hopeful about with this experiment? What made you...what, what promise did you see when, when you would go into those, the schools? Especially seeing your kids in the school. What, what, what, what were, what was the change?

00:35:04:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, I think the first change that we started to see [sighs] was that the schools had got much quieter. Teachers were in the classrooms. Kids weren't roaming the halls. And there seemed to be a, a real process of education going on, which before, I mean, you went, the classes were rowdy. [subway passes] They were disruptive. The teachers either ignored it, or the teachers weren't in the classrooms. The classrooms weren't covered. It kind of settled down quite a bit.

00:35:35:00

Interviewer:

Let's just stop the camera one second.

[cut]

00:35:37:00

[slate]

00:35:38:00

Interviewer:

OK. Once again, what were you most hopeful about? What was it, you know, in your own children, what did you see? What changes did you see in them that year of, of the experiment?

00:35:50:00

Dolores Torres:

I saw more learning. And I saw more discipline. Their grades had come up. It wasn't only due to what the teachers were teaching. It was due to the teachers teaching the way that they did. It was due to the teachers saying, If you're gonna disrupt this class, I might be to your house tonight. Children don't like that. When these children saw these teachers willing to come into this community, they knew they weren't gonna get away with anything. And as I said, there were new programs implemented. And these teachers carried them out. Before, we couldn't go into a classroom and say, Well, here's a program. Maybe the kids can learn this way, teach them this. Oh, no. Teachers wouldn't do anything like that. But this way, we could say, OK, this is your assignment. This is what you're gonna try teaching. This is the way you're gonna try teaching now. This may be the way that we can reach these children. And these wishes were carried out, and a lot of these programs were working.

00:36:48:00

Interviewer:

OK. And finally, you were talking about the Black Panthers. What—how, how did you view the Black Panthers in this, in this conflict? What role did they take in, in Ocean Hill-Brownsville?

Dolores Torres:

The only thing, they didn't interfere with anything—

Interviewer:

Are, the, the Black Panthers.

00:37:04:00

Dolores Torres:

The Black Panthers didn't interfere with anything. The Black Panthers, you have to remember at that time, you didn't have like it is now, city wide breakfast programs in the schools. All right? Our schools, we had breakfast programs where people from the community would serve the children breakfast in the schools. The Black Panthers had programs where they fed the children breakfasts, OK? They had a program where we had many vacant blocks, buildings, buildings that were torn down, many vacant blocks, and there were dogs running around, children were getting bitten. And you would the, the people to come and do something about it. And they wouldn't come. People were afraid to come into the neighborhood. The dog catcher was afraid to come to the neighborhood. And as a result, these kids were being bitten. The Panthers were doing something about these dogs, as I said. And they were feeding these kids dinner sometimes also. And they just would, they mirrored parents.

00:38:02:00

Interviewer:

OK. Stop, stop camera.

[cut]

00:38:06:00

[slate]

00:38:06:00

Interviewer:

What...when was it clear to you that the [siren] experiment had failed? That it, it wasn't gonna, it wasn't gonna last? When was it clear to you that...?

00:38:17:00

Dolores Torres:

It was clear to us, [clears throat] although we were still hopeful, that it wasn't gonna work when the next elections were held. The next elections were 100 percent political. Whereas you may say well, we had elections, and they were political. We had no political, we had no assemblyman. We had no councilman.

00:38:43:00

Interviewer:

OK, what election are you talking about?

Dolores Torres:

The second election after the ex—

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] board—

Dolores Torres:

The second election of the local school board.

Interviewer:

Why don't you start again?

00:38:50:00

Dolores Torres:

OK. We felt that...we didn't feel that the experimental district was a complete failure. And we hoped that it wasn't a complete failure, but we felt that we were losing ground. That's what it was. When everything became political. This happened when the elections were held for the local school board, the second election held for local school board. You have to understand, the people to these school boards at first were appointed. We were the first elected school body.

00:39:24:00

Interviewer:

OK. One more important question, how did you feel when this experiment was dismantled and things began to fall apart? This new school board came in. How did you feel? Because you had made a great personal investment in this.

00:39:36:00

Dolores Torres:

Well, I felt bad in a way. I knew a lot of the teachers that were there were gonna continue to doing what they were doing, which was teaching our children and really caring about them. I felt that we had achieved...the greatest thing I felt that we, we had really achieved was that we had gotten more parent involvement. We had helped strengthen PTAs, and they in turn helped write up new programs for the kids in the schools. The kids did get new programs,

and there was learning going on. You have to remember at the beginning, there was very, very few people that were participating because nobody was listened to. [subway passes] The parents weren't listened to. But that second election of district 23, that local school board, they had all the machinery. The politicians put all their machinery behind them. We didn't have the money.

00:40:28:00

Interviewer:

OK, stop, stop camera.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:40:31:00

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