



Interview with **Athalie Range**

Date: March 21, 1989

Interviewer:

Camera Rolls: 1069-1070

Sound Rolls: 129-130

Team: A

Interview gathered as part of ***Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s***. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Preferred Citation

Interview with Athalie Range, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on March 21, 1989 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 #1069]

[sound roll #129]

[slate]

00:00:13:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

00:00:19:00

Interviewer:

All right. Tell me about the time when you heard about the outcome of the, the trial of the officers from Mr. McDuffie's death and what you did then.

00:00:28:00

Athalie Range:

May 17th, 1980 was certainly a dark day in the city of Miami. That was the day that the courts ruled that five officers, who admittedly took a part in the killing of Arthur McDuffie, were set free by the courts. I happen to have been on a funeral service at the time a phone call came to let me know what had happened, and I immediately left someone else in charge and of course came home to be near, because I felt that we'd have trouble in the city. It was just

maybe an hour or so later that I received a call from the person who I believe was then the president of the NAACP. His name was William Perry. He called and said that they were having a peaceful march to go to the Dade County Jail or the Justice building, as we called it, to have a rally there in memory of MacArth—of Arthur McDuffie. He insisted that I come. I am not a person, I must admit, who—I'm very anxious to get into very large crowds. Nevertheless, I felt at his insistence that it was necessary, and I did go. As I arrived at...almost at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital location, a group of, I would consider, about 3,000 people were coming around the corner up 12th Avenue and 14th Street, and you could hear the shuffling of feet as they were coming. And they were singing, *We Shall Overcome*. As they spotted me, Mr. Perry, and others who were on the frontline, I got out of my car, parked it in the Caesars garage, and as they spotted me, some of them came over got me and I joined them in the frontlines. We then had about 150 or 200 feet to walk to the Justice building. As we got to the Justice building, everyone holding hands and still singing, without any warning at all, a rock crashed through the large glass doors of the Justice building. And if anyone has ever said to you that the crashing sound of glass can turn a normal group of people into madmen, that is what happened there. When the gra—glass broke, people immediately stopped singing, changed their tone, and we had a full-scale riot on our hands in a matter of minutes. I was almost crushed in the crowd because of my size—and I'm very mindful of that, that's one of the reasons I don't get into very large crowds—but there were two young men there who saw my plight, and I don't believe my feet touched the ground until they got me across the street to the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. And they advised me to go inside, and I did just that. The riot began. Rocks began flying. The officers, of course, were on the scene almost immediately, and it was very, very difficult for anyone to get out of the area. As the evening drew on, with, within moments, I would say, within moments, cars were set on fire. Cars were overturned. People were running back and forth, screaming. I—as I stood in the in the balcony of Cedars of Lebanon Hospital on about the 12th floor, I could look down at the Florida State Health Building, which is just across the street, and there I saw young men drive up in a black car and just stepped out of the car and began throwing firebombs. That was the first experience I'd had at seeing firebombs thrown. They threw them through the window which had been previously broken by rock, and that building was set on fire, and the police then were in the distance. You could see them from where I was standing, from my vantage point. You could see them with the canine group, the dogs, across the street, just across 12th Avenue, and I suppose they were hoping to get in to quiet the people down, but they were not successful. They would come so far and they'd turn back and go, and this went on—this terrible rioting and burning of cars went on—way late into the evening. It must have been ten or eleven o'clock by the time I'm speaking of now. I was anxious to get home. I don't believe my children knew where I was. I was anxious to get home and I took a chance to come downstairs to attempt to get out and go in another direction. As I got down to the parking level and started into the parking garage, I heard a voice. I didn't see anyone but I heard a voice coming from a White van that was parked there, which said to me, Ms. Range, get down! Get down! They're shooting. The cops are shooting. And of course, I was really frightened, because I heard them very clearly and I could almost hear footsteps coming behind me. I did not get down, because I felt if I crouched that the, the officers would think that I might have had a weapon in my hand. I stood against the car that I was near and just held my hands up so that they could see that I didn't have anything. As I did that, an officer came around with his weapon drawn. He ran around. And he knew me—I had, not too many

years before that, been a commissioner in the City of Miami, and I was known to many of the law enforcement officers. And he personally got me back to the building. He said, Ms. Range, get back in the building and don't try to come out. So I went back and and I spent the time there until after midnight, when I was finally able to get out.

00:07:10:00

Interviewer:

All right. Let's stop down there.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Stopping down.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

[cut]

[slate]

00:07:20:00

Interviewer:

Okay. Explain me what happened when Andy Young and the others came to town.

00:07:24:00

Athalie Range:

I believe I would prefer to speak just for—just regarding Andy Young. I think that he was really not received with open arms. It seemed to have been the general feeling of the community that this was our problem, we wanted to solve it. We were not happy with outsiders coming, in giving directions, and as a result of that, Mr. Young left without too much of a, of an input in that particular circumstance.

00:07:54:00

Interviewer:

A couple of weeks later, June 9th, President Carter came in town to meet with a number of community leaders—I know, I, I believe Frank Borman from Eastern Airlines, and Claude Pepper perhaps, and I know that you were in that group along with them.

Athalie Range:

Yes.

00:08:07:00

Interviewer:

Tell—what was the purpose there? What was—did he hope to accomplish?

00:08:10:00

Athalie Range:

I think President Carter came in like other leaders came in to try to calm the people, and of course, between May 17th and June 9th, we'd had time to more or less get back to almost-normal—aside from the fact that, of course, the city was in a terrible circumstance, having been burned much more than it had in any other circumstance of that kind. President Carter came in with hopes and promises that we could do something with, with money, with promises of jobs, with promises of better treatment. Police brutality was a very—was the foremost subject on everybody's mind at that time, because it all grew out of the brutal killing of Arthur McDuffie. He came to make some promises to us that unfortunately were not kept. It strikes me that he might have mentioned something about \$5 million or more coming into the community to overcome the ruin that had been in our neighborhoods. Perhaps some of it did get out here, but I think that the greater portion of it did not filter down to the people who were hurt most by the riots, but I think this was his intent.

00:09:32:00

Interviewer:

What happened, though, when you left that meeting that night? You were in the limousine with [inaudible]—

00:09:36:00

Athalie Range:

Yes. Yes, we were in the limousine. We left the meeting place, which was the James E. Scott Community Center—I believe it was—on Northwest 54th street, and of course, a very large crowd of people were there. Most of them were there to greet the President—very gleefully, I can recall—or having come from Miami Beach, and the, the route that we took coming down 22nd Avenue, there were people waving, and of course the President was returning the waves of the people. We went and had this very fine meeting where questions were asked and answers were given. As we came out and did get in the limousine, of course, the President

stood outside the limo for a moment and said some words to the people, and as we got into the limousine, and the secret servicemen were driving, were running alongside the limousine and moving out into the mainstream, I suddenly heard a rock or a bottle, something struck the car, and I tell you I was really frightened and was not too happy to be with the President at the moment. I would much prefer to have been, having been at home [laughs]. Nevertheless, the President accepted it very, very coolly. It was not, he was not moved by it at all. At least, when I say he was not moved, I mean that he did not appear to be afraid in any way. And of course, after a few more paces, we got out of that crowd and was back on our way to the beach.

[camera roll out]

[wild audio]

Interviewer:

All right. Let's stop down and change roll.

[cut]

[camera roll #1070]

[slate]

00:11:20:00

Interviewer:

OK, talk to me about the unemployment issue and what, what attempts were just made to solve it in 1980.

00:11:24:00

Athalie Range:

Yes. Among the many promises that were made, there were certainly many promises made about the efforts in employment, that we would have better employment, there would be many jobs offered—and indeed they were. Jobs were offered. Nevertheless, the jobs that were offered were, for the greater part, jobs that people were not completely fitted to do. I can give you an example, if a man is a welder, it isn't likely that he's walking the street looking for a job, because he's trained to do a highly technical job and he's able to find work. If a man's an electrician, the same thing holds true. Consequently, many of the jo, jobs that were offered, what was found out later to be jobs that needed particular skills, and still the man on the street did not profit from this because the man on the street knew little or nothing of this kind of employment, so it didn't really help a whole lot. And that has happened in 1980 and succeeding years—the jobs are never what the people actually can do.

00:12:36:00

Interviewer:

Why do you remain in Liberty City? You've been here for quite a while, and you stay here. Many people have left.

00:12:41:00

Athalie Range:

Yes, many people have left, but Liberty City is—I consider it home. Of course, I came from Overtown to begin with. I've been here in Liberty City. I serve the people in Liberty City. That is one of the main objectives of my business is to be here to serve the people in Liberty City and in neighboring areas. I feel it's a fine thing for younger people to move out, to stretch out, to go wherever they are pleased—but I am pleased to be here, to build a monument to this community, and I feel that it's necessary to remain here and help to build Liberty City up, rather than to go away and look at it in scorn. There are too many people right now who grew up right here in Liberty City, yet they get on the expressways, ride from their downtown jobs over Liberty City, go to the outlying areas, get their cocktails, lock their door, and forget that there's a world outside—of people like me, who live in Liberty City.

00:13:49:00

Interviewer:

Another thing that we're talking about is leadership. I wonder if you can describe what the situation is in Miami with respect to leadership for the Black community.

00:13:56:00

Athalie Range:

You know, that question always bothers me just a little, as far as leadership is concerned. Whenever we come into a community like Liberty City, the seekers always ask, Who are your leaders? Take me to your leader, and it always gives me the feeling of the fables we read in the history books—when the hunters went over to Africa to look for wild animals and they'd get caught by a tribe, and they're gonna be burned in oil, they'd say, Take me to your leader [laughs]. We don't have such a leadership here in Liberty City. I think—or here in Dade county, for that matter. I think everyone is trying to make his contribution toward whatever he can do to make things better for the total community, and almost anyone can take a leadership role in certain areas. Naturally, we have those trained persons who ought be in the forefront in order to guide those who do need the leadership, and I think we have a number of good leaders. I think the older ones of us now, who blazed a trail, we might say,

are willing now to step back just a little. Let those, who have gained the opportunity through our efforts, take over and carry us on to greater heights.

00:15:30:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop down one more time.

[cut]

[slate]

00:15:33:00

Athalie Range:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

Mention the price.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

Interviewer:

All right, go ahead. Talk to me about the price of integration.

Athalie Range:

Mm-hmm. Well, the price we've had to pay for integration is really one of—I'm not together on it.

Interviewer:

Do you want to stop down?

Athalie Range:

Mm-hmm.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Stop down.

[cut]

00:15:51:00

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

Interviewer:

All right. If, in fact, integration has been achieved, then how does that ultimately affect the goal of what Black society should think, or even American society should think?

00:16:05:00

Athalie Range:

Well, I think we cannot say that integration has been totally achieved. There are still areas right here in the City of Miami that we're fighting to get into. There're still schools that are probably ninety-nine percent White or ninety-nine percent Black. Consequently, I think that even though some of us might feel that the war on integration's been lost, I don't feel this way, but I do feel that we're still fighting the battle and it's still uphill. I think that much blood is still being shed in order to achieve integration. Let's look at some of the positions that we have. We have huge companies that bring well-trained Blacks in, carry them straight over the squalor of Liberty City and Overtown and everything else, purchase beautiful homes and estates for them in the outlying sections of the community—and those Blacks do not know that we exist, or their, their, their circumstances are such that they simply don't have the time to come and mix with those of us who are still out here in the forefront of the struggle. We have many, many positions that could be held by Blacks, Blacks who are trained for the positions, yet you—we still have the thought that you come looking for something, and you've got to bring your qualifications with you. We've gone and gotten the qualifications, yet we still have to go around in a circle in order to get some of the things that we feel are rightfully ours. In other areas, we have the red lining of people who would come into this community to live, to have their businesses. We have red linings on insurances, which is very important factor in the life of any community. Consequently, I think we still have a long, long uphill battle to go as far as integration is concerned—true integration.

Interviewer:

All right, let's stop down now.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:18:18:00

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