

Interview with **Rosemary Porter**

Date: October 22, 1988

Interviewer:

Camera Rolls: 2031-2033

Sound Rolls: 215-216

Team: A

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

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Interview with Rosemary Porter, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on October 22, 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 #2031]

[sound roll #215]

[slate]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:00:17:00

Interviewer:

OK. I do need to ask you to try to incorporate some of my question in your answer, but at least to talk in full sentences. Nobody hears my voice—

Rosemary Porter:

OK.

00:00:25:00

Interviewer:

—all they hear is your answer. Can you tell me about your old neighborhood and what it was like when you moved in and how it changed?

00:00:35:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, my old neighborhood was basically a neighborhood of middle-class people. Frame homes, probably the average age was forty year old houses. It was a nice neighborhood, everybody knew each other and the schools were close, and people felt a commitment to their neighborhoods and their schools and—

00:01:10:00

Interviewer:

Why did you move?

00:01:16:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, why did, why, why did we move? Well, the neighborhood had undergone a great deal of racial change, but my mother and I, you know, remained there. We lived there for four years after it had been re-segregated. But my, my true reason for leaving there was I was getting married and we wanted a bigger house because, you know, we planned on havin' a family and starting out on our own.

00:01:59:00

Interviewer:

K, you wanna cut?

[cut]

00:02:02:00

Cameraman:

Marker.

Cameraman:

Mark.

[slate]

00:02:07:00

Interviewer:

OK, as someone who's been through it, can you describe what panic peddling is like? What do they do?

00:02:14:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, panic peddling is a very horrifying experience. They call you at three o'clock in the morning, four o'clock in the morning, come knocking at your door, ask for people who aren't there. It's just like a unrelenting thing [pause]

00:02:40:00

Interviewer:

So, it's realtors who are doing this?

00:02:44:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, I don't know if you, if you could ever prove that or they just put people up to doing those things, but it seems very, you know, just odd that it never happens, it never ever happened, you know, when the neighbor [sic] wasn't undergoing racial change. And it's like—

00:03:10:00

Interviewer:

So, can you explain in terms of the beginning with when the neighborhood began to change racially? People started calling and you didn't know who. Is that what happened?

00:03:18:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, that's right. As the neighborhood began to racially change, I mean, that's, you just start getting all these phone calls and people knocking at your door. And sometimes they'd just hang up, sometimes they'd say, You know, we're, we're looking for houses in the area. Are you interested in selling? We have buyers all lined up. And it's, it's just like you, you get bombarded by it from every different angle. And when a neighborhood is really go, you know, changing, I mean, you just don't need that, that kind of aggravation. I mean, people who decide to leave are gonna leave, and those that are, they're concerned about leaving, they, they don't have, they don't deserve to be, you know, harassed and, and frightened, because that's what, that's how you feel. You're scared. You get scared be—it isn't gonna stop. You can take your phone off of the hook at nighttime, wrap it up in a towel, you can do that every night. Then they start call, coming to the door and knocking on the door.

00:04:33:00

Interviewer:

And what is it that they're—what's, where does the panic come in? What are they telling you is gonna happen?

Rosemary Porter:

Well, that your neighborhood is changing.

Interviewer:

Sorry, can you tell me the full sentence?

Rosemary Porter:

Oh.

Interviewer:

It's OK.

Rosemary Porter:

What was it?

00:04:42

Interviewer:

What, what is it that the realtors or the people who call, what is it the phone calls are saying?

00:04:49

Rosemary Porter:

Well, when they call with their panic peddling statements, it said the neighborhood is changing racially, you don't wanna lose money. Only the first ones out are the ones that get their money, the rest all lose. Who wants to live in neighborhoods that are unsafe with Black people? It's just, it's just really a frightening thing. And when you're not familiar with other, that familiar with other people, I don't, Blacks or whatever they are, and you just constantly are receiving these harassments, I mean, you're not gonna, the average person is not gonna stick around and find out that, you know, there's a lotta nice people out there.

00:05:40:00

Interviewer:

It's particularly hard for people that, like your mother, somebody who is older, isn't it?

00:05:45:00

Rosemary Porter:

Oh, it, yes, my mother was, I would say that she was really just terrified by it and heartbroken. You, you hear these panic peddlers and they just tell you all this stuff. And my mother lived in that house and raised her family there, and just the thought of the, of the things in the neighborhood changing, you, that, she, she just didn't need that extra push of panic peddling in there.

00:06:21:00

Interviewer:

So, what, what made you decide to live in Marquette Park? What was it like here in 1966?

00:06:27:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, I decided to move to Marquette Park. It was, I was getting married and I knew people over in this area. We had found this house. Was a nice house, it was something that we could afford. It needed a lotta work, but it was something that as we went along little bit by little, we could improve upon. It had a nice park, schools around, good schools in the area. We planned on having a family and it had everything to offer that I looked for, everything I had in my old neighborhood.

00:07:03:00

Interviewer:

So, can you tell me about moving day? You had a unique experience on moving day. What happened on the day you moved in?

00:07:10:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, on the day that we moved in, Martin Luther King took his march down St. Louis to Marquette Park. And my house is four doors off of St. Louis, and he proceeded on to Marquette Park.

00:07:30:00

Interviewer:

Actually, I have to—can we stop for a second?

[cut]

[wild audio]

00:07:32:00

Interviewer:

He actually wasn't there that day.

00:07:34:00

Rosemary Porter:

Oh, he wasn't?

00:07:35:00

Interviewer:

He wasn't [laughs].

00:07:37:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

00:07:37:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

OK, speed.

00:07:41:00

Interviewer:

OK. If you could tell me again about moving day and what it was like.

Rosemary Porter:

Well, we were moving in here from our old neighborhood, a re-segregated—

Interviewer:

I'm going to stop you—say, we were moving in from, we moved into Marquette Park.

00:07:59:00

Rosemary Porter:

Oh. We moved into Marquette Park two weeks before my wedding, and we had neighbors from the old neighborhood were helping us out. So we were busy bringing in furniture and boxes front and back. And, and there was a lotta shouting that you could hear, like, in the distance, and police sirens. And so, we kinda kept on working back and forth. Well, then they happened to, they reached the corner and then we saw that it was the, the marchers on their way to Marquette Park.

00:08:42:00

Interviewer:

And what was your reaction?

00:08:46:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, my reaction was, you know, I was just surprised that, you know, there was all this big hullabaloo about this march to Marquette Park. I mean, I had lived in a re-segregated neighborhood and, and I really didn't know that this neighborhood was targeted for any kind of racial confrontations or anything. [fly buzzing] My mother was really upset.

00:09:16:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut. [laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

Let's cut.

[cut]

[wild audio]

00:09:18:00

Interviewer:

This fly is not cooperating.

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

00:09:22:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

00:09:22:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

Interviewer:

So, what happened on the day you moved into Marquette Park?

00:09:33:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, on the day that we moved into Marquette Park, the civil rights move—marchers marched down St. Louis, which is like, St. Louis is like three houses down, three, three houses down from my new house. And after coming from a neighborhood that had undergone all the pressures of panic peddling and seeing the neighborhood go from totally White to probably ninety-five percent Black since we had lived there for, like, four years after it had undergone racial change, it was, [pause] it was, [laughs] [pause] well, it, it wasn't, I can't say it was, like, frightening. I, I just, I just felt like, oh God, you know, I, we went through all of this once, you know. Not marching or whatever but just a neighborhood being up, you know, just up, upheaval, just like upheaval of the whole area over there. And you really get kind of, like, wow, you know, you, you move from one place and come to another place and now you're just gonna have a lot of aggravation with—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild audio]

Interviewer:

OK, stop.

00:11:17:00

Rosemary Porter:

—with all this.

[cut]

00:11:23:00

Camera crew member #1:

[camera malfunction]

[wild audio]

Mark.

[slate]

00:11:24:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

00:11:28:00

Interviewer:

What was your reaction to the marchers in light of having just come from a neighborhood that had been in tur, in turmoil?

00:11:37:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, I think my reactions were, I was probably a little angry and I was definitely upset. When you live through that once, of a neighborhood changing and—

00:11:51:00

Camera crew member #1:

Excuse me. I'm sorry, I have a jam.

[cut]

00:11:57:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:12:04:00

Interviewer:

Having lived through a neighborhood changing once, how did you feel when you found out that there were people demonstrating a block away?

00:12:12:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, after, you know, living in a neighborhood that had undergone—

[rollout on sound roll]

[cut]

[sound roll #216]

00:12:22:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:12:28:00

Interviewer:

OK. Having just left a neighborhood that had changed racially, how did you feel when you found out there were civil rights demonstrators a block away?

00:12:37:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, having just left a neighborhood that had, had gone through a racial change and civil rights demonstrators were, like, marching down the street three houses from where I was moving in, I was, I think I was really upset. I just thought, oh no, not again, for whatever that might mean. The first thing I thought is, oh, now I'm gonna have to go through panic peddling and all these emotional things of moving from a place that you loved and you grew up and your brothers and sisters and your ma raised the family there. I guess that does kinda

bring that all to the front of your head, even though my experience in that neighborhood after it changed was a positive one. The Black people that moved in over there were perfectly nice people, good neighbors, we got along and everything else. But the atmosphere that's created when racial change comes about is just, it's just loaded with emotions, emotions.

00:14:03:00:00

Interviewer:

Because of what? Do you have any idea?

00:14:08:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, I think a lot of those emotions are brought about by fear of the unknown. It's a well-known fact that this city is probably the most segregated city in the world. Black and White people just do not have a chance to, or especially at that time didn't have many opportunities to mingle with each other, therefore kinda get to know each other. And that's—

00:14:45:00

Interviewer:

So, why couldn't you stay? Who profited by you leaving?

00:14:50:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, by the time we left there wasn't any panic peddling over there. Like I say, we had lived there for four years and the neighborhood was, like, ninety-five percent Black. My reason for leaving there then was that I was getting married and wanted to raise a family. And so, we looked for a house of our own and decided to move.

00:15:17:00

Interviewer:

Can you tell me what you did, what you said before about Marquette Park? You had not, not realizing it was going to become this symbol of, of White, of a White neighborhood.

00:15:27:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, when my husband and I went house hunting, when we did, we decided to get married and we wanted to buy a house, we looked for a neighborhood that had basically what we wanted, parks and good schools, a well-kept area, and an area that we could afford. We weren't aware that Marquette Park was supposed to be this big stronghold of White supremacy or that it was in the, in the offing to have civil rights marchers come marching into the neighborhood to make their statement for open housing or whatever the issue was. We were not aware of that.

Interviewer:

OK, stop.

[cut]

00:16:17:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

00:16:18:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:16:21:00

Interviewer:

OK, so you found out this demonstration was going down the next street. What did it look like? What did you see?

00:16:28:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, they're ju—there were just crowds of Black people and, and police and everybody was shouting and, I mean, it was really [pause] I mean, I just, I wasn't prepared for the, the idea that, you know, I was gonna have to deal. That's the first thought that came to my mind is I was gonna have to deal with this all over again, and, and I was also afraid that, you know, like, something would happen. I mean, there were all kinds of police and everything, and I thought, well, you know, what, what is this? You know, it's one thing to march. Well, I guess, I just guess you know that when the, the Blacks are there and the police are there, that

somewhere along the line they're planning on dealing with confrontation from somebody else, and I just did not wanna be a witness or a party to that. I just, I really didn't see a—I thought, oh, God. That's what I thought again.

00:17:45:00

Interviewer:

Could you see any point to the marching? Did you have any, any sympathy with the marching or think that they—I mean, were you angry that they were marching or?

00:17:53:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, I don't think I had any, I don't think I had any, like, sympathy or any real feelings with what, I just thought, oh, I don't wanna go through this again. You know, that was basically it.

00:18:07:00

Interviewer:

What about police? There were a lot of police.

00:18:10:00

Rosemary Porter:

Oh, there were a lotta police. Yes. Well, I, you know, I guess the police were out there to do their job and that was to protect them, to, to, to give them their right to march or whatever.

00:18:26:00

Interviewer:

Was there any sense that they were being kept away from the rest of the city or being [inaudible]? Was that an issue for other, for residents in the city of Chicago?

00:18:36:00

Rosemary Porter:

The Blacks?

00:18:37:00

Interviewer:

No, that the police were being drawn away.

00:18:42:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, I don't really, well, I imagine they were. You know, where are you gonna get all these police to protect these marchers and demonstrators, or, I mean, they have to be drawn from other, from duties around the city.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Rosemary Porter:

But if they, if they feel that those marchers needed protection, I mean, hey, you know, they should've, they shoulda provided them with the protection.

00:19:09:00

Interviewer:

What about the, the television? What television saw was Nazis and, and a lot of White anger. What was your sense of that, the response that they did get? What you told me was that they didn't represent all the White people in this neighborhood—

Rosemary Porter:

That's right.

Interviewer:

That the Nazis are Nazis. That's what I'm looking for.

00:19:29:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, as far as, you know, the Nazis being on TV and that, like, they speak for this area, I don't feel that they speak for this area. There, sure, there's probably some of them that live around here, but it's like every other organization, it draws from everyb, everywhere. And I really myself don't feel like the Nazis are heavily represented here, and they don't speak for the average White person that lives here. This is a, a middle-class White neighborhood, and

all people ever ask to do is just, you know, middle class people are that way. They live in their houses and they take care of their business and their families. They're not out there looking to kill people and, you know, with all these far-out views. They just wanna be left alone. And that's—

00:20:25:00

Interviewer:

Was the issue in Marquette Park, the sort of, the reaction against the marchers, was it racial or was it economic? In your opinion.

Rosemary Porter:

Well, I think, you know—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry, I was talking.

Rosemary Porter:

Interviewer:

Sorry, start again.

00:20:38:00

Rosemary Porter:

The issues of Marquette Park, whether, whether it, it's racial or economics, OK. I think everybody wants to think that it's racial, all right. That's the, that's the, the notion that somebody wants to put in everybody's heads that it's a big racial thing when actually it's economics. It's economics. Your home is your single most biggest investment. Your home and your neighborhood. And they got people so worried about if a Black moves in the neighborhood is gone. That thing was never, that idea was never created by middle class White people or by Black people. I mean, it's just been the history that through panic peddling and real estates that make thousands, millions by block after block re-segregating a neighborhood. You know, a long time ago there was a theory, they could make a million dollars from every block they turned, every block they turned. They made the money. ***The White people didn't make money, the Black people didn't make money. The real estates make money and they do it because of that. They can move the Blacks into middle class White neighborhoods, they can move the Whites outta middle class neighborhoods into the suburbs. They make the money, we don't make anything. But they, they propagate the idea that because Blacks move into White neighborhoods, your house values are gonna go***

*down.* And that's the first thing those panic peddlers will tell you, Get going while you can still get your money.

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild audio]

Interviewer:

Cut please.

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

[cut]

[camera roll #2033]

00:22:29:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:22:34:00

Interviewer:

I'm gonna ask you that question again, though, 'cause it was a very clear answer. In terms of the media, what you see is a lotta violence, it's a lot of confrontation. Can you tell me about what your response is to that?

00:22:49:00

Rosemary Porter:

I, I, I believe that the media just—

00:22:53:00

Interviewer:

Actually, why don't you start, start from what you said, which was, was your reaction to the violence. I mean, that people were throwing rocks at the marchers.

00:22:59:00

Rosemary Porter:

Oh. OK. Well, I, I don't feel that anybody has the right to throw rocks at anybody, that anybody has the right to, you know, perpetrate violence on another group of people. People are out there because I imagine they believe in what they're marching for or whatever, but I certainly believe that there's, there's ways of dealing with things without violence, without violence. And—

00:23:36:00

Interviewer:

What were the Nazi Party, when you—the contrast, the Nazi Par—people were looking for confrontation? As the person in the middle, how does that make you feel?

00:23:48:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, I, I guess people were looking for confrontation. And how it made me feel, well, I just, I don't wanna see my neighborhood used for a battleground for people's opposing views. I mean, I really resent that. By and large the majority of people in this neighborhood, they're peaceful, they're peace-loving people, they just raise their families, they don't bother anybody. And, and we're always portrayed, you know, the racist South West side and, you know, those people over there are all looking to, you know, burn crosses on people's lawns. That isn't, that isn't true. People wanna live in these neighborhoods, you know, and they, they don't wanna be panic peddled, they don't wanna have people telling them, Well, if you don't move, you know, you're gonna lose your, your, your fortune. Your fortune is your house, that's all it is. That's your fortune. For most of these middle-class people, that is your fortune, your home.

00:24:47:00

Interviewer:

So, this is a battleground between who? If it's not the, if it's not the, the regular homeowners in Marquette Park, who?

00:24:59:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, it's, it's a battle, I guess. I don't know, extreme groups. I mean, you know, whenever you butt two heads together you get people out there, Blacks marching for their civil rights, and then you got Nazis or whatever getting out there and preaching their White supremacy. But I really resent the idea that the media puts these White supre, supremacy [sic] or whatever they are out there like they speak for the whole southwest side, because that is not true.

00:25:33:00

Interviewer:

OK, stop.

[cut]

00:25:36:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Scene 4, take 10. Mark.

[slate]

00:25:41:00

Interviewer:

So, deep breath. How do you feel about having your neighborhood chosen as the place where a group of people is going to make a stand? How does that make you feel?

00:25:53:00

Rosemary Porter:

I really resent groups, any groups coming into my neighborhood and creating an atmosphere of, like, it has to be an armed camped. I really resent that. This is my neighborhood, and everybody's got their views and they're certainly—have their rights to express them however they want. Well, I don't want them in my neighborhood. Let them go down to Grant Park or

some place, get their selves together and do whatever they have to do. I don't want my neighborhood, this idea of an armed camp, that we're White racists because we got these Nazis, that we hate Blacks because we, we don't want the Blacks marching in Marquette Park. Let them go and just everybody leave the neighborhood in peace. We march in the park, that park is for this total area. They can't, you can't take the kids up to the park when there's gonna be a march.

00:27:10:00

Interviewer:

About a year and a half after this period of time, the Kerner Commission came out with a report that said that our country was splitting into two societies, Black and White, separate and unequal. Did you have a response to that? Do you, did you agree with that? Were we becoming two societies? Were we already?

00:27:30:00

Rosemary Porter:

We're becoming two societies? Well, I, I kind of feel now, you know, at this time that definitely, you know, two or three societies. It's, I'm sorry to say, but I, I feel that people are more polarized today than they've ever been, than they've ever been.

00:27:55:00

Interviewer:

But in 1966, did you think that there was ever a chance that Blacks and Whites could live together without the neighborhood getting completely used?

00:28:04:00

Rosemary Porter:

No. No.

Interviewer:

No, what?

Rosemary Porter:

No, I never thought. In 1966, I would've never dreamed that Blacks and Whites could live in the same neighborhood. That they could come together and—no.

00:28:23:00

Interviewer:

And how does that make you feel?

00:28:28:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, how does that make me feel? I don't really think that I really felt anything about it because it was just the fact of the time. OK? And I consider that probably [coughs] I had a unique experience because I did live in a neighborhood that had changed, and I lived there for four years, you know. And I did get to know Black people, and they're really no different than I am, all right. They wanna a nice neighborhood, they want good schools for their kids, and they wanna get along with their neighbors. And they don't want the rest of the world coming and, you know, messing up their little nest.

00:29:15:00

Interviewer:

So, why wasn't it possible then?

00:29:20:00

Rosemary Porter:

Well, you know, it wasn't possible then. And I can't say that, you know, the, the feeling has much changed to this day because people still do not know each other. OK? And panic peddlers and real estate people are never gonna let it happen 'cause that is not the name of the game. The name of the game is money, it's profit, it's profit for real estates. You think they care about Black people? You think they care about middle class Whites? Be serious. Be serious. How many houses and how many Blacks can we turn? And how many people can we get out there and tell the story, Get your money before the Blacks move in because then, hmm, you know, you, you won't even get half of what your house is worth today. That's the name of the game.

00:30:14:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut. Is there anything else—

[cut]

[wild audio]

Interviewer:  
—that I haven't asked you? If you're telling—

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:30:20:00

[cut]

[end of interview]

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