

Interview with **Bobby Seale**

Date: November 4, 1988

Interviewers: Louis Massiah (Interviewer #1), Sam Pollard (Interviewer #2)

Camera Rolls: 3065-3071

Sound Rolls: 331-333

Team: B, C

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**Note:** These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #3065]

[sound roll #331]

00:00:13:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:00:16:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. We're back to 1966, '67, '66-'67. What were, what were some of the things going on in the Black community in Oakland at the time that the Panther, Panther Party was founded? Just set some, set the stage for us.

00:00:31:00

Bobby Seale:

We had a problem with, actually, police brutality that had been sparking numerous riots in 1966, even prior to that in 1965, the Watts Riots had vicious acts of police brutality. Huey P. Newton and I were working with the North Oakland Neighborhood Service Center under the city government and Stokely Carmichael—

00:00:52:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

I'm sorry, please stop.

Interviewer #1:

Stop.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK. I didn't realize you—

Interviewer #1:

Cut?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah.

[cut]

00:00:58:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:01:00:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Back in October 1966. Set the context in Oakland, in the Black community in, in Oakland, with the founding of the, the Black Panther Party. What was going on?

00:01:12:00

Bobby Seale:

Black Panther Party, 1966, when Huey and I founded that organization, that particular year, numerous acts of police brutality had sparked a lot of spontaneous riots, something that Huey

and I were against, the spontaneous riots. Even a year earlier, in 1965, in Watts, you know, sixty-five people were killed, 200 wounded, 5,000 arrested. And Huey and I began to try to figure out how could we organize 5,000 youthful Black folks into some kind of political-electoral power movement. Stokely Carmichael was on the scene with Black Power. We were questioning, Huey and I, about the need for a functional definition of power and we came up with this, that "power is the ability to define phenomena then in turn make it act in a desired manner." With the phenomena of racism structured in the city council at that time, Huey and I working with the North Oakland Neighborhood Service Center, the advisory board, we got 5,000 signatures for them to go to the city council, to get the city council to try to set up a police review board to deal with complaints of police brutality. Well, the city council ignored them. So, that phenomena was that the city council was just a racist structure which could care less about the forty-eight percent Black and Chicano people who lived in the city of Oakland. So, there we are trying to figure out what to do. We finally concluded through those months that we had to start a new organization. And we sit down and began to write out this Ten-Point Platform and Program in the North Oakland Neighborhood Service Center in North Oakland, California, in the community where Huey and I lived. ***And we wrote out this program. "We want power to determine our own destiny in our own Black community,"*** alluding to the needs to be organized—political electoral power. Full employment, decent housing, decent education that taught us about our true selves, not to have to fight in Vietnam, ***immediate end to police brutality and murder of back people was point number seven. The right to have juries of our peers in the courts, what have you. We summed it up. We wanted land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, and peace.*** And, in the tail end, we stuck in two famous paragraphs. "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to separate themselves from the political bondage," that was the emphasis, the political bondage, "which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the Earth the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitled them." I mean, this was the kind of summarization we gave to our meaning. And we summarized that Ten-Point Platform Program, flipped a coin to see who would be chairman. I won chairman and we created the Black Panther Party.

00:03:57:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, how did you come up with the symbol of, the, the name Black Panther. How did you come up with the name Black Panther?

00:04:03:00

Bobby Seale:

Actually we had written the Ten-Point Platform and Program of the organization but yet didn't have a name. A couple of days later, Huey P. Newton and I was trying to figure out why it was that on a Lowndes County Freedom Organization--it was Lowndes County, Mississippi, a pamphlet we had--why did they have this charging black panther as a logo? And Huey come up with some notion that if you drive a panther into a corner, if he can't go

left and he can't go right, then it will tend to come out of that corner to wipe out or stop its aggressor. So I says, that's just like Black people, all the civil rights people are gettin' brutalized across this country for exercising the First Amendment of the Constitution which is the law of the land, they can't go left. Other people have tried to patrol the police with law books and tape recorders, they've been brutalized, they can't go right. Even the young Whites who were protesting, I said, who was in support of the Black people, can't go left, can't go right. I said, we're just like the Black Panthers. And in effect Huey P. Newton and I named our organization the Black Panther Party, but at first it was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Later, we dropped the self-defense aspect because we didn't want to be classified as a paramilitary organization.

00:05:09:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Now, there were other Black Panther Parties that sprung up around that time. What was your relationship to those other Black Panther Parties?

00:05:16:00

Bobby Seale:

The only other group that sprung up about two or three weeks after we had started, was the Northern California Branch of the Black Panther Party over in San Francisco. I had worked with those partic—that particular group previously in the Revolutionary—organization called Revolutionary Action Movement, but I couldn't get along with them. I, I guess I had a view that they had a misunderstanding about what revolution was about. And in effect, we did not, we attempted to work together because they came to us. We were very prominent in the community there for about three months, patrolling police. The people really liked what we were doing and the Northern California operation came over and says, We want you to help us escort Sister Betty Shabazz from the airport when she arrives for a rally that would be held in Hunters Point, one of the riot areas that people were trying to cool down and organize politically. We said, sure, we'd love to work with you guys. But what in effect happened there is that this group, we had, we, we said we had twenty guns and then they said they had twenty, and we found they only had five. So we supplied only ten or twelve or something like that. And then we found out after we did all this escorting, and then later had a Mexican type stand-off with the police, while this other group, the Revolutionary Action Group, Group of the Black Panther Party had split the scene and we didn't know why. And we found out later on that their guns were unloaded and we thought and felt that they were jeopardizing the whole situation by not letting us know that.

00:06:46:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, let's go back to the police patrols. What went through your mind? Were you afraid of being—just put yourself back in that time. You're out there patrolling a, a police arrest. Just, just describe the incident, and what, what were you feeling as, as you go through that?

00:07:01:00

Bobby Seale:

First, when you're dealin' with patrolling police, when we decide to even do that at the first— at first, I mean—first, we had to accept the fact that we may get killed or go to jail but we were also sensitive to the fact that peaceful demonstrators were being brutalized all across this country, that their rights were being violated. And when we decided to do that, you have to remember we were dealing with clear-cut, fine points of the law, that as long as the weapon was not concealed, so we felt secure there that we weren't violating the law. We studied all the gun laws, we knew them very well. And when you walk up, suddenly, you know, when we started patrolling the police, six or seven of us and I think we had one sister, she was—had a, she was packing a pistol, and I had a pistol, and Huey had a shotgun, and our uniforms. And we had our *Ten-Point Platform and Program*, copies of that, and tape recorders, and law books. And *I remember one of these first events when we got out of the car, we saw a policeman, you know, making an arrest of some kind, about twenty or thirty people in the community standing to the side watching. And the Black folks, one of 'em says, Hey, who are these people co—hey, man, these guys got—hey man, I'm gonna move out of here, these guys got guns and stuff like that.* And so Huey says, No, brothers and sisters, it's not necessary to leave. This is a new organization, the Black Panther Party, we here to observe these police in the community, make sure there's not gonna be any more police brutality. And little Bobby Hutton passed out some of the *Ten-Point Platforms and Programs* which all have applications to join. *And it came down to some point where the policeman says, What are you doing with those guns? and Huey says, Well we got ours to defend ourselves and to observe you. And the police, You have no right to observe me. And Huey with all his law study, because he was in law, night law school at the time, California State Supreme Court ruling state said everyone has a right to observe a police officer carrying out his duty as long as they stand a reasonable distance away. And a reasonable distance was constituted in that particular California Supreme Court Ruling as eight to ten feet. I'm standing approximately twenty-two feet from you. I will observe you carry out your duty, whether you like it or not. And the Black community is saying, Well, go ahead on and tell it.* Well, I mean what you're doing here is that you have a nervousness about it at first a bit, but with the community's reaction, which is really what your objective is, it gives you a good feeling that you're right. The guns are loaded, they're not pointing at anyone because we also know California Penal Code, you can't even play around, play around and point a loaded weapon at, at anyone because it constitutes assault with a deadly weapon. So, really I begin to feel secure with our posture, particularly with the people around, the Black community who stayed around to watch this, and to see the police back down. And after we learn, after a few, couple of months, that these police were tryin' to figure out where they can catch us illegally. I mean, we studied the law much more clearly to find out we was clearly right. Ultimately, they made a law against us, to stop us from carrying guns. That's how legal we were.

00:09:52:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, now the decision to go to Sacramento. Was it conceived as a media event? You might tell why you went up to Sacramento, and did you, did you see it as a media event?

00:10:03:00

Bobby Seale:

Well, we had only hit the press three or four times so far, the print media. And what we have heard is that the police department had went to a local congressman to get a bill written and it would hit the newspaper. So, Huey called me up and says, We have to go to Sacramento. It was conceived as a media event that the press is always at the California State Capital, so if we got up there and read a statement in opposition to what the California Legislature was doing with respect to us trying to exercise our right to, you know, deal with police brutality in our Black community, then of course, the press would carry at least our side, would carry it. And of course, hopefully, we could get more people to join the Black Panther Party. But in effect, well even when we arrived, this is what the real, *we arrived there, all these Black men and women, twenty-four males and six females with guns. And Ronald Reagan, then the Governor, was on the lawn with 200 future leaders of America, you know, twelve and thirteen and fourteen year-old kids. And these kids started leaving his session on the lawn and coming to see us. And these young White kids thought we were a gun club*, you know, Hey, neat thirty-ought-six you got there. Well, the media followed these kids because they were there and asked, Aren't you the Black Panthers? Yes. And I began to read a statement, and of course, the press later let us inside and I was trying to get to the spectator section but we wound up on the—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Bobby Seale:

—floor of the California State Legislature while they're dealing with the bill.

00:11:25:00

Interviewer #1:

Wait. We just rolled out, we just rolled out.

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK. That's a rollout on camera roll, thirty, sixty-five.

[cut]

[camera roll #3066]

00:11:32:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:11:33:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. You were just saying you were branded as invading.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Wait just a sec. Now.

Interviewer #1:

Talking about, go ahead.

00:11:38:00

Bobby Seale:

The Black Panther Party, me in particular, and the group that was with me, we were branded as hoodlums invading the capital. In fact, after I read the message once I wanted to go inside to the spectator section. So, when we got in the halls, you have to imagine, there's 100 press people, cameras, still cameras, print media people backing up and I'm saying, Where is the spectator section? and the press saying, This way, Bobby. In effect, they led me on the wrong floor and we wound up down on the floor. Some party members got ahead of me with shotguns, pistols, and wound up on the actual floor of the California State Legislature. And the press is not even supposed to go in there and they followed them in, taking pictures of Panthers with guns on the floor. I had to get the party members out of there, I says, Come on, we're in the wrong place, because I was really lookin' for the spectator section. So, we come out and not until we left the capitol, two blocks away when we stopped at a service station to get gas and what have you, did we all get busted. Because in effect, what we did at the capital

was not any—then later we were charged with disturbing the peace of the assembly which was a misdemeanor and I wound up doing six months at jail for.

00:12:46:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, I'm trying to put the Panthers in some sort of, in some sort of line with other struggles for, for, for Black freedom. Where did the, the philosophy of the Panthers come from? How were you influenced by Malcolm X, you were talking about Martin, and Elijah Muhammad?

00:13:00:00

Bobby Seale:

Huey and I had been involved for some time, off and on, studying Black history, what have you, what Malcolm had done, where Martin Luther King had come from. I was highly influenced by Martin Luther King at first, and then later Malcolm X. Largely, the Black Panther Party come out of a lot of readings, Huey and I putting scrutiny to everything going on in the United States of America. It was like we must've subscribed to twenty-some-odd different periodicals, off-beat periodicals like *The Liberator*, *Freedom Ways*, what have you, even some periodicals out of Africa. But we had read and digested Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. I mean, we knew Lerone Bennett's *Before the Mayflower*. I knew about the 250 slave revolts, and that included Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner, and Denmark Vesey. I mean, I, Frederick Douglass, everything, the Nation of Islam, what had happened through the 1930's, what have you, and so on. And there we were with all this knowledge about our history, our struggle against racism, and when we started the Black Panther Party it was more or less based on where Malcolm was coming from, where our struggle was, an argument about the civil rights movement, not learning to own property. And then Stokely Carmichael in 1965, '66 talkin' about Black Power, and we thought we needed a functional definition of just the word "power" alone. And we felt that if we defined the phenomena of a city government framework or institution of government as racist in terms of the institutional racism that we had understood from studying that history, then it's high time we made that institutionalized political function act in a desired manner, and how do we go about that? So, we had to organize political electoral power, we thought, so this is where we were coming from.

00:14:43:00

Interviewer #1:

Did Malcolm ha—Malcolm X have a particular influence on the Panthers?

Bobby Seale:

A particular influence in the sense that—

Interviewer #1:

Oh, could you just rephrase the questions?

00:14:50:00

Bobby Seale:

Malcolm X had a particular influence on the Panthers in the sense that earlier he had stated that the civil rights people down South who were exercising the First Amendment of the Constitution, that's what he alluded to, are gonna be violated by racists and every Black man who has a shotgun in his home has a right to defend himself. Even the Deacons for the Defense in this context had an influence there. Even as we read the history of Robert Williams, also had an influence there. So, you see this has been rollin' since '59 in terms of how we see the history, even with respect to the slavery votes historically. So, it comes to a point that if the civil rights people who were peacefully protesting, if their rights are gonna be violated, then we're gonna have to move to a higher level, and take the position that we have a right to defend ourself based on the Constitution of the United States.

00:15:36:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Now, the Marxist philo-philosophy, the, the Maoist influence, was it there from the beginning?

00:15:44:00

Bobby Seale:

No. The Marxist-type philosophy had no real influence on us creating the Black Panther Party. It was later that we found a way to make money by selling *The Little Red Book: The Thoughts of Mao Tse-Tung*. We sold this book for three or four weeks before we even opened it up to read it because we would take it up to the White students at University of California, we'd buy 'em for twenty cents and sell it for a buck, *Get your Red Book: The Thoughts of Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*, one dollar. I mean, people hand over fist. So, we'd run out, go pay our rent, buy a few, few extra shotguns, pay our phone bill, go get more books, come back. We even went to a big anti-war rally with 35,000 people there and sold two, three-thousand books that day. We left our guns at home, all we wanted to do was sell books because we needed funds, financial support. And one day after all of this selling of this books, we sit down and start reading this book. And one point in there it says, Do not steal, not even a needle and a piece of thread from the people. We thought that was great. We started reading all these points. And then we begin to cor—incorporate some of the aspects that Mao talked about in this *Little Red Book*. Later we picked up the full *Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, we begin to read that, and then we began to look at look at Marxist-Leninist materials.

But we never was what you call doctrinaire socialists. In fact, we didn't get along too well with many of the hardcore doctrinaire-type socialists.

00:17:00:00

Interviewer #1:

Were, were Black folks in the, in the community, were they able to understand your, your, your Marxist perspective, the Maoist perspective that came into the party?

Bobby Seale:

Yeah, but you see, what we did is we inculcated it in a way that we were saying it from the Black Panther Party's point of view and analysis.

Interviewer #1:

Could you say that again and make sure you say the Maoist perspective or whatever?

00:17:19:00

Bobby Seale:

The, it wasn't a Maoist perspective that we had so much. We used some of the principles that were applicable to our situation in the USA, in terms of the organizing principles, what have you. We were more or less, we believed in a sort of a coop—cooperative socialism and we didn't accept, per se, a sort of a state control command economy type concept. So, the way we did it, we pulled from what we thought was valuable to us and yes, brothers and sisters began to accept that. I mean, you would have to imagine a brother who's been taught how to read in the Black Panther Party standing up and telling another brother on dope, Brother, you're acting in an unprincipled manner. You know what I mean? That practice is the criterion of the truth, and things like this here. So, this is one of the things, to have grassroots brothers and sisters citing principled posture, taking a principled posture and trying to educate the community and kind of in, in the, in the attempt to help raise the conscience of the Black community.

00:18:20:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Could you talk about com-community control and how that became a policy and a program for the Panther Party, particularly, with, with the police, community control?

00:18:30:00

Bobby Seale:

Well, community control was in a vague way from the initial point of the, that was all related to the functional definition of power. But we initiated a program where we got some research teams out of University of California and some other places and put together a real referendum to the ballot for community control of police, really to decentralize the police and have five commissioners duly elected by the people, a form of more participatory democracy here. And we finally did get it on the ballot in the City of Berkeley, it lost by one percentage point. But that was one aspect, along with selling the Black Panther Party newspaper and dealing with a lot of other problems in the community, that was one of the key political electoral aspects in 1968 that we attempted to initiate.

00:19:17:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. When did the Panther Party begin to start moving on a, on a national front that, become a, become a national organization effectively?

00:19:24:00

Bobby Seale:

Effectively as a national organization, the Black Panther Party began to move, well, originally, you have to understand that when I did the California, when I went to the California State Capital that caused us first to have international notoriety. But in terms of on a organizational level, the Black Panther Party really spread from, prior to the murder of Mart—the assassination of Brother Martin Luther King, we only had about 700 members in six or seven chapters and branches, largely on the West Coast. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, our organization grew from 700 to 5,000 members plus. And with the assassination of Robert Kennedy later that year the young White radicals readily coalesced with us at our direction, they couldn't direct us. They coalesced with us. So, it was whoever in the power structure who murdered Martin Luther King caused a lot of people who sided with Martin Luther King to say, The heck with it, let's join the Panthers, and they in effect tagged us as the vanguard of the revolution.

00:20:31:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Could you talk about the, the, the breakfast programs and, and the development of the survival programs? How did they, how did they begin?

00:20:37:00

Bobby Seale:

Young man standing out in front of the Black Panther Party office that sold papers at McClymonds High School, a Black school, said something about the fact that some teachers was tryin' to get free lunches for high school students. And I said, Well, what about the little kids? They need to eat too. So, I initiated with the central committee that we wanted a free breakfast for children program. Eldridge Cleaver called it a sissy program. I says, Who's the greatest revolution in the, revolutionary in the world to you, Eldridge Cleaver? He says Mao Tse-Tung. I said, When you read the material it says, "Always serve the people." But mine and Huey's concept related to that was that the recipients of the program, in effect, become educated and understand that they have to organize in opposition to the racist power structure. But the breakfast programs initiated in Reverend Neil's church in West Oakland, California, spreaded around this country to a point where we was feeding over two hu—two, a couple hundred thousand kids free breakfast. Later, Willie Brown and some other state legislators in California moved and got a bill through, even with the override for \$5 million for all the schools in the poor and wo—working class communities for free breakfast for children.

00:21:43:00

Interviewer #1:

And how did you see these programs? Did you see them as being an, an end in, of themselves or were they part of a revolutionary policy?

00:21:50:00

Bobby Seale:

They were part of a revolutionary policy. Some people like to say they were reform programs, we says, no, a reform program comes from the power structure who's oppressing you. This is a people's revolutionary program which educates the people that they have to be in opposition and oppose the power structure. That is the great revolutionary character of the program. The program to us makes a statement, even if the power structure incorporates it in its system, it makes a statement that we're saying from the community, that's what you should have been doin' in the first durn place. So, that's our attitude, that was our attitude about that.

00:22:21:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. What was Huey Newton's particular gift? What, why, why did you work with him? I mean, what, what, in, in forming the party? What was, what was Newton's particular gift?

Bobby Seale:

His—

Interviewer #1:

And you should rephrase that question.

00:22:34:00

Bobby Seale:

Huey, Huey's basic genius, as we—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Bobby Seale:

—used to call it, was his ability—

00:22:41:00

Interviewer #1:

We just rolled out, I'm sorry.

00:22:43:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

That's a rollout on thirty, sixty-six.

[cut]

[camera roll #3067]

00:22:48:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:22:50:00

Interviewer #1:

Once again, what was Huey Newton's particular gift or particular genius as an organizer and in collaboration with you?

00:22:57:00

Bobby Seale:

Huey Newton's genius, as we used to call it, was his great ability, starting from the theoretical point of view, to show how we could move to heighten the contradiction as a means, one, to educate the people or to capture their imagination. I mean, the very idea of patrolling the police was really grounded in a theory that Huey had that if the idiot Ku Klux Klans could stand on the Capitol steps and get publicity, then we could do the same thing only our publicity would be about trying to raise the conscious of Black people to understand that we have to take a posture against the structured racism. So, raising the contradictions to a higher level was key to how Huey thought and understood and analyzed the situation.

00:23:43:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Once again, you, you might explain what you mean by contradictions, that, once again, what was Huey Newton's particular gift?

00:23:51:00

Bobby Seale:

Huey Newton's basic genius, as we used to call it, was his ability to deal with the contradiction and raise the contradiction. In a sense, I would say that Huey's Newton's genius was a, let's say it like this here. Huey was able to take the Panther Party and take the very concept of civil disobedience and put it on the cutting edge while at the same time holding a legal posture. In other words, he distinguished civil disobedience from criminality. Well, the power structure'd say, You're all criminals. But we know that a civil disobedient stands out loud on the corner and states what he or she is opposed to, whereas a criminal is covert. So, Huey put it on the cutting edge without becoming criminal and put it on the cutting edge to make the issue sharp enough, to make even the White racists realize that they have to pay attention to what's going on here. That was Huey Newton's genius.

00:24:49:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. We're gonna move ahead a little bit. Now, the alliance with SNCC, the Student Nonviolat-Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, how did that come about? And you might talk a little bit about the drafting of Stoke-Stokely Carmichael, but how did that alliance come about?

00:25:03:00

Bobby Seale:

Huey was arrested and co—and charged with first degree murder in Oakland, California. We had scheduled a birthday rally for Huey, and Eldridge and I left and went to Washington D.C. to visit Stokely to see would he come to the rally. He agreed to come to the rally. A week or so after that, James Forman came out and started rapping with us in Los Angeles and later came up and explained to us that, seemingly, SNCC was getting ready to fall apart because of these White students who tended to dominate the decision-making policy. And later after that, we heard that the United States government was getting ready to draft Stokely to go fight in Vietnam. Well, Eldridge and I put our heads together and we wrote up a draft notice for Stokely. I went to the front steps of the San Francisco Police Department, had a press conference, and read the draft notice that Stokely Carmichael was hereby drafted into the Black Panther Party and he will not fight in the racial imperialistic power structure's war in Vietnam. Stokely in effect accepted, Rap Brown came to the Huey P. Newton birthday rally, James Forman and others, and we asked Rap Brown would he accept the draft also. So, Rap Brown 'came the minister of justice, Huey, Stokely Carmichael became the prime minister and James Forman himself from SNCC became the minister of education.

00:26:27:00

Interviewer #1:

Wa, was there a history of, of relations between SNCC and the Panther Party?

00:26:31:00

Bobby Seale:

No, there was not a history of relations. I mean, whenever Stokely came to the San Francisco/Oakland Bay Area in '65 and '66 before the party was started, Huey and I would always go to those rallies to hear him speak at the time, but in terms of havin' a direct hardcore relation or being a member of the or—his org, those, the organization, for him, no, we were not.

00:26:50:00

Interviewer #1:

Did, did you think the alliance between SNCC and the Panthers would last?

00:26:55:00

Bobby Seale:

Well, I don't know, it happened that it didn't last. I mean, Stokely wound up in 1969 in Scandinavia, speaking around the world, representing the Party and representing the ge—the Black people's struggle in America in general, that's the way we told him to do it, your free will. But while we had developed a lot of alliances, working coalitions, may I say, with the White left in America, Stokely began to criticize that. And we told him he was wrong, that no White people run our organization, that all those people in the working coalition functions and caters to the, some of the needs we need based on the fact that if they are truly against racism, if we need this kind of support, this kind of support, give it to us. If you don't give us the support, get out of our way. But that spurred a situation that when I got back in early 1969, that we quietly kicked Stokely out of the Black Panther Party and told him he wasn't a member anymore. We didn't want a whole lot of press at that time about it because it's enough having a bunch of racist media tryin' to destroy what you represent, you know, by saying they've split, they've split, that kind of stuff.

00:28:01:00

Interviewer #1:

No, but what was your hope when SNCC and the Panthers joined together? What was, what was the greatest hope?

00:28:06:00

Bobby Seale:

Well, initially, I guess what we really looked at was that we had a larger, well, first, here was two organizations that could somewhat merge its leadership, the notoriety of the spokesmen in Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, Huey was in jail as a political prisoner, what have you, and that it would spur a broader ability, you know, to organize that political Black community, political electoral power unity and give this revolutionary character that the Black Panther Party needed.

00:28:43:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, at that time, this is backing off of SNCC for a second, did you believe that a revolution was starting and, and what were the signs if you did?

00:28:51:00

Bobby Seale:

Oh yeah, the, it was there, the revolution was there. I mean, [laughs] when you start getting into shootouts and battles and twenty-six-year-old Black Panther Party members are getting

killed, particularly through the year of 1969, yes, it was already going on before the Black Panther Party started. I mean—

00:29:08:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Could you just rephrase and make sure you say the revo—you know, the Revolution, that we, we believe the Revolution is there, OK? Did you believe that, that the Revolution was, was starting, what were the signs?

00:29:17:00

Bobby Seale:

Yes, the revolution was already going on. I mean, the signs was not only the spontaneous riots that had occurred through the latter part of the '60s but the civil rights movement, the fact that the racist power structure all across this country was attacking peaceful demonstrators, and now here we had moved after several years to a position of defending ourselves, people like Malcolm X who had preceded us. Now here we were attempting to implement some aspects of where he was coming from. ***It was a battle, it was a struggle, and I think we rooted ourselves in in the sense that we began to get millions of Black pe—folks to really look at where we were coming from in our stand against the power structure. Now, a lot of people call a revolution a confrontation. Really, what you and I meant by revolution was a need to revolve more political power and economic power back into the hands of the people, that's really what a revolution is.*** Those in the immediate confrontations evolved because the racist power structure do not want us to exercise our democratic human rights to organize our people in opposition to their structured racism.

00:30:27:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. OK. Could you talk a little bit about your coalitions with White radical organizations? When did that begin and what were some of those working coalitions?

00:30:38:00

Bobby Seale:

One of the first working coalitions we had was with the anti-draft movement. They had, see, you have to understand something. Huey P. Newton and I was in and about, around these guys many times way before the party started and sometimes after. Now, we would sometimes be around University of California and we would be arguing with them. You don't know what police brutality is, and I would make jokes, You guys need a course, Police Brutality 101, before you understand what we mean. What do you mean? You need to get

brutalized by some police so you'll understand what's happenin' in the Black community. And I used to say, Maybe you need a, an advanced course, Police Brutality 405. And once these guys got brutalized out there in front of the induction center in Oakland, California, I said, Huh, interesting, Police Brutality 105, bang.

[rollout on sound roll]

[cut]

[sound roll #332]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Marking the sound roll 332.

00:31:35:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Marking.

[slate]

00:31:37:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Why did you begin? Why did the Panthers begin their coalitions with White radical organizations?

Bobby Seale:

I guess mainly because we saw a resource—

Interviewer #1:

Once again, if you could rephrase the question.

00:31:49:00

Bobby Seale:

I guess we began most of our coalition with the young White radicals because of the resource but initially it was the young White radicals who sort of identified with Huey being in jail after the vicious police brutality upon the draft resisters and that initiated the coalition. What, in effect, happened though was we, when they wanted to coalesce with us, we demanded of

them that they support us and that you don't run our organizations. And from there it became with the Peace and Freedom Party who wanted to get on the ballot, we thought that was a nice thing to do, and a third party factor, so we let them into the Black community to register in the Peace and Freedom Party. But a third of the people wound up registering in the Black Panther Party anyway. That was, and as we looked at it and as we saw the anti-war protest and the young Whites who did really get out in the streets to demonstrate against structured racism, we saw that as a resource in that, it—another aspect of our analysis was that we were talking about power to the people. We made a new analysis of what nationalism was about, Black nationalism. That whatever Black unity we had, it was really a sort of a catalyst to help humanize the world and we were that catalyst here in Afro America or Africa, that's what it was about. And that the world was composed of more than just Black folks, you know. So, the coalition aspect to us being what one defined as a minority United States of America, if the White community showed some split, then we should side with that aspect of the group that seemed to be or would act as friends to us.

00:33:41:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut. OK, but we sc—we got a rollout.

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Camera Crew Member #2:

It's a rollout on thirty, sixty-seven, camera roll thirty, sixty-seven.

[cut]

[camera roll #3068]

00:33:51:00

Interviewer #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:33:53:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. All right. Take us back to, you know, Betty Shabazz arrives, you know, you're outdoors, you're indoors, you're, you're waiting for her to arrive. You know, what, what, what did you hope to achieve by, by meeting her?

00:34:07:00

Bobby Seale:

The whole Black Panther Party contingent, we all arrived at the airport, Huey says, Line everybody up. Some policemen in plainclothes come out and says, What are you doin' with these guns? Huey says, That's irrelevant. It's none of your business. So, more policemen come out, he says, Where you going? Huey says, We're going in the airport. The policeman says, You can't go in the airport lined up with guns like this. He says, This place accommodates over 200 people. Any place that accommodates over 200 people, we can exercise our constitutional rights and guns are not illegal, be quiet. Bobby, let's go. I says, All right, forward, hup. We start marching, we walked into the airport, walked all the way to the gate, waited for Sister Betty Shabazz, she got out, we surrounded her. We came out. Police are walking everywhere, people with their eyes all bugged out, What are these guys doin' with these guns? We come out, we get into the car and we take off. We go to *Ramparts Magazine* for Eldridge Cleaver to interview Sister Betty Shabazz. The police came up because there's two Panthers standing out in front of Ramparts. Several more police came up. Then some police came up and little Bobby Hutton was cussing this policeman out, telling him, You ain't comin' in here, you ain't got no warrant, because for us brothers begin to know a little law, etc., etc. And as we came out, Sister Betty Shabazz said she did not want any cameras. And so when we came out, Huey came out. So, Huey had a magazine and he put it up in front of this Channel Seven camera and the guy knocked it down, Huey put it back up and then the guy hit Huey. And then Huey turned around and popped the cameraman and then turned around, he said, Police officer, arrest this man, he assaulted me. [laughs] Imagine Huey is telling the policeman to arrest this White reporter with the, etcetera. He assaulted me. Then the police come around and start grabbing their guns, Huey said, Spread. Don't turn on your back on these back-shooting MFs. And the next thing you know we spread, I put my hand on my gun, the police says, Don't put your hand there, I said, Don't you put your hand on your gun. We spread it and we backed up, a real Mexican standoff. The other guys with the other group were gone with Sister Betty Shabazz, she'd been gone, and we got in our cars and we split and left. And then we found that the other guys, the five people didn't even have their guns loaded.

00:36:02:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Once again, the symbol, the name Black Panther, how did that come about and we're gonna talk about Lowndes County, Alabama?

Bobby Seale:

We were talking about—no, it's not Lowndes County, Alabama, I'm not saying that because it's not correct.

Interviewer #1:

OK, let's stop.

Bobby Seale:

The Lowndes County Freedom Organi—

00:36:17:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Stop down.

[cut]

[slate]

00:36:21:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. How did you come up with the name "Black Panther" for the Black Panther Party?

00:36:26:00

Bobby Seale:

Huey P. Newton and I had received a pamphlet from the Lowndes County Freedom Organization from down South and they had a logo of a picture of a charging black panther. I asked Huey, Why would they have a charging black panther? Later, he came up with the point that if you push a panther into a corner and if it can't go left and it can't go right, it will tend to come out of that corner to wipe out its aggressor, whoever had pushed it into the corner. And the analogy was that that's where Black people had been pushed. Peaceful demonstrators exercising the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States and then Bull Corners [sic] and racists brutalizing them. They couldn't go left, couldn't go right. With the petition we had for community police review boards, they ignored that, the city government. So, in effect, Huey and I decided to name the Black Panther Party the "Black

Panther Party for Self Defense." We later dropped the "Defense" because we didn't want to be tagged as a paramilitary organization.

00:37:18:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. I'm gonna go to some Fred Hampton questions now. What, what are your personal recollections, what personal recollections do you have of Fred Hampton as a party leader?

00:37:27:00

Bobby Seale:

My own personal recollections of Fred Hampton as a party leader was the time when I went to Chicago to see firsthand what brother Fred Hampton and, and, and, and Bobby Rush had organized. It blew my mind. Fred Hampton's charismatic ability to teach and rap to young brothers and sisters, have a thousand young brothers and sisters in the church all saying, Power to the people! Power to the people! Power to the people! And to even find out that Fred Hampton had previously been in the NAACP and here was, you know, had all these breakfast programs, the health clinics rolling and everything and to speak. And I remember later telling party members that, If anything ever happened to me, because I know sooner or later these racists are gonna wanna kill me, that since Fred Hampton is deputy chairman under me with the Illinois State Chapter of the Black Panther Party then he will become the chairman of our national organization. Please make sure you always consider him. And I was telling members of the central committee that. And Fred Hampton was just one of those young brothers who could articulate, bring home, capture the feeling of young people and break it down. He could break, I, I was good at breaking all this theory down so the average person'd understand it, but Fred Hampton, he was twice as good as I was.

00:38:38:00

Interviewer #1:

What support was Hampton, Bobby Rush, and the Chicago Panther Party to you, to, in, in organizing on your behalf during your trial in Chicago?

00:38:47:00

Bobby Seale:

The Chicago Chapter of the Black Panther Party, the Illinois State Chapter of the Black Panther Party is, well, well, automatically, I mean, you know. Let's back up, cut.

00:39:00:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Cut.

[cut]

00:39:03:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:39:0:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. How were Fred Hampton, Bobby Rush, and the Illinois State Chapter able to organize on your beha—behalf during your trial in Chicago?

00:39:14:00

Bobby Seale:

That was, Bobby Rush, Fred Hampton, the Illinois State Chapter of the Black Panther Party, it was automatic, you know, that you organize. I'm the Chairman of the National Organization of the Black Panther Party, there are numerous rallies that Fred Hampton and Bobby Rush put together, I mean, right outside the courtroom, you know, "Free Bobby," etc.

00:39:33:00

Interviewer #1:

Could you just refer to your trial? OK, once again.

Bobby Seale:

I'm, I'm so—

Interviewer #1:

All right. How did, how did Fred Hampton, Bobby Rush, and the Illinois State Chapter organize on your behalf during your trial in Chicago?

00:39:47:00

Bobby Seale:

That was automatic that, that Illinois State Chapter of the Black Panther Party would organize. They automatically organized rallies, what have you, etc., in relation to that particular trial, the Chicago Eight Conspiracy Trial, the one in which I was chained, shackled, and gagged. I mean, they had numerous rallies right outside the courtroom, marches, what have you, etc., to bring attention, of course, to the fact that I was being railroaded in Judge Julius Hoffman's courtroom.

00:40:11:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. The police and the FBI raided the Chicago Panther headquarters several times in 1969 and at one point they, like, broke in and knocked it down. Could you just tell that story about the time that they just tore the place apart and what you advised them to do and what the community did in, in response to what happened afterward?

00:40:32:00

Bobby Seale:

In 1969, practically every branch and chapter of the Black Panther Party throughout the United States was attacked not less than once and as much as five times, particularly in Chicago. There was, wait a minute, yeah, I'm goofing up here.

00:40:49:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, cut, cut.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #3:

Speed.

00:40:51:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:40:52:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. The police raided the Panther headquarters in Chicago in '69 several times. Just talk us through what happened and what you advised the, the Panthers to do after that office was raided.

00:41:03:00

Bobby Seale:

The Chicago Chapter of the Black Panther Party was attacked several times. And one particular time, I remember they raided the Black Panther Party office and they had a short shootout. And of course, we had a rule that we would take an arrest so somehow or another, you know, it was another [unintelligible] so they took the arrest but what the police did is they went in like Eliot Ness with sledgehammers. I mean, our press, all of our IBM typewriters that had been donated by the White radicals, our newspapers, I mean our mimeograph papers by the caseload, and then set the whole building on fire. This is what the FBI and the Chicago Police did. Now, *the idea on the part of the police was to psych the community out. They called me up the next day, I says, Is the office open? Well, no the police boarded the place up. I said, Open it back up. You got the lease to the place. What? I says, Open it up. Take all that boarding down, paint that place. And the Black Panther Party members started working for a couple of days. The next thing you know the community started bringing wood, paint, and everything, and opened that Black Panther Party office right back up. And of course, this was an attempt to terrorize us out of existence. At the same time if they, if we would close down, it would leave the Black community saying, Well, they stopped them.*

00:42:20:00

Interviewer #1:

How, how were your suspicions and, and fears of the FBI and other federal and local police forces changing in those years, in, in '68 and '69? How were you becoming more aware and more suspicious of them?

00:42:31:00

Bobby Seale:

Actually, through the year of '69 we had big purge in the Black Panther Party because we had grown by early '69 to seven, eight thousand Black Panth—Black people in the Black Panther Party. And we had too many provocateur agents and then too many incidents and things were happening, you know, like a \$42 service station robbery in the Black Panther Party newspaper truck with bold, black, one-foot letters that says "The Black Panther Black

Community News Service." For forty-two bucks and I'm bringing in twenty-five thousand dollars a year to the Black Panther Party, every penny going into the treasury of the Black Panther Party. What do we need with forty-two bucks, you see? So, this was a lot of provocateur agent activity that was going on, that in effect was an attempt on the part of the FBI to make us look bad in the eyes of not only the public but the Black community in particular. So, we were very leery and we began to kick people out. Even if people fooled around and wouldn't pass some leaflets out, kick 'em out. We got too many people in the organization, we didn't know what was happening because sometimes you would have some people passing out leaflets and then you find a stack of 'em in a trash can somewhere, you know, that kind of stuff. And who was in this area, so kick that person out of the party, get rid of 'em. We, we were too big. In fact, I think we reduced, by the end of that year, we reduced our membership by fifty percent.

00:43:44:00

Interviewer #1:

And were you more suspicious of the police as well? I, I mean—

00:43:48:00

Bobby Seale:

We were infiltrated, we were infiltrated by the FBI, police, provocateur agents. I mean, it's documented fact through COINTELPRO's operations, through our Freedom of Information Act, fact. I mean, the, they're showing, I mean, that the FBI had set up for the National Guard Armory in Chicago to be ripped off and then blamed on us. I mean, it was all set up using provocateur agents by the FBI to do that. You know, I mean, John Huggins and Alprentice Bunchy Carter had been shot, killed, and murdered in UCLA. And nowadays, we find and trace all this information back to provocateur agent activity orchestrated by what? The FBI.

00:44:32:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, de-de-describe how you learned about Fred, that Fred Hampton had been, had been murdered and, and your personal reaction.

00:44:39:00

Bobby Seale:

I had been brought back to Oakland—San Francisco, I'd been brought, I had been brought back from Chicag—I'd been brought back from the Chicago Conspiracy Trial back to Oakland to wait extradition and was in jail December the 4th and—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Bobby Seale:

—I picked up the newspaper that morning, I could get—

00:45:02:00

Interviewer #1:

Rollout.

Camera Crew Member #2:

That was a rollout on thirty, sixty-eight.

[cut]

[camera roll #3069]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Thirty, sixty-nine. Time code fourteen ten.

00:45:09:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:45:12:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Describe how you learned about Fred Hampton's murder and, and, and what was your personal reaction?

00:45:22:00

Bobby Seale:

[sigh] I was sitting in San Francisco County Jail that morning and read the newspapers that Fred Hampton and Mark Clark had been killed and murdered that morning. Over the next few days, I found out a few more facts of the situation and to hear and understand that State's Attorney Hanrahan with a special force—police group had entered the house at five a.m. in the morning and shot the place up. And to understand—hear that the bedroom, the wall this way to the bedroom and the wall this way to the bedroom had hundreds of rounds shot in at bed level. I mean, and then hear that Fred Hampton had been shot in the head. It—and Mark Clark of course killed on the entry at five a.m. in the morning to me was, it was a culminating point, you know. I had worried about too many of us getting killed earlier but it was a culminating point. The only real relief that came out of that was a couple months later when Roy Wilkins of the NAACP created a commission to investigate the FBI's concerted attempt to smash the Black Panther Party, which really is a pivot point and which caused a decline in attacks upon Black people—Black, upon Black Panther Party members' offices and homes.

00:46:41:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. And just going back a little bit. At one point, Fred Hampton had, had rejected the Weather Underground. What was, what was the talk in, in, inside the Central Committee of the, of the Panther Party when, when he made that decision?

00:46:56:00

Bobby Seale:

It wasn't Fred Hampton who rejected the Weather Underground, it was me. I gave Fred Hampton direct orders not to participate with the Weather Underground. [laughs] Eldridge Cleaver wanted him to participate. Eldridge Cleaver was trying to run the Black Panther Party from Algiers. I said, Don't participate in it because all you're doin' is setting yourself up. I says, The Black Panther, I says, They're young Whites and I'm not opposed to their activity but do not bring Black people out of the Black community to run with the wh—White young, un—underground in the White community. It don't work, brother. All they're gonna do is corner you and they're gonna kill the Blacks before they kill the Whites. I gave him direct orders not to participate, in opposition to Eldridge Cleaver attempting to give Fred Hampton direct orders to participate, and Fred Hampton followed my directives.

00:47:42:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. We're going to the Gary Convention now. You, you made a point in your speech at the Gary Convention, you're saying, "I won't call my brothers pigs, not in Gary, Indiana." What are, what are your most vivid recollections of going to a major National Black Political Convention in a city with a Black mayor and with a Black, Black chief of police?

00:48:03:00

Bobby Seale:

Well, I thought that was positive to the extent that previously to that, the Afro-American Policemen's League in Chi—of the Chicago Police Department basically supported us. Most people don't know that there were quite a few policemen here and there who understood what we were getting at when we talked about structured racism inside the police department. Most people don't know that when Huey and I, around the time we first started the Black Panther Party, we had a Black policeman who was a friend of ours who recruited with the police department. We didn't want to destroy the police department, what we wanted to do was run it. That's why I ran for mayor of Oakland in the first place, so we could reorder it and redirect it and make sure it served the real basic desires and needs of the people. So, when we had a Black mayor, a Black police chief, etc., that was like a sign of things beginning to change, you know, to control those agencies of government was important in terms of when you start talking about power or Black Power.

00:48:55:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. But specifically, let's talk about Gary. Is the—

00:48:58:00

Bobby Seale:

Well, see, I don't know that much about Gary. I just made that statement as a sign of direction of change that was comin'. I don't know much about Gary, I knew that we had a Black mayor. I thought that was great that a Black mayor could be elected. The fact that we had our, some policemen there and a po—a Black police chief, that was important. Now, on the other end of the fact, what if that Black policeman chief later had turned out to be a vicious, a vicious, I'd then call him a vicious Black pig, you see what I mean? So, I mean, I can distinguish between the color you are and the content of your character, you see what I mean? So, it was like a hope for decent character that may hopefully evolve.

00:49:35:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. What was your message to the convention in Gary and, and how did you feel about, how do you feel you were received?

00:49:41:00

Bobby Seale:

I wasn't allowed to participate in the convention. I was taken to some entertainment thing to speak to some people for twenty minutes which I always thought was absurd in the first place, being one, a, an organization as the Black Panther Party which was entrenched and rooted into this overall struggle. So, for whatever reason, whoever organized that convention, they obviously didn't want a leading representative of the Black Panther Party to participate in the convention.

00:50:08:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. A major theme of Gary was "Unity without uniformity." Do you recall a sense of unity or was the conventions marked by rifts and differences that you remember?

00:50:20:00

Bobby Seale:

I don't even know nothin' about the convention. I flew in one afternoon, I got in there at si—four, five o'clock. I spoke that night, later went to a hotel, and caught a plane the next day. See, I don't even know what those guys was pulling, you know, they didn't want, they didn't want us—

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

[cut]

[wild sound]

Bobby Seale:

—in it, that's what it was, for whatever silly reason, I don't know.

00:50:38:00

Interviewer #1:

You still rolling?

Camera Crew Member #1:

No, they're cut.

Interviewer #1:

OK.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

OK. You, you talked about Fred Hampton's effectiveness in organizing programs and the, and the Panthers in Chicago, their effectiveness there. What expectations did the national leaders of the Panthers have for Hampton in 1969?

00:50:56:00

Bobby Seale:

That's [laughs] cut.

00:50:59:00

Camera Crew Member #3:

Cut.

[cut]

00:51:01:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:51:03:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. How did the Central Committee work in terms of coordinat-coordinating, you know, the, those, the branches with the national, with, with, with the Central Committee? How was that coordination worked out?

00:51:13:00

Bobby Seale:

Largely, the Central Committee evolved to a point to we may have had ten or twelve different members they were mostly initially composed of people who ran chapters in other states. Many times, like we may not get to Fred Hampton or Bobby Rush in Chicago but if the Central Committee, if we had a quorum for it, if we had a majority or three quarter votes for a particular policy, now this is, all right, we gonna have, create breakfast for children programs. The Central Committee agree, called democratic centralism which is majority vote. Then we'd give directives to chapters and branches, that they had to set up a free breakfast program or set up a pre—preventative medical health care clinic, beginning maybe with sickle cell anemia testing in a local church that may allow the use of that church. So, it was a lot of directives given. We may have, we had Minister of Defense, Chairman, Minister of Education, Minister of Information and so on. Well, in each chapter, we had Deputy Chairman, Deputy Minister of Defense, you know, Deputy Minister of Education and so on. Each branch, you know what I mean, it was like Director of Minister of Education and so on for each chapter and branch, so that they could carry out their basic functions based on the directives they got from the Central Committee of the Black Panther Party.

00:52:26:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. That's a cut. All right. We're just gonna switch.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

This is with Team B with Sam Pollard. Ready?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #3:

Marking.

[slate]

Interviewer #2:

OK, Bobby. How were you contacted about coming to Attica?

Bobby Seale:

Actually, Huey—

00:52:42:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

I'm sorry. I, I was making noise. I'm sorry. OK, now. OK, start again, the same.

00:52:47:00

Interviewer #2:

How were you contacted about coming to Attica?

00:52:49:00

Bobby Seale:

Huey Newton was first asked to be a member of that committee dealing with At—Attica and the Central Committee voted that maybe I should go. And via Bill Kunstler, I think it was, who originally had called, was the real initial contact there I think if I'm not mis—I forget exactly how that went.

00:53:17:00

Interviewer #2:

Let's cut a second. It was Kunstler.

Bobby Seale:

Huh?

Interviewer #2:

Kuns—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible] Team B.

00:53:22:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:53:25:00

Interviewer #2:

How were you contacted about coming to Attica?

00:53:27:00

Bobby Seale:

Actually, Bill Kunstler had contacted the Black Panther Party. Originally, the request from the prisoners was for Huey but then the Central Committee decided that I would go. When we arrived to Attica, at first they wouldn't even let me in the prison, the very first day. I mean, these guards came up and pointed shotguns at the front windshield and the rear windshield, you know. And then finally, Kunstler was called out and then they refused to let me in. We left the grounds, was on the highway headed back to Buffalo, New York. [pumps arms] Here come some state troopers stopping us, you know, Warden Oswald wants you to come back. Oh, OK. When we go back, they let us in. I see the committee for a short period there and they're trying to, some are talking to me about the need to get these prisoners to drop the last three negotiating points. We go into the prison. When I get into the prison, I make a speech to the prisoners, you know, and power to the people, prisoner's power, etc., to this effect, OK. Then when we finish with the speech, there's a lot of other committee members with us, you know, the negotiating committee. And about two, there's a couple of the brothers call and said, Bobby, could we pull you over here and talk with you? So, they pulled me down to other end of the table, away from everybody else, away from any cameras, and this is what they explained. They wanted me to see if it was possible that, if we could get a helicopter, a sizeable helicopter to come in over the wall real fast, let the nine or ten prisoners who wanted to get out and then take them out of the country, and then they would drop the last three negotiating points. I says, What? And they say, You. They heard, these prisoners heard that we had a Black United Airlines pilot, I mean, who flew on a full-time job with United Airlines. And he did work with us because he was a editor part-time of the Black Panther Party newspaper, and I said, Hey, I don't know, I said, But I see where you brothers are coming from because that would be real revolutionary act. I really had identified

with that, could we pull this off? I says, I [unintelligible] what it means, I'm saying, I'm gonna have to leave, man, in the morning or something to get back to Oakland because I got to talk to Central Committee, I can't talk on the phones or whatever. He says, right. So, next morning, so I leave the prison, next morning I try to get, really get back in the prison but they won't let me back in. Oswald, Warden Oswald would not let me back in. I leave and catch a plane of twelve noon or something, I wind up in California. You know, it'd be two, three hours behind, the difference in time, what have you. I have a meeting, Charles Garry, our lawyer, Charles Garry, he's the chief counsel for all cases of the Black Panther Party comes over. I tell him what the situation is. We deduct that it's impossible to get even anybody, any, meaning our White radical friends or anybody with such short notice even to even consider whether or not they would take the chance of getting killed to fly over with a helicopter.

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Bobby Seale:

I said, Well, I'm gonna have to go back, I says, you know, so that night, Sunday night, remember I flew in—

00:56:30:00

Interviewer #2:

We ran out.

Camera Crew Member #2:

A roll—a rollout for thirty, sixty-nine.

Interviewer #2:

That was good. What I'm gonna do is I'm gonna ask—

[cut]

[camera roll #3070]

Camera Crew Member #2:

This is for Team B.

00:56:36:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:56:40:00

Interviewer #2:

OK. Let's start from this question. What was it like when you got to Attica? When you finally, when you got to the prison? What was the atmosphere like and how were you treated?

00:56:48:00

Bobby Seale:

When me and my other Black Panther Party members arrived there, we was readily surrounded with shotguns, you know, a couple of guards in front and a couple of police, state policemen in the rear, shotguns pointed directly at the window. I mean, actually pointed when they found out I was Bobby Seale, that's when they did it, OK. And what we were trying to say to somebody, well, the lawyer said, This is Bobby Seale, and so he got a hold of Kunstler and Kunstler came out, and that's when they took the shotguns away. And then the word was out that Commissioner Oswald did not want me in the prison, would not let me in. And the news had covered that event, you know, that I was leaving and the prisoners saw over the television inside the prison that I was not allowed in. And something happened because I had split, you know, we was halfway back to Buffalo, ten miles from the prison and a state trooper car comes along and stops us and says, Commissioner Oswald would like for you to come back to prison. He will let you in.

00:57:54:00

Interviewer #2:

Good. Let's cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[cut]

00:57:56:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:58:00:00

Interviewer #2:

Now, you went inside and you met the other observers and Commissioner Oswald and they presented the twenty-eight points to you. What was your reaction to the twenty-eight points?

00:58:06:00

Bobby Seale:

Well, they were basically twenty-eight points and to me they were deman—they were the demands of the prisoners, you know. Of course, my point was that I needed to get inside the prison to talk to the prisoners about the twenty-eight points. A couple of the people, though, have said that, We gotta get them to compromise on these last three points. I think Commissioner Oswald had made the [unintelligible] 'cause, We cannot negotiate on these last three points, so we went inside. When I went inside the prison, finally when we got past of all this massive amount of firepower and idiot guards making a statement, you know what I mean, Yeah, we'll blow your ass away, or something like this, what have you, etc., If anything happens, you get it too. They were saying that to me and my other party members who was with us. Finally, when we got to where the prisoners were, well, the leaders of the negotiating, the prisoners' aspect, had me speak, I spoke. We sit down and we start talking and then three of the brothers pulled me to the side at the other end of the table, where no cameras and nobody was at, and started rapping to me about, We need a helicopter in here. If we can get a helicopter in here and get the eight or nine or ten, whoever it was that they wanted out, Who could leave the country and go into exile. Then that, that point they would negotiate on the, they would drop the other three points that Oswald would not negotiate on, which involved some prisoners leaving the country as exile, one of those points, one of those last three points that were non-negotiable. So, in effect, I couldn't, in other words I, I just couldn't make a decision that I was gonna bring a helicopter. I told them I had to go back to Oakland, California, I had to talk to Central Committee of the Black Panther Party to do this. So, the next morning, which was Sunday, I came back to the prison and attempted to go in again. Commissioner Oswald would not let me in.

00:59:58:00

Interviewer #2:

Let's cut. That's goo—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Rolling in [unintelligible] for B.

[slate]

Interviewer #2:

OK, ready?

01:00:06:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Just a second. Yes.

01:00:09:00

Interviewer #2:

What happened in the, that next morning after the Saturday night when you went into the yard?

01:00:15:00

Bobby Seale:

Next morning, I came back to the prison and I got inside. I went into the negotiating committee's room, you know, this, and Commissioner Oswald's there, I told them to tell him I wanted to get in, and Commissioner Oswald came out and says, Are you gonna tell 'em they have to drop the last three points? I said, Commissioner Oswald, I can't do that at this time, you know. He said, Well, if you can't tell them to do that, then you can't go in the prison. So I left, caught a plane a couple of hours later, flew to San Francisco, immediately had Huey P. Newton and other members of the Central Committee and Charles Garry, our lawyer, come, because we had to make this private between, Charles Garry was all of our lawyers, right. So, if anything come about conspiracy, well, this is between our lawyers and us and what legal ground we have. And I explained to 'em that they wanted a helicopter to fly in over the wall to let the prisoners, nine or ten prisoners get out and then, because they'd heard we had a United Airlines, Black United Airlines pilot who was a member of the Black Panther Party who edited our paper, newspaper part-time, sometimes. And they thought maybe we could get a pilot for a helicopter. But, Huey P. Newton and I and the rest of it, it was too short a period of time, it was too short notice, even if we, even if we, if we could have got one of our White radical revolutionary friends. It was too short a notice to even put it all together and that the best thing I could do is go back and try to get with, with the negotiating committee to try to see what we could do now. The problem with me is I wasn't able to say for the

prisoners that you're gonna drop those last three points, I couldn't do that. But that morning, Monday morning, when I arrived back in Buffalo coming from the airport, one of the local lawyers had picked us up, dropped us off at the hotel. We threw our bags in the door, shut the door, got back in the car. Live on radio is suddenly, as we're driving a couple of miles from Buffalo, The prison and the prisoners are being attacked. I mean, this is what's going on, we hear this live on radio. We drive a few miles and say, They've attacked the prison. I mean, this is live. Next day, I was still there in Buffalo, *The New York Times* has printed that Bobby Seale had went in that last Saturday night and told the prisoners to cut the throats of the guards which, of course, the coroner later confirmed that not one of the prison—which I never did tell the prisoners that because I would—

[rollout on sound roll]

[cut]

[sound roll #333]

01:02:48:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:02:51:00

Interviewer #2:

OK. I want you to pick up from after you, you went, after you left the prison and you went back to Oakland. What happened when you went back to Oakland?

01:03:00:00

Bobby Seale:

When I got back to Oakland, we had a Central Committee meeting, Charles Garry came over. We discussed the fact that it, it was impossible to get a helicopter or a pilot to fly into, over the prison wall and that the best thing for me to do is go back. So, Charles Garry decided to go back with me and that's in effect basically what happened.

01:03:24:00

Interviewer #2:

When you got back you heard about, you heard about, you were in car, and you heard on the radio they had attacked the, retake—retaken the, the yard.

01:03:33:00

Bobby Seale:

No, well, we had arrived at the airpo—picked up at the airport the next Monday morning, early that Monday morning. We went to a motel, threw our bags in the door, jumped in the car, headed to the prison. After a couple of miles on the road, there was a live broadcast of what was going on at the prison and suddenly the live broadcast began to say, They've attacked the prison, they're attacking now, and you could actually hear the gunfire in the background over the live broadcast of the car radio. And I've always contended that I was not the right person to be one of the key negotiating members concerning Attica, because you needed a person more like Martin Luther King or even Malcolm X probably could handle it better than me. Because I had a real dedication to political revolutionary activity, even at that time, you know. Having twenty-six-year Black Panther Party members killed by vicious racists in this country. Of course, we killed fourteen of them too, in their attacks on us. But it'd gotten to a point that I con—I considered the idea if, if it was possible to bring a helicopter in over the wall, as a pure revolutionary act against the penal legal system that's part and parcel of the racist power structure in America. To me, that was like really getting to the nitty gritty of criticizing the penal legal system in America because if you really got down to a real reform in the prison system of America, you would have to question the whole exploitation that goes on with capitalism in America.

01:05:01:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, let's cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[cut]

01:05:03:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

And speed, mark it.

[slate]

01:05:05:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. What was the atmosphere like in Attica as you were in there? What was, I mean, what was goin' on, what was the tension? What was the f—what was, what was the feelings like in there?

01:05:16:00

Bobby Seale:

When I got into the prison yard and they announced that, Brother Bobby Seale is here, on the microphone as I was walking in, Right on! These brothers is, it was, like, overwhelmed. It was like, it was victory. Bobby, we got Bobby Seale in here, the political revolutionary they'd probably heard so much about. That's what was going on. I mean, it was a per—pure warm welcoming, you know, in the sense that, Hey, Brother Bobby is here. I mean, there's been movies and stuff that misportrayed my role there, you know.

01:05:48:00

Interviewer #2:

OK. I mean, not just, not just what's happening with the prisoners but the, but the, the, the guards and all that too, OK?

Bobby Seale:

Oh, that's before we get to the yard.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Bobby Seale:

You have to go down this long hall.

Interviewer #2:

Tell me about that.

01:05:58:00

Bobby Seale:

OK. Finally, Commissioner Oswald said we could go, so then we're walking through the halls and finally we get to a certain section that, I mean, they have police, guards, lined up piggyback, so to speak, twenty on this side, twenty on this side, then there's a upper level catwalk where there's ten or fifteen up there. They got machine guns, I'm talkin' righteous machine guns, shotguns. And so we have to stop when we walk through this section here and these racist guards talking about, Yeah, you guys, you're gonna get it too. If anything happens, we're gonna make sure, I'm gonna make sure, and somebody, I'm gonna make sure I blow him away, I'm gonna make sure I get his ass, or something with this effect, you know. So, that's this racist atmosphere and this is the cutoff point between out here and when you get ready to go down to this long corridor, before you go down this long corridor where the prisoners are in control, OK? So, this is one thing, we had to walk through this situation, so, you know, vicious racism.

01:07:03:00

Interviewer #2:

OK. Cut.

[cut]

01:07:05:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

On three, three, three, back to team C. Mark it.

[slate]

01:07:09:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. What were your expectations when you went to the Gary, the National Black Political Convention in Gary and what, what did you find when you got there?

01:07:18:00

Bobby Seale:

I was invited to speak at the National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana. And I thought that I would give some kind of speech to the convention itself, you know, with respect to us, the Black Panther Party, who were heavy political organizers around America. And when I arrived there, Jesse Jackson met me, and at some locations they told us to show at, he brought in Isaac Hayes. Isaac Hayes met me, I rapped with Isaac Hayes for a while. And then later, I was asked to come out to speak and I realized that I was speaking following

some entertainment event and so I spoke for ten or fifteen minutes and then when we finish, I asked Jesse if I'm not—if I remember correctly, I thought I was supposed to speak at the political convention where they were dealing with hammering out ideological and political goal objectives? He says, No, you were scheduled to speak here at this event. I says, Oh. Later, Isaac Hayes went on at this location that I was at which to me at that point, I realized that I had been pulled in or was being ostracized from the real convention floor delegates and people. Most of the people I was speaking to were dressed for a entertainment night situation, you know.

01:08:42:00

Interviewer #1:

Why, why do you think you weren't asked to speak on the main floor?

01:08:47:00

Bobby Seale:

I don't know. Maybe it had to do with the prominence of the Black Panther Party, maybe it had to do with—

Interviewer #2:

Could you just rephrase the question [unintelligible]?

Bobby Seale:

What was the question again?

Interviewer #2:

Why weren't asked to speak on the main convention floor?

01:09:02:00

Bobby Seale:

The reason that maybe I wasn't asked to speak on the convention floor may have been, had to do with our own prominence, maybe it had to do with a group of people who didn't necessarily, may have thought that we may have took some kind of leadership role in the National Black Political Convention. We were heavily critical of, of cultural nationalism being a, a part of leading what we thought should have been political revolutionary activity. That may have been a reason, you know, I couldn't. But in one context, I felt slighted, I thought it was underhanded on the part of whoever organized the convention. Which, in

effect, see that con—contributed to a lot of things that went down in the '60's and the early '70's. On the one hand, here we have—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Bobby Seale:

—law enforcement agencies doing everything they can to keep us from getting together.

01:10:00:00

Interviewer #2:

OK. We just rolled out. Anyway, I think we got it.

Bobby Seale:

OK?

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK?

Interviewer #1:

Yes.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, one second.

[cut]

[end of interview]

01:10:07:00

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