

Interview with **Mike Wallace**

Date: October 12, 1998

Interviewer: James A. DeVinney

Camera Rolls: 1001-1002

Sound Rolls: 101

Team: A

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

Preferred Citation

Interview with Mike Wallace, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on October 12, 1998 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 #1001]

[sound roll #101]

[slate]

00:00:12:00

Interviewer:

—try to incorporate the answer into, the question into the answer—

00:00:14:00

Mike Wallace:

I'll try to.

00:00:15:00

Interviewer:

—but just give me, your statement will stand alone.

00:00:18:00

Mike Wallace:

Sure.

00:00:19:00

Interviewer:

And you can talk to me, I'm close enough to the camera lens that—

00:00:21:00

Mike Wallace:

Gotcha.

00:00:25:00

Camera crew member #1:

OK. Interview with Mike Wallace. New York City. Team A

00:00:36:00

Interviewer:

OK, tell me, first of all, how that 1959 documentary came about.

00:00:40:00

Mike Wallace:

Lou Lomax, a reporter I'd never heard of, came to my office, told me about something called the Black Muslims. I'd never heard of them. We went next-door to Sardi's Restaurant to have lunch, and he told me at great length about an organization called the Black Muslims. He didn't tell me how many people they were or how strong they were. What he suggested to me was that they were not a particularly well-known organization. They had never been written about in the White press, that there was very little ken of them in the White community. ***Would we be interested in doing a broadcast, a documentary, about them? I suggested that, yeah, we might. Let's learn more about them. One of the conditions of our doing the broadcast, he said, was they will not talk to a White reporter.*** Therefore, who was going to be the reporter? It was obvious. Lomax wanted the job. Lomax had... good contact with the Muslims, with Malcolm X, with Elijah Muhammad, and people around them. So, Ted Yates, who was the producer with whom I worked, and I finally made a deal for Lomax to go to work on that documentary for us. The reporter on that documentary was Louis Lomax. The producer was Ted Yates. I was the narrator, but I never met Elijah Muhammad at that time. Matter of fact, have never. Never did meet Elijah Muhammad, and did not meet Malcolm X at that time. All that I did was voice over, anchor, the work done by Lomax and camera crew. And, after that, and we called it *The Hate That Hate Produced*, and after that went on the air, we put it on five minutes a night on local news, and it attracted some

attention. We decided to make an hour of it, and following that, there were various people from the Black community who participated in a forum about it.

00:02:40:00

Interviewer:

I'd like to ask you how the title came about.

00:02:42:00

Mike Wallace:

I don't remember.

00:02:44:00

Interviewer:

I was just wondering what it m—what it meant, if there was a particular meaning to it?

00:02:48:00

Mike Wallace:

The, the meaning of *The Hate That Hate Produced* was, there is hate, hatred, suspicion, whatever, on both sides. If indeed the Muslims hated the Whites, and they acknowledged that they did, Malcolm was very eloquent about that. Elijah Muhammad was very eloquent about it. They were racist. They were separatists. They wanted, they wanted to separate, separate the Blacks from the Whites in this country. If they felt that hatred, it was in reaction to the hatred that they felt had been directed against them, therefore, *The Hate That Hate Produced*.

00:03:26:00

Interviewer:

In your opening remarks, you referred to the Muslims being preachers of hate while sober-minded negroes stood idly by. I was wondering who some of those sober-minded negroes were who were standing by?

00:03:36:00

Mike Wallace:

The, the entire Black leadership, and take a look at the, the Black leadership back then. Roy Wilkins, for instance, a man, a friend of mine, a man for whom I had great respect. Word of the Black Muslims simply had not filtered out to the, to the White community. To the White

journalistic community, to the White community in general. When I first heard about the Muslims, I, I didn't know what Lou Lomax was telling me about. And, when I say "stood idly by," we never heard a word from any of the Black leadership at that time that there was this group called Black Muslims.

00:04:18:00

Interviewer:

What about Malcolm X? You've been talking about the Muslims. Tell me a little bit about your first impression of Malcolm X on that program.

00:04:24:00

Mike Wallace:

My impression of Malcolm X? My impression of Malcolm X on that first program was that he was a demagogue racist. What some people think of Louis Farrakhan today is what I felt about Malcolm X when I first saw, on film, not in person, what he had said about Whites. That's what I felt about him. And only later did I meet him and begin to talk to him, and become a friend of Malcolm's, as he began to understand, I think, Whites better. As he began to—I think that Malcolm—what the heck am I trying to say, here? Maybe I should wait and listen to—yeah. [clears throat]

00:05:20:00

Interviewer:

Let's stop down here for a moment because it may be good.

00:05:21:00

Camera crew member #1:

Can we cut for a moment?

00:05:22:00

Interviewer:

Yeah, let's cut.

[cut]

00:05:23:00

Camera crew member #1:

Team A

Camera crew member #2:

Are you gonna continue a new subject or, or what?

Interviewer:

We'll just sort of pick—another question, yeah.

Camera crew member #1:

OK, another question.

[slate]

00:05:36:00

Interviewer:

Louis Lomax, of course, was Black. You were White. When you were putting the program together, did that lead to any differences of opinion?

00:05:42:00

Mike Wallace:

None. None. Lomax knew the subject. We didn't. We were being introduced to the subject. Ted Yates, who is now dead, killed on the first day of the Six-Day War, was a fine producer. I was editor, reporter. And we, we had talked to Lomax enough, and he had talked enough to the principals, Elijah, Malcolm, and others, for us to believe what he delivered to us.

00:06:14:00

Interviewer:

That's an interesting point of view, though. You, you were actually doing the show for a White audience, then, to actually educate them as to what this group's about.

00:06:19:00

Mike Wallace:

Not necessarily to a White audience. We were doing it for the New York audience, which is hardly a White audience. It's [pause] *The Hate That Hate Produced*, for a young outfit, an

outfit with not much money. We had \$3,000 budget for this documentary, one hour. For this young outfit, that was a kind of a maverick outfit Newsmaker Productions, working on Channel 13, which was then a not, a commercial outfit. It hadn't turned educational yet. For us to get this kind of a story was really quite extraordinary. I doubt maybe that some of the so-called establishment television stations at the time would've done the story.

00:07:12:00

Interviewer:

OK, what sort of response did the show get?

00:07:15:00

Mike Wallace:

John Crosby was the, the nation's television critic at the time. He was astonished. Wrote about it, wrote about it glowingly, and suggested that other people should pay attention to it. As a result of which, because up to that time, there hadn't been a word about the Black Muslims in any of, of White publication. Following that, *US News*, *New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, others, followed up the *Free Press* out in Detroit. Actually, it was the first time that the Black Muslims came to the attention of White America.

00:07:59:00

Interviewer:

So, was there any angry response?

00:08:02:00

Mike Wallace:

There was, there was angry response. Following the hour that we put on, on Channel 13, of *The Hate That Hate Produced*, we had a group of Jackie Robinson, Roy Wilkins, Gardner Taylor, Arnold Foster from the Anti-Defamation League, and a woman, Black woman, Anna Hedgeman. A couple of them, especially Roy Wilkins, Jackie Robinson to some degree, suggested that we had overstated about the Black Muslims, that, that they weren't as important as we had made them by devoting this hour to the subject. It took White journalism only a couple or three months to do much more than we had done, very shortly thereafter, and some of the people in the panel wrote eventually to *The New York Times*, which had in effect downgraded *The Hate That Hate Produced*. Some of the people who took part in that panel wrote to the *Times* chiding them for having not paid enough attention and taken the broadcast seriously enough.

00:09:16:00

Interviewer:

How are we doing on the roll there, Bob? Have we got time for another question? Are we s'posed to—

Camera crew member #2:

We have, yeah, we got 30 feet left.

00:09:23:00

Interviewer:

Alright, during that time, there was a lot of attention paid to the civil rights movement in the South, a lot of attention paid to Martin Luther King. Was there a media position with respect to Malcolm and the Nation of Islam? That, because it doesn't seem like they got quite as much—

00:09:38:00

Mike Wallace:

Well, I would—[sighs]—the White, the White press generally did not know who Malcolm was. They did not know who Elijah Muhammad was. They simply didn't have any ken of the Black Muslim movement. So, they weren't getting any attention. We began to get them attention.

00:09:58:00

Interviewer:

OK. Can we slate this?

Mike Wallace:

Sure.

Camera crew member #2:

OK. Hit it.

[slate]

00:10:03:00

Mike Wallace:

OK? Sh— want me to take that again?

00:10:05:00

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

Mike Wallace:

You'll let me know when.

00:10:08:00

Interviewer:

Now.

00:10:10:00

Mike Wallace:

OK. White journalism at that time didn't know who Malcolm was, didn't know who Elijah Muhammad was, had no ken of the Black Muslims. So, there was no attention being paid at that time. It took some time following that for major publications, White publications if you will, *The New York Times*, the *US News*, *Detroit Free Press*, to come forth and begin to pay attention, to put reporters on it and find out that the Black Muslims were, indeed, a substantial group and a group that had to be dealt with.

00:10:46:00

Interviewer:

OK. I would sort of like to jump forward a little bit—

Mike Wallace: Sure.

Interviewer:

—in time to maybe—

Camera crew member #2:

We've got 30 feet left.

Interviewer:

About 30 feet? Translate that to time for me, I'm not sure that's enough.

Mike Wallace:

About—it's about a minute, yeah.

Interviewer:

I thought it sounded like very little.

Mike Wallace:

Is this alright—

[cut]

00:10:57:00

Interviewer:

—and you know, even the story that we were talked about earlier

Camera crew member #2:

OK. One, one oh oh two.

00:11:06:00

Interviewer:

Alright, aware of the fact that we're jumping time, tell me about when Malcolm came in and talked to you.

00:11:13:00

Mike Wallace:

Was the date of that 1965?

00:11:15:00

Interviewer:

I think it was '64.

00:11:16:00

Mike Wallace:

Sixty-four? Sixty-four. After Malcolm went to Mecca, and I heard from him a couple of times, postcards was all, but he had some confidence in me, felt that I was a friend, and as he began to learn, and he felt that certain White reporters were trustworthy, and he used to write to me occasionally. After Malcolm came back from Mecca, I wanted to talk to him. I was at CBS by then. And, he came into my office and said to me, in effect, as a matter of fact, I'm trying to think, I don't want to say what I— make up what I don't remember. Malcolm came to my office at CBS, and suggested that he was in danger. I said, What are you talking about? They are out to get me. Who? The Black Muslims. Why? And I'll tell you why, he said. And then, he began to tell me a tale about Elijah Muhammad as a lecher. I said what do you mean, a lecher? He fathered children by young women whom he had taken as secretaries from out of town. Not one, not two, but several women. And, I found that very difficult to believe. He said, Mike, I will prove it to you. I will get on the phone with some of the people who are now living in Los Angeles, and I'll let you listen. And indeed, that's what happened. He called a couple of women on the West Coast. We have a transcript of that conversation, because on the—also listening was my secretary, a young, Southern woman, who was scared to death by what she heard, but it was quite apparent from that phone conversation that, indeed, the allegations by Malcolm were correct, that Elijah Muhammad had fathered children by a group of people, group of young women, who had been working as his secretaries. He felt that, because of that, and I suggested to him, Malcolm, you start talking about this publicly, you're going to get killed. And he said, in effect, he knew there was this danger, but he was going to go ahead with it. He was killed. What was the date of his death?

00:13:45:00

Interviewer:

February 21st '65.

00:13:50:00

Mike Wallace:

It was only a very short time later that he was gunned down here in New York City.

00:13:56:00

Interviewer:

Besides some of these incidents, you seem to have had some sort of a personal relationship with him. Tell me your, your impression of, of Malcolm X as a man.

00:14:01:00

Mike Wallace:

Malcolm was on a voyage of discovery. Discovery of himself, discovery of the White man. He was not, he was not tied to an understanding of the White man, not tied by the Black Muslims, willing to understand that he was wrong about some Whites. I liked Malcolm. I liked his strength. I liked his humor. I liked his openness, and I admired, I must say, his determination, his ambition to be a Black leader. He was, he was in search of a group. He wanted to be a leader. He knew that there was Roy Wilkins and the NAACP. He knew there was Martin Luther King. He knew there were various other Black leaders, and he was trying to find his place in that constellation, and his OAU was his effort, as I understood it, to try to do that.

00:15:10:00

Interviewer:

You mentioned you liked his humor. Can you give me an example?

Mike Wallace:

I can't.

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm. OK.

Mike Wallace:

I can't.

00:15:16:00

Interviewer:

When you met him, after he returned from Mecca, did he seem like a changed man to you in any way?

00:15:20:00

Mike Wallace:

Yeah. When he returned from Mecca, he did indeed seem like a changed man. It's as though he had made an extraordinary discovery of himself and of White people in general. It's as though that, that, that voyage, not just to Mecca, but to the Middle East and, and rubbing up against White reporters, and rubbing up against a variety of people, had simply broadened his view of life. He was, he was such an intelligent man anyway, such a capable man, such a, such a charismatic man. And, I felt, I had felt, that he was beginning to get an education even as I was getting educated about the Black community then, he was beginning to be educated about the White community.

00:16:06:00

Interviewer:

What do you think? We're pretty much out of the questions that I had prepared, I'm just sort of curious if there's any other thing that you'd like to tell me about Malcolm? You've had a number of contacts with him. Is there any particular moment that stands out that [inaudible]?

00:16:20:00

Mike Wallace:

No. There isn't. No, there really, really isn't. As I said, we weren't—the moment that stands out was when he came to my office and told me, Look, I am gonna tell this tale about Elijah Muhammad, a man for whom I had, he had this admiration. He, he was the leader, and he was going to tell the tale that he said had been told him by Elijah Muhammad's son, Wallace, that Elijah was a lecher who had impregnated several of his secretaries. He knew he was gonna put himself in danger when he told that tale. He told it publicly. He told that to me, in my office, and it was only two-three months before he was gunned down.

Interviewer:

Let's stop down one more time, we may be at the end of it. Carol, are there any—

[cut]

00:17:09:00

[slate]

00:17:10:00

Camera crew member #1:

Thank you. OK. Any time.

00:17:15:00

Interviewer:

OK, if you could just give me your response, when Louis Lomax came back with some of this film, what—

00:17:21:00

Mike Wallace:

When Lou Lomax came back with the film of the rally, the Black Muslim rally, I was simply stunned. I mean, here was this auditorium, overflowing, thousands of people, about an organization I knew nothing about. I found it difficult to credit when I, when I saw it. And of course, when we put it on the air, New Yorkers, 'cause that's all who saw it, were stunned that this, there was this organization, the Black Muslims, about which White New Yorkers simply knew nothing.

00:17:56:00

Interviewer:

OK. All right. Thank you very much.

Camera crew member #1:

Let's hold for room tone for about 30 seconds or so.

[cut]

[end of interview]

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