

Interview with **Roxanne Jones**

Date: June 5, 1989

Interviewer: Paul Stekler

Camera Rolls: 4125-4127

Sound Rolls: 472-474

Team: D

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

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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 #4125]

[sound roll #472]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Take one.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:00:19:00

Interviewer:

OK, we're back, back more than twenty years ago in the 1960s. How did you get involved? I mean, you were never active beforehand. How did you become involved?

00:00:28:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, I came involved because I had to get on welfare. I had a broken marriage, and I had two children, and I was working as a waitress. I became sick and the doctor told me, you know, I should go and get help from welfare. At the time I had a constable sign on my door, that's when they let all your neighbors know you owe rent. And I had...my electric was being threatened to be cut off, and I went to the welfare department. I didn't know that much about welfare at that time 'cause I came from a working family. I had heard the welfare word used in the block where I lived, one lady was supposed to have been on welfare. And I just, not knowing much about it, but with the doctor saying they would help me, I went there with the idea I was gonna get help. And I will never forget that day as long as I live. How I was treated, the disrespect. Not only me but everybody was sittin' around in that office. And I didn't get welfare that day. As a matter of fact, it took two weeks. As a matter of fact, I didn't get welfare until I talked...a lady in the building where I lived knew a politician and I went to see him. And he told me that, when I go back the next day, if I was, was gonna be trea...if she began to treat me bad again, for me to ask to see her supervisor. And that's exactly what happened. When I asked to see her supervisor, I became Mrs. Jones with a smile and all of a sudden I got help, I got welfare that day. And that's the day, when I got home, I fell on my knees and I thanked God for the check. And I told him if he would just allow me to do the best I could for my kids, that I promised him that I would be a good mother, that I would be both mother and father to my kids, and I would do whatever was possible to change the way that I was treated that day.

00:02:25:00

Interviewer:

You hadn't been active beforehand. How did you become active?

00:02:28:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

I, I became active because several months after I started to OIC, Opportunity Industrialization Center, I took the printing course and then I found a job in the paper. It said printers' helper. And I went and convinced that printer that I was the person for him to hire, and he hired me. And unfortunately, I worked for three months and my daughter's godmother took sick with a stroke and I was thrown back home again with my youngest daughter was only two at the time. And I had to stay home and take care of her. There wasn't any childcare around at that time. And so, a leaflet came under my door one day, and that leaflet said, "If you're on welfare, you have some rights. Would you like to have more money to live on? Would you like to be treated in dignity?" And I kept on readin' and I saw down there Welfare Rights Organization was holdin' this meeting at Southwark Reed. And I went to that meeting that day, it was a community center, and I guess I was so vocal that I became the chairperson that day. They elected me that day to become chairperson. We organized and immediately, you say how did I become active after being treated the way I was, after a couple of meetings hearing how those other women were treated, we began to, right then, organize to try to change the system. First of all, we wanted to bring about dignity to ourselves because we

knew we were somebody. We were mothers, we loved our children just like a working person loved their kids and we wanted to be respected that way. And we began to organize then. That's how I became active, being a welfare mother, being mistreated.

00:04:16:00

Interviewer:

Were you angry back then?

00:04:17:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

I was very angry because, as I said earlier, I come from a workin' family. I, I come from a religious home. I love my brother and sister. I realize I'm their keeper. And I, I, I felt like why should I be treated this way? I haven't done anything, you know, to cause me to have to be treated this way. Why they look down on us? Why do they say all welfare mothers are bad? And I thank God for the movement...Dr. George Wiley, who, who helped start this movement. In Philadelphia, though, it started with some social workers and ministers got together. It was called Crusade for Children under the auspices of Hazel Leslie, my predecessor. She's deceased, she was the first chairman. And then it became Welfare Rights after they met Dr. Wiley.

00:05:05:00

Interviewer:

Let's cut for one second.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sure.

Interviewer:

I wanna pursue that.

[beep]

Interviewer:

I, I just wanna make sure the sound—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

00:05:14:00

Camera Crew Member #3:

Sound two.

[slate]

00:05:16:00

Interviewer:

What sorts of things was the Welfare Rights Organization in Philadelphia doing in '66 and '67?

00:05:22:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, one of the first thing...President Hazel Leslie did, they, they wanted to show the deficiency in the diet, so they had went to sell blood. And there was only one, I think, of those ladies whose blood was apropos. So, what happened, they were showing the inadequate welfare grant, that's what they did just before I joined, got involved. Immediately when we organized, my group was called the Southwark Reed Group. One of the first things we did, we had one of the young ladies come in, young mothers came in and she had went to the Salvation Army to get help, and they had denied her help. And I just could not believe this and nor could any of the other members, so we immediately agreed to go to the Salvation Army the next day.

00:06:13:00

Interviewer:

Why did they deny her help?

00:06:15:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Because she was an unwed mother.

00:06:16:00

Interviewer:

So, can, can you start again and talk about it?

00:06:18:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Yeah. Oh, I'm sorry. What happened, one of the first actions that we took was, at the meeting it was a young lady who had went to the Salvation Army, she was an unwed mother. She had two children and she went there to get some help for Christmas, because we organized around November. And so, we...she went there and they denied her help 'cause she didn't have a husband. So, one of the first things we did, decided to move on there and to go there the next day, and we did that. And about fifty of us mothers went down there and we changed their policy. So, that was an action that immediately got around in the community, and other welfare mothers who hadn't joined immediately came to join the group. And that was one of the first things we did to more or less advertise where we were and we gained a victory, which was good. The first thing we did was gain the victory. Then we began to move on the fact of rotten meats in our area. We lived in South Philadelphia where, where it was a lot of stores that had rotten meat and gave inferior meats to, you know, welfare people. And we immediately got meat, and we had a big church that we organized, and then we set up and we had LNI there and the health department and we exposed those stores that had rotten meat that night and changed that policy in the community. And other welfare mothers liked that. Then we began to talk about jobs, the lack of daycare, the lack of jobs and the lack of being able to go to college. And at this point we're really organized, then we...this is the next year we've joined the National Welfare Rights. And January of 1968, Hazel Leslie, the president of, of Welfare Rights passed away that April. And I was elected chairman that June...I mean citywide chairman. And six months later I was a member of National Welfare Rights, a coordinating member. And then things were really moving. In Philadelphia we, we were tired of dealin' with the door-to-door salesmen, and so I, I said, well, about three or four of us welfare mothers went down to Gimbels and, and we were called stupid for wanting credit; who did we think we was? And so, we immediately decided to set up a demonstration. At this point, we had organized Friends of Welfare, people like Dr. David Gracie and Father Paul Washington, they had began to organize a Friends of Welfare Rights group. These were people that wasn't on welfare, prominent people, people on the main line that was really feeling sorry about Dr. King's death, and they really began to see that we had been treated so unjustly as mothers loving their kids like working people, and also mothers saving taxpayers money [laughs] because if we had threw up our hands and said we couldn't cope, then these cities would have to pay more money to the foster mothers to take care of the children. So, what happened after we organized this group and we wanted credit, we informed them and I called Dr. Wiley and told him I would always call him and let him know what we were doing in Philadelphia, and he thought it was a great idea. And, as you know, we won that victory within one hour after demonstrating at Lit Brothers. Then all the other stores fell in line. All the other stores fell in line, even Sears here in Philadelphia. They had trouble with

Sears...other parts of this, of the, of the nation, but we won victory at Sears. One store was called Grants and we had trouble there, we had to turn White to get credit there. [laughs]

00:10:07:00

Interviewer:

So, the things you were doing, you were—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Excuse me. [inaudible]

Interviewer:

What?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Change tapes.

[cut]

[camera roll #4125]

00:10:16:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:10:19:00

Interviewer:

OK, we're back. We were talking about 1966, actions into 1967. A lotta things that have to do with economic issues, day-to-day issues. Some people think this was a very different kind of movement than the kind of, sort of movement that people think of when they think of the early 1960s civil rights movement—

Roxanne H. Jones:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

A lotta things that have to do with economic issues, day-to-day issues. Some people think this was a very different kind of movement than the kind of, sort of movement that people think of when they think of the early 1960s civil rights movement—

Roxanne H. Jones:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

—that Dr. King was into in the early '60s. In what way was it different?

00:10:42:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Because we're talking economics here, we're talking about actual survival, people being able to eat. See, you gotta, you gotta put your frame of mind into a frame where you're a mother left by a husband with two children. And now you're not used to that check, even though he might've been a drunk, but he brought the money home, enough for you to try to survive. But you're dealin' with a totally inadequate welfare check. And you have to think about the fact that you're in a grocery store market and you need to buy milk and juice for your kids, but you gotta decide on one. And you gotta put your frame of mind to the fact that you...your rent is due and you need oil, or you need to pay your electric bill, you need to pay your gas bill, and you have to decide which one of these you can pay. And, and, and you have to sit yourself there so you can really understand. Being able to go sit and eat where you wanna eat is fine if you have the money, but here you're talkin' about not havin' that money, trying to live on peanuts, so to speak. Not even enough money to exist on. And you have to put yourself in that frame to understand the difference in the civil rights movement and this aspect of, survival is what I'm talking about, survival.

00:12:03:00

Interviewer:

How did your program differ than, let's say, Dr. King's program at that time?

00:12:06:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, at that time Dr. King was fighting about the right to go sit in a restaurant, the right to go to school, get a good education. Nothing's wrong with that, that's fine, I subscribe to that. As a matter of fact, I had nothin' but great admiration and respect for Dr. King. But again you

gotta understand these are welfare mothers who have been left, as I said, by the wayside, to provide for their kids, to be both mother and father. And we're talkin' about havin' that food on the table, for existence, they need to eat. And we have to make those decisions on how they can eat on the little money. Across the country welfare payments was that low all over the country. As a matter of fact, in Pennsylvania we ranked twenty-seven low in welfare payments in 1967. Twenty-seven low, for the fourth largest city in the nation. So we were all bitter, and not to take away from Dr. King's movement, we were a part of that movement, but we just saw our survival, we were talking about life, this is now. Yeah, I'd like to go downtown and sit in a movie or, or eat in a restaurant, but what about not having the money to eat there? So, we were talkin' about life, living. To me, that was the difference. Havin' the right to, to get a job, to be trained. You know, Dr. Wiley's slogan was...our slogan was "Adequate trainin', adequate jobs, adequate pay." And I didn't see nothin' wrong with that. And our other slogan was "Welfare's a right and not a privilege". And that's true.

00:13:48:00

Interviewer:

Can we cut?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sure.

Interviewer:

That was wonderful. That's—

Roxanne H. Jones:

Oh.

[beep]

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] said [unintelligible]

[beep]

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:14:00:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Take four.

00:14:01:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Yeah, as a matter of fact, we loved Dr. King. As a matter of fact, lot of us was part of that movement. But we in Philadelphia were somehow upset because Dr. King had not, we felt, spoke out on the welfare movement in this country. All the things he did was good, but we felt like he was a little lax there. So, we heard he was coming to Philadelphia...St. Thomas Church. And so, Dr....I mean, I'm sorry, Hazel Leslie, our chairperson, was alive then, so she appointed me to be the one to ask him the question about why he had not got involved, you know, and adopted National Welfare Rights' philosophy on welfare mothers. And so, he came...we went to the meeting and when my ta...chance came around for the question, I got up and I immediately asked him, I didn't understand how come you have not, you know, fought, help, why you're not helpin' us fight this fight, why you're not talkin' about welfare mothers. And I went into the whole bit, you know, not exactly like as if I was talkin' to a welfare secretary, [laughs] but here I'm talkin' to this man who I had great admiration for, whom I loved so much, who I felt has done such a good job, but I still had to be honest with him. I felt he had not addressed the question about my life and what I'm tryin' to do, and about all these other welfare mothers that was there in the room. And so, I went through the whole bit. And he sat there and looked at me and listened just as polite and, and the most earnest as I guess he could have. And when I finished he informed me that he had left Chicago last week and that he had indeed addressed the welfare problem and that Welfare Rights was indeed a good organization, he...and he subscribed to everything that we were about, and yes he was with us one hundred percent. And I felt like a fool [laughs] because nobody had told us in Philadelphia. George hadn't got to us that he was at that meeting and they had met in Chicago. And Hazel didn't know it. So, therefore, you know, here I was confronting this great man with this question, and then...but he was so polite and so gracious about, in his answerin' me. And I just will never forget him because that's the day he told me, he said, You gonna be a great leader. I didn't even understand, I didn't even subscribe to that when he was saying it. And I asked him could I have the pencil he had and he hand it to me, and I said, Well, I'm gonna take the glass, too. So I have them to this day. And I just think about him durin' the struggle when times have been hard and it seemed as though I wasn't going to accomplish a accomplishment, and I would think about Dr. King and he has been a great inspiration to me. And that was one of the embarrassing things in my life, but it turned out to be a good thing. [laughs]

00:17:00:00

Interviewer:

When you first heard about the Poor People's Campaign, what did you think?

00:17:04:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

I thought it was a great idea. Excellent idea. And to this day I think it was good. Not everything is perfect. I think a lot came outta that movement. Again.

00:17:16:00

Interviewer:

What about it did you think was good?

00:17:18:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

I think what was good, a lotta issues. If you remember, a lotta issues came to focus. We had people comin' from as far as Mississippi and all over this country came and they were all sayin' the same things to me. They were saying, We want jobs. We want to be treated as human beings. We want the right to work. We want the right to get an education. And I think when you had that many people coming together, whether you have some little problems or not, like flies found in the greens, you know, when they was cooking out there, that was just not even worth mentionin'. The, the thing that I liked most about was people came together. They were all saying the same thing, We want our government, we want to petition our government, and we want this government to be a good government, a fair government, and we want a fair chance, and we want what's rightfully due us because of the Constitution. And I think in spite of all the little problems, I think people need to look at that. That's what came out of that movement whether or not we got it all, but the point is people came together and they were real about coming together.

00:18:25:00

Interviewer:

Now, give me one lead sentence to get into that. That, just that "When I first heard of the Poor People's Campaign..."

00:18:34:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, well, in Philadelphia, when, when I first heard of the, the Poor People's Campaign, we immediately had a meeting and we wanted to be involved because we realized it was a good thing...realizing people were gonna come together from all over this country. Poor people, people of all walks of life was comin' together and I thought it was good.

00:18:53:00

Interviewer:

Why do you think, I mean, when they were in Washington some things didn't work out very well? Why do you think that was?

00:18:59:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, you gotta, you gotta understand that's the same year that we lost a great emancipator, Dr. King. And, and, and even though people organized and tried to do their very best, but they were doing it through a great hardship. We had lost our leader, and so I think all those little mistakes that happen have to be just discarded of because people were under great tension, great remorse, and there was a lotta things that probably didn't go right. But I think when you look at the overall picture, I think we are foolish to try to look for faults. I think we should look at really the positiveness that came out of that movement.

00:19:41:00

Interviewer:

And what sorts of positive things came out?

00:19:42:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, look at me. [laughs] Look at me, take a look at me. I went from welfare to the Senate. And I was at the Poor People's march.

Interviewer:

Cut for one second.

Roxanne H. Jones:

Stunned you on that one, didn't I?

Camera Crew Member #3:

[laughs]

[beep]

00:19:58:00

Interviewer:

[laughs] Yes you did.

Roxanne H. Jones:

[laughs]

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:20:08:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Go ahead.

00:20:10:00

Interviewer:

What about the folks who thought back then that it was a failure...who criticized it? What would you say to them now?

00:20:14:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

I'd like to know what they were lookin' for. You know, what did they expect to come? You know, I'd have to ask them, what were they looking for? I mean, here are people comin' from all over the city to address their government in a way they felt was best to do it. I would like to say to those people, really, what was you looking for? What, what did you want to come out of, what did they want to come out of? And I think those people that criticize are just talkin' because they wanna criticize, because anybody with common sense ought to know

that that Poor People's march was a good thing that happened. I'm not sayin' everything happened within the march and all the problems, but it...the concept was a good concept, and those people that did that I just think they're a bunch of phonies.

00:20:59:00

Interviewer:

Can you start with by saying, "I would say that the critics of the, of the Poor People's Campaign..."?

00:21:04:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Yeah, I would say to the critics of the Poor People's Campaign that they was full of BS because I don't know what they were lookin' for. They'd have to realize it was a positive thing. Not everything went right, but the concept was right.

[rollout on camera]

[wild sound]

00:21:18:00

Interviewer:

What about—

Camera Crew Member #2:

That's rollout.

Interviewer:

Rollout?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mm-hmm.

[beep]

Interviewer:

I wanna ask one or two more questions on the third roll.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sure.

Camera Crew Member #1

Camera rolled out. That was forty-one, twenty-six. We're going to forty-one, twenty-seven.

[cut]

[camera roll #4127]

[sound roll #473]

Interviewer:

As they're doing—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it, please.

00:21:36:00

Camera Crew Member #3:

Sound six.

Roxanne H. Jones:

Mm-hmm.

[slate]

00:21:39:00

Interviewer:

You were telling me on the phone about the Poor People's Campaign being good 'cause it was gonna force the government to do some things.

00:21:45:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

What sorts of thing would happen to poor people coming to Washington force the government?

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, I felt like that, that, with people coming to Washington addressing the government, talkin' about jobs, job opportunities, that this would happen. And outta that era some jobs did come forth. Yes indeed. Job training came about, you know. We had different organizations that were able to get into different programs where people worked that had never worked before. And I think all that helped.

00:22:18:00

Interviewer:

Now, some people would say the government really wasn't in much of a mood to listen to people at that point.

00:22:22:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, I think that's true, the government wasn't. But, you see, this is why people like us always had to fight and push and get ugly in order to make the government do anything, or legislators who think they just was about business as usual. But that's what it took, the poor people's movement. The poor people's movement to get a lotta things started in the various different states.

00:22:46:00

Interviewer:

So it forced—

Roxanne H. Jones:

I think it played its part.

Interviewer:

So it forced—

00:22:49:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

And I think it forced a lotta people in other states to do things. I really think so.

00:22:57:00

Interviewer:

If you had to make one statement as to how the national Welfare Rights organization affected mothers, how it made them overcome barriers and see themselves differently, how would you say it?

00:23:08:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Magnificent. The best thing that ever happened was Dr. Wiley, the welfare mothers, Johnnie Tillmon to Beulah Saun...Beulah Saunders and the, the, the Matthews, and I could just 'em all. All of them played a big role. I think that's a movement that has been downplayed, that has never been looked at the way it should have been. Dr. Wiley and the welfare mothers across this country.

00:23:35:00

Interviewer:

What did they accomplish? What did they do?

00:23:37:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, I think they...first of all, they made the statement that we are to be recognized. We are to be respected. That was number one, we are to be respected, we are mothers. These are the...we have the same sons that, when they get eighteen years old, you take 'em, train 'em and make 'em be anything you want 'em to be. So we're saying now while they babies, give them what they need, give us what we need to make them strong so they can eat right, they can get the right education. We made a statement in saying that we're gonna fight for what we believe is rightfully ours, and we did just that. And it was one of the greatest movements ever been in this country. And proof of it is that I'm sitting here now as the first Black woman ever in the state of Pennsylvania...the first Black woman, I sit in the Pennsylvania Senate telling that same story. The movement has continued with me right here.

00:24:38:00

Interviewer:

What was George Wiley like? Why was he important?

Roxanne H. Jones:

A great man. This man was so great—

Interviewer:

Can you start by saying, "George Wiley"?

00:24:44:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

George Wiley was a great man. Here was a man that was a chemist, he was a married man, and even I think he, I think his, he lost his wife being in this struggle because of his constant pace of bein' away from home. The man has never gotten the credit he deserves. Here's a man that believed in women, in a...in women strugglin' cross this country. And he wanted us to be recognized and have the things that we deserved, and he taught us how to get them, and he was a brilliant man, brilliant. I loved him.

00:25:22:00

Interviewer:

Did people have to make...did they have to jump across a barrier in the way they saw themselves to be able to be active in this kind of a movement?

00:25:28:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

No, because as I said earlier, you know, when you're affected by somethin' and someone comes along and say, Hey, I, I might not have the whole solution, but if you join in with us, we can all fight together to accomplish this goal. And this is the type person George Wiley was. As he traveled across this country, and I traveled a lot with him and, and he sent me a lotta places, and the fact of it was this was a man that just talkin' to him you immediately want to get involved. If you was one of them mothers that sat around all day looking at *Search for Tomorrow*, those daytime stories, after a conversation with Dr. Wiley, you would forget that television and you'd go right and join and get involved. And I followed his philosophy and that's why the movement was so great in Philadelphia.

00:26:16:00

Interviewer:

Beforehand, were you ashamed that you were poor?

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, I never got poor till got on welfare. See, I came from a very rich family, a lovin' family. We had a lotta love. I never was hungry in my life.

Interviewer:

But when you, when you—

Roxanne H. Jones:

When...you mean was I ashamed to get on welfare?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

00:26:34:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, yes because the way I was treated the day I went there, and subsequently after then hearing all the things that they were sayin' about welfare mothers made me feel ashamed until I got involved deeply in the movement and realized that welfare was a right and not a privilege, as Dr. Wiley taught us. Welfare is a right and not a privilege. And I really accepted that and, and, and I knew it was right and I knew it was just. And then we began to learn. We began to learn that if it wasn't for us poor mothers, some of these people wouldn't even have jobs. We realized how valuable we was. And we learn all that in that movement, in the welfare rights movement.

00:27:21:00

Interviewer:

So, as you begin to, to, to think of welfare as a right and you begin to get into things about economics—

Roxanne H. Jones:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

—this is very different than, than a movement which is based on purely integration.

00:27:32:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

That's true. That's why I said the, the movement never got the exposure it should have with the press. Dr. Wiley as a leader and a great man never, as far as I'm concerned, got the credit that he deserved for organizing along with all the great welfare mothers and along with all of the social workers and the ministers that got involved to organize this organization.

00:27:55:00

Interviewer:

Why was that?

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, I think that I should...well we have to ask the media. I don't know why.

Interviewer:

What was more—

00:28:06:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

I think it was that Dr. King was the issue during that time, integration was the thing during that time. And I think it was people within the government and the media that didn't want to really bring out this whole inadequacy of the way they were treating, you know, people on welfare. Because they took us being nothin'. Who are you? You, you asked 'em for a handout. We givin' you this little check, ain't you satisfied? I mean, who do you think you are askin' for somethin'? I mean, you oughta be glad you're gettin' this little check no matter what it is. This was the attitude of the government 'cross this country. And that's why I loved Dr. Wiley because we exposed...he taught us how to expose the government for not doing what they was supposed to do, take care of us adequately. You're not gon' have it both ways. You either gon' up the ante or you're gonna give us job training and jobs so we can live and take care of ourselves.

00:29:01:00

Interviewer:

For you, back then, was integration more important or were these economic things more important?

00:29:07:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, right then, of course, now you know economics was more important to me 'cause what the heck did I care about goin' and sittin' beside somebody in a restaurant, eatin', when I couldn't even afford to go in the restaurant. More important to me was my family, was my children gettin' a good education. For me, bein' able to get the kind of job trainin' I needed to go on the job or, for that matter, many of us bein' able to go into the colleges, like we had to knock open the doors to get in there. We had to fight for everything we ever got, for the right even to go to college, for the right to be in Volunteers in Service to America. We had to fight for that. We had to fight for a right for our kids to...this, this whole government is nuts. I mean, they couldn't even understand prevention. When Dr. Wiley and the legal committee got together to meet with HEW on early screening and diagnosis, prevention, we had to literally almost fight 'em to make 'em understand we're talking about savin' money in this country. I mean, isn't it better to correct a illness while a child is young than to wait till that child is twenty-one and then become permanent disable? Took us two years to make 'em understand that. So everything we did has helped. And that's a movement that I still say lacked the recognition it should've gotten.

00:30:31:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[beep]

[cut]

[sound roll #474]

[wild sound]

00:30:34:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Ready, Paul?

00:30:34:00

Interviewer:

So, this is 1968?

00:30:35:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

National Welfare Rights. We went down and we decided to take over his office.

Interviewer:

When...what year was this? Do you remember?

Roxanne H. Jones:

Oh, lord, don't start.

Interviewer:

'72 maybe?

Roxanne H. Jones:

Probably. It was.

Camera Crew Member #1:

K, I'm rollin'.

Roxanne H. Jones:

'72.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Are we ready, Paul?

00:30:47:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Yeah.

00:30:48:00

Interviewer:

Yes.

Crewmember:

OK.

Roxanne H. Jones:

Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Rolling tape [inaudible]?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah, mm-hmm.

[picture resumes]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark it.

00:31:01:00

Camera Crew Member #3:

Sound seven.

[slate]

00:31:06:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about what it was like to go down in something like the occupation of Nixon's campaign office when NWR, how did you feel and what sorts of things would you do?

00:31:14:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, I felt great about going down when Dr. Wiley called us to come down. And I felt really good when I knew we was gonna go down and take over his campaign office and make it National Welfare Rights' office. We felt good because we felt we would get the attention. Now, understand me, we, we always knew that we had to do some outrageous things like breaking down a wall in HEW to talk to the employees about different things that we wanted to talk about at that time, early screenin' diagnosis. But we had to do these extreme things in order to get the attention, and to get the attention then we were able to express why we were doin' those things, you know what I mean? Like goin' to jail here in Philadelphia for knocking my shoe through the window. That was because they were gettin' ready to cut off old people, and the only way to get attention was to do somethin' extreme after they had invited us here, told us we would be able to speak, and then closed the door in our faces. So, we just went off. But I think a lotta people look at the, the extreme things that we did back then, but I think less attention has been paid to the accomplishments. We do those things, but what, what happened after we did those things. People want to say, Oh, she's crazy, she did those things, she's nuts. But look what happened after doin' those things.

00:32:37:00

Interviewer:

What happened?

00:32:37:00

Roxanne H. Jones:

Lotta accomplishments happened in Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania when, when we did the thing here and, and, and—

[rollout on camera]

[wild sound]

Roxanne H. Jones:

— Harrisburg. Old people were not cut off welfare. OK? When we went down to Washington and took over Nixon's office, we were again telling him that your Family Assistance Plan is not going to work and we're not gonna hear it, and it gave us access to the press. Well, you down here, you done took over Nixon's office. What you got to say? Why you doin' this? Well then, hey, I got the microphone, then I'm able to say, Look we're not gonna live on twenty-four hundred dollars a year. His dogs live off of twenty-seven, their budget is twenty-seven hundred, and he wants four human beings to live on twenty-four. This is why we took over this office. We want to address our government. And these are things like we would do to get attention to bring the issues, not personal attention on Roxanne Jones, but attention to the welfare struggle. The fight here is what we're talking about, the right to work, the right to have jobs. It all tied in.

00:33:44:00

Interviewer:

That's great. Thank you very much.

Roxanne H. Jones:

[laughs] You're welcome.

[beep]

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] hot weather. Oh—

Camera Crew Member #1:

[inaudible]

[cut]

[wild lines]

Roxanne H. Jones:

Just that one word?

00:33:51:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah. Hold on, this is gonna be some wild wells for Senator Jones.

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, well.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Short one.

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well. Well.

Camera Crew Member #1:

And I need one, the statement you said before when you said what was accom—you said, "Well, look at me."

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, look at me.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Right, do that once more.

Roxanne H. Jones:

Well, look at me.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Great.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:34:22:00

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