Interview with **Linda Bryant-Hall**
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Interviewer: Judy Richardson
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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 #2096]
[sound roll #243]

00:00:12:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Now, if I look into the cam— [laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

Mark one.

[slate]

Interviewer:

[laughs] Hang on a sec.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK.

00:00:17:00

Interviewer:

OK. How did you feel when Dr. King came to Chicago?

00:00:22:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Well, ***when I first heard that Dr. King was going to come to Chicago, I was elated. I said, Oh, my gosh, Chicago is gonna get involved in all of this. You know, Dr. King has got a, a, a powerful following, a powerful message, and he's gonna bring it to Chicago to help with the movement here. He sure need it.*** And I was looking forward to his coming.

00:00:43:00

Interviewer:

Now, what did you think about the fact that he was basing—well no, first, what was the difference between the Southern communities that he had worked in and the Northern community that he's coming to here in Chicago?

00:00:54:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Well, I didn't really understand how different the communities were until he came and the people he brought with him and I got a chance to meet them and see what kinds of people they were. And in the South I got the impression that that community was more monolithic. After he came here, it was quite obvious, at least to me, that this was a more diversified community and tactics were gonna have to be a little different here. What happened is that when he came in, I think what he tried to do was to try and take that, that kind of style that he had operated with in the South and just plant it down here in Chicago as if it worked there, it would work here, too. Not taking into consideration the differences that were here.

00:01:37:00

Interviewer:

And what kinda differences would be here?

Interviewer:

One, Black people were—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. The kind of differences.

00:01:42:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK. The kinds of differences that existed here were the fact that Black people were of all kinds of socioeconomic backgrounds, they, we had Blacks who lived in Chicago public housing, we had Blacks who lived in very poor slum areas, and we had Blacks who lived on Chicago's Gold Coast, one of the richest communities in the world. And they—but they all had a commonality, they all needed Dr. King here to help hear, to help their voices be heard. And all of us wanted Dr. King to come. I mean, and to this day I realize that I was a very lucky person to get to meet him and know him.

00:02:21:00

Interviewer:

And you mentioned also that one for the other problems was he, he—the sense of the bigness of it, the vastness of it—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—And that each community had separate kinds of—

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Yeah.

00:02:29:00

Interviewer:

—OK, hold it just a second. Cut. OK.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Camera crew member #2:

When D's ready.

Interviewer:

Okie dokie.

Camera crew member #1:

I'm ready.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Now, tell me that question again.

Interviewer:

Oh, oh, just a second.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Topic.

Interviewer:

Again, what was the difference between what King had been used to in the Southern communities and what he's coming into in Chicago. And to center it around the sense that there is, it's so big, Chicago is so big and that there are many different communities with a lot—

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Yeah, with the history.

Interviewer:

—with the history in an organization.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK.

Interviewer:

So you couldn't come in with just one program.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Right.

Interviewer:

You, you had said, yeah.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Yeah.

Camera crew member #2:

Okie dokie.

00:03:05:00

Camera crew member #1:

[coughs] Ready.

[cut]

[camera roll #2097]

00:03:07:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark two.

[slate]

00:03:09:00

Interviewer:

So, what is the difference between what King is used to doing in the South and what he is faced with here in the North in terms of the diversity and the largeness of the Black community here?

00:03:18:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Well, I think what happened when King came to Chicago, and he found out, or he needed to find out, [laughs] was that the co—the city was so large and people were so different. There were people here from all over the city who—and each community had an organization already existing, and each community had a plan, and each community had their own kinds of goals set. And we were working together in group called the triple CO, I forgot the exact name of it at the time, headed by Al Raby. And at that time it was—we had just decided that we need an, an umbrella group, and therefore we, we came up with triple CO and all the community groups got together and tried to pool our resources. And when King came, though, what he wanted to do was just work with that one umbrella group and then not understand that each group within that group had a program of its own, had leaders of its own, had its own kind of direction that it was going in, but we all had a common goal, but we needed somebody like King, we needed him to lend us his strength, to lend us his name, and we wanted him to come in join our movement, not come in and lead it because we already had leaders. So, when he came in to try and discount what was already here, I think he offended quite a few people.

00:04:42:00

Interviewer:

Cut. That's perfect, that's absolutely it, yeah.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

K.

[beep]

[cut]

[wild sound]

Clory Bryant:

Not all the churches, many of ‘em.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Yeah. Thanks, ma. [laughs]

Clory Bryant:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

Clory Bryant:

Don't wanna be run outta town.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

[laughs] Right. [inaudible] go back to Boston with her.

[cut]

00:04:57:00

Camera crew member #1:

And mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark three.

[slate]

Interviewer:

OK.

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

00:05:01:00

Interviewer:

Give me a sense of the problems you had with Dr. King basing his movement in the church, as he had in the South.

00:05:09:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK. The problem with Dr. King wanting to base his movement here in Chicago, only in the church, was a big problem for us. In Chicago, as I said, there, there are people who are very diversified, and some people in Chicago didn't even believe in churches, didn't believe in God. I mean, they were avowed atheists, and for somebody to come in now and ask them to come into the church and follow his movement through, through that mechanism, it didn't wash so well with a lotta people. And then, too, the churches might've, in Chicago, represented something different from what they did in the South. In Chicago, the churches, many of the Black churches, not all of them, certainly, many of them had very close connections to the political machine. The political machine supported many of the churches. I mean, they did so much as buy the pews where the people set. They provided the church with a store front. They provided the minister, in some cases, with a salary. So, for him, now, to turn to the community people who've been fighting against this kind of set up and say, Come and follow me, you know, it just, it just wouldn't go over.

00:06:15:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Lovely. Yes.

Camera crew member #1:

Oh, cutting?

Interviewer:

Yeah, we're cutting. Yeah. OK.

00:06:21:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

I looked over.

[beep]

[cut]

00:06:23

Camera crew member #2:

Mark four.

[slate]

00:06:25:00

Interviewer:

When Stokely issued the thing about Black power, how did that make you feel? What'd it mean to you?

Linda Bryant-Hall:

When I first heard him—

Interviewer:

Sorry, if you could just mention Stokely.

00:06:33:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK. When I first heard Stokely Carmichael stand up and I saw him on the news, he stood up in front of this crowd of people and screamed "Black Power" with his fists raised, I just said, Oh boy, it's about time somebody said that. I mean, it's like we were afraid to say it. It was, it was whispered, and we were told that our element of the movement, we're told, you know, not too loud with that, we don't wanna offend anybody. But Stokely had the nerve, the gall, the audacity to stand up and say, "Black Power," you know, and not be ashamed of that. And I like that. I like that very much. And I sort of sor—I was sorry that King was afraid to say it because, then again, he looked real meek, and that was unbecoming to many of us.

00:07:22:00

Interviewer:

What did it mean to you as a member of CORE? I mean, you were kind of the outside of, of what was going on in the traditional kind of movement.

00:07:30:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Mm-hmm. Well, you know, with CORE we the co-we were the Congress of Racial Equality, and a lot of times our goals, too, were integration, but we also wanted to say not only integration but, in fact, that was just the, the byproduct, I guess, of, of what our goals were. But, what we really wanted people to understand is that Blacks wanted power. We wanted the power to make some decisions on our own, the power to decide where we were going to go and what direction we were gonna go in. And when we said power, that meant not only, not only did that statement go for White America but it went for Dr. King also. You can find yourself, if you are going to come in and be a, a total power in a situation, you can find that you can be oppressive also. I don't think he intended to do that, but we felt suppressed in many cases. Our views were, were not accepted with Dr. King, and so we felt Dr. King was almost doing like, like the White community was doing us, and, it was hurtful.

00:08:41:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

Camera crew member #3:

It's interesting.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Yeah.

[beep]

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:08:48:00

Camera crew member #2:

So, you're repea-peating—

Linda Bryant-Hall:

So, now am I starting over?

Interviewer:

Yes.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

All over. OK.

Camera crew member #2:

On Stokely, too?

Interviewer:

On Stokely, too.

Camera crew member #3:

Yeah.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Yeah. OK.

Camera crew member #2:

So, this is two questions.

Interviewer:

We're gonna see if we can make it one.

Camera crew member #2:

One, OK.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK. Right, 'cause she said there were two things.

Camera crew member #1:

[coughs]

[cut]

00:09:04:00

Camera crew member #1:

And mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark five.

[slate]

00:09:07:00

Interviewer:

OK. When you first heard Stokely say "Black Power," what did you feel and what did that mean to you? And in the sense that it might've even connected with what you'd been hearin' Malcolm talk about.

00:09:15:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK. When I heard Stokely Carmichael say "Black Power" and I saw the picture of him standing there with his fists raised, he had such, he drew such an excitement and an energy that, that came to me and those others who were in CORE at the time that we wanted to say, Yes, we, this is what we want. We support you in this and we don't wanna be ashamed of wanting Black power. Is there something wrong with wanting Black power? No, there isn't. And we would like to be able to say that to people. I mean, he came with the same kind of energy that Malcolm X came with, and that's what we liked. Not that we wanted to overthrow our government, and there may have been some who wanted to, and not that we wanted to do anything violent. In fact, I was one who followed Dr. King's methodology, but I also wanted Dr. King to be a little more forceful about what it is—sorry, you told me not to say Dr. King.

00:10:08:00

Interviewer:

That's OK. Cut. That's OK, wasn't bad, as a matter of fact. It's a shame. I'm sorry, [laughs] we shouldn'ta told you.

Camera crew member #3:

Man.

Interviewer:

Yes.

[beep]

[cut]

00:10:17:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark six.

[slate]

00:10:19:00

Interviewer:

OK. Oh, now I've lost it. Give me a sense of what it meant to you as a member of CORE. And you had talked about also what you ha-had wished Dr. King would do, and a sense of it being what you were hearing from Malcolm as well.

00:10:33:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK. Being in CORE, you know, CORE is not a religious-based organization and therefore we did have a lotta people also who were not necessarily church people, who didn't even believe in churches and were adamantly against that. But what we did have in common with everybody in the movement is that we wanted Blacks to, to move ahead, to move forward, and we were goin' pretty slow. We decided that what we needed to do was to give, give this whole thing a little more energy. And when Stokely Carmichael decided that he was going to

dare to say "Black Power," that was, that was like a sign to all of us across the country, OK, it's OK now, you can say it, it's out there and open. Let's deal with that. And Dr. King, when he decided that that was going to be something that we should hush a little bit, I think that made it even more attractive to us, the fact that somebody would tell you not to, not to harp on it too much, to play it lowkey. In fact, we decided then that, yeah, that must be the direction that we need to go into because we're getting too many people who are telling us to go gradually, and to go slow.

00:11:47:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

I'm not saying that right.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

Think about it a second. If, 'cause what you were saying originally was that—

[beep]

Interviewer:

—you backed Dr—

[cut]

Interviewer:

—so, you don't have to worry about a thing. I mean, don't remember anything, just—

Camera crew member #1:

Any time.

Camera crew member #3:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

—however you wanna play it.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Thank you.

Interviewer:

Yes, that's right.

00:12:02:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

[laughs]

[cut]

00:12:03:00

Camera crew member #1:

And we're marking.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark seven.

[slate]

00:12:07:00

Interviewer:

When you heard Stokely issue that call for Black power, what'd that mean to you as a member of CORE?

Linda Bryant-Hall:

It meant at the time—

Interviewer:

Oh, sorry.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

When Stokely Carmichael decided that he was going to stand up and say "Black Power"—

Interviewer:

Sorry. Not even decide, but when you heard.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

00:12:22:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK. When I heard that Stokely, when I heard Stokely stand up and say "Black Power" and he said it with so much force, and he wasn't ashamed to say it, and he said it with so much energy that I knew that that was what I needed to, that was the call that I needed to adhere to. And so many others of us in CORE, at the same time, felt that way. And he said it in a way that we were sa—it said, I'm not ashamed of it. Yes, that's what I want. Put it right out here on the table, you know. This is what it is, this is what it's about, Black power. Let's pick that up and deal with that. And he sort of made, it was a challenge to those in the movement who were less militant to either deal with that or to step out and say, I'm not backing it, one way or the other. But it was an exciting time for us because we felt, yeah, these people all over the country are feeling just like we're feeling right here. They want Black power.

00:13:20:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

Camera crew member #:

That's fine.

Interviewer:

That's it.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Was that it?

Interviewer:

That was it.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK.

Interviewer:

That was it. [laughs]

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK.

[beep]

00:13:25:00

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

00:13:26:00

Camera crew member #1:

And marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark eight.

[slate]

00:13:29:00

Interviewer:

What role did, did organizations like CORE, which are more militant, play in getting King to be more militant?

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Well, the fact that we would take an opposite—OK. You want—

Interviewer:

You have to mention CORE is all.

Linda Bryant-Hall

You want—

Interviewer:

Yeah.

00:13:44:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Groups like CORE made Dr. King, I think, more militant, kept him more to the left than he probably would've been if we had not been around. Whenever we decided we were going to do something very radical, such as our march on, into Cicero, that made Dr. King have to say, Well, maybe it's such, it's not such a bad idea, because Dr. King was not going to denounce us, as we were not going to denounce him. We had to show unity even though we were at different points. So, when he, when we decided that we were going to do somethin' very militant like support Black power, Dr. King and his people, they had to look at Black power and say, what is this? Is this something good here? Is this something that we ought to be looking at? And this kept him more to the left than he, I think, would have been if we had not been there.

00:14:32:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Yeah. That’s it.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Camera crew member #1:

Turn it on.

Interviewer:

Hold that anger—

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

Camera crew member #3:

Yeah, yeah. You're, you're on a roll.

Interviewer:

—of how you felt.

Camera crew member #1:

You want to start right there?

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Yes.

Camera crew member #3:

[clears throat]

Interviewer:

OK. Hold the anger.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK.

00:14:43:00

Interviewer:
OK.

[cut]

00:14:44:00

Camera crew member #1:

And mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark nine.

[slate]

00:14:46:00

Interviewer:

Yeah. When Dr. King calls off the march, how did you feel?

00:14:50:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

When he called off the march, we were surprised, we were shocked. This is the march we looked forward to. The other marches were nice, but the one in Cicero had special meaning for us. The Cicero community was, has been a very hostile community to Blacks for years, ever since I could remember, and I looked forward to the time that I could march down those streets and in, in defiance of all those people there. When I was a little girl you, we were told, never go on the other side of Pulaski, never go on the other side of Cicero, and especially don't go there by yourself. So, when Dr. King said he wasn't going to march in that neighborhood, I said, My gosh, well, what's it all about? This is the neighborhood to march in. They've been known to have toughs in that neighborhood and even some gangster connections there. But we were saying, you know, We're, we're talking to all of those White bigots, and whether they're mafia people or whether they're just some White hecklers, we want them to know, yeah, we're gonna come to Cicero. Cicero's gotta yield, too, like the rest of the country. So, when we decided that we were going to go, that morning when we gathered for the march we had made this big statement saying we were going to defy Dr. King and march to Cicero. Well, [laughs] that took a lot more than just conversation to do. So, we got in the park at the, at the gathering point where we had announced to the city [laughs] in public press releases we were going to march. There were practically more reporters than there were people. There were about six or seven of us who showed up to go on this march, and we just knew we were gonna fall flat on our faces and this is gonna be the ultimate of embarrassments. And when we decided—we waited around, were supposed to start I think at about twelve o'clock, we waited around and waited around and waited around until, finally, we had to go. And it became obvious that no more people were going to come. And just at that point, I think the community almost felt sorry for us, [laughs] the community people. They started to show up. Well, these were the people who lived adjacent to Cicero, too, so they sorta knew the relationship of Cicero with Chicago, and

especially with Cicero with Blacks. And so, they started to fall in line. We hadn't knocked on anybody's door. We hadn't leafleted that neighborhood, we had not done all of the kinds of community organization things that it takes to get this kind of march going, but yet still these people just sorta started to come outta their houses, they were si—they had been sitting in cars watching, you know, the reporters and the news people around the cameramen and all, and they were watching. But then the kids who were playing basketball, they decided to come, go with us. And I guess what happened is that everybody really was just tagging along to see who was there and what was going to happen. But as we got into the Cicero, the hecklers got so bad that everybody decided, well, you know, you, I'm not gonna let my people go over there, and maybe I need to go with them. And I think sort of a groundswell, and the next thing I knew it was, it was just at least a couple a thousand people going into Cicero. And once you got in there, you couldn't come back by yourself, so you had to stick [laughs] with the march. So, as we got into Cicero, the, we noticed that the National Guard had been alerted, of course. Lucas had promised the, the city to, to—fathers that there was going to be no violence. Now, how he could promise somebody there was going to be no violence I don't know, but that's the only way they were gonna give us the permit to march. So, we decided we would go on and tell them, Yeah, nobody's going to riot, nothing's going to happen. And, in fact, on our part, nothing did happen. When we got there, we noticed that all of the bayonets and the guns that were out were aimed at the marchers and not at the hecklers. The hecklers were throwing bottles and rocks and spitting and calling us all kinds of filthy names and doing some other things that I wouldn’t even repeat. But it—what happened is that people became so excited, and we were, it was a closeness in that march. Even the Chicago Police, I think, saw some of the things that were goin' on and felt that those things were unjust, and they decided, for the first time, Chicago police did not beat the marchers, did not throw the marchers around. Chicago police decided to protect to us because it was obvious who the National Guard were there to protect. They were there to protect Cicero and those people who were heckling us.

00:19:14:00

Interviewer:

And talk about how the mood was different in terms of the, the sense of self-defense on the march—

Linda Bryant-Hall

[sighs]

Interviewer:

—and then possibly throwing the bottles back or the bricks back.

00:19:27:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK, yeah, it was, you felt really threatened. You felt like this was not just a regular picket line that you're walking where you're going to go down and make your presence known and walk your mile or two and come back a, a given route. When you got there, you really felt like you were surrounded by an air of hatred. I mean, even Dr. King had mentioned when he marched that Chicago had some of the worst people that he'd ever en-encountered.

00:19:57:00

Interviewer:

Cut just second 'cause I'm asking you the wrong question. A sense of the fact—

[beep]

Interviewer:

—that the, the people who—

[cut]

00:20:03:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark ten.

[slate]

00:20:06:00

Interviewer:

How was the character of the Cicero march different from Dr. King's usual marches in, in Chicago?

00:20:13:00

Linda Bryant-Hall:

Well, Dr. King's marches in Chicago were usually made up of movement people. This march was community people. These were, these people had not attended any workshops on

nonviolence, they had not listened to any lectures on love and lovin', you know, your fellow man and all. They were just people who were angry about what was happening and wanted to do something. And when they all decided to go on this march, and people started to throw bricks and bottles at us, a couple a people caught the bricks and threw them back, threw rocks back. [laughs] You know, they even would jump in between a lady sometimes. Women who were on the march were very protected. The fellas were there. I saw these coats that looked as if men had something underneath them. I don't know if anybody had anything, I didn't see anything, but the coats were really heavy. And these people were saying, you know, Yeah, we're gonna come to Cicero and we're not going to go limp. We're going to march through Cicero and we're gonna march to the point that we said we're going to march to, and we're gonna come back. And that in itself was a triumph because people just didn't do that in Cicero.

00:21:21:00

Interviewer:

Cut. That's it. That's right.

Linda Bryant-Hall:

OK.

Interviewer:

Now, let me ask you, is there anything—

[beep]

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:21:28:00