

Interview with **Rufus Lewis**

October 31, 1985

Montgomery, Alabama

Production Team: A

Camera Rolls: 123-127

Sound Rolls: 1110-1111

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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*.

00:00:02:00

[camera roll 123]

[sound roll 1110]

[slate]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER 1: OK. FIRST OF ALL, CAN YOU DESCRIBE FOR ME WHAT MONTGOMERY WAS LIKE AT THE TIME BEFORE THE BUS BOYCOTT?

Lewis: Before the bus boycott?

INTERVIEWER 1: ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF RACE RELATIONS. AROUND 1955, WHAT WAS THE TOWN LIKE?

Lewis: What Montgomery was like before the bus boycott, was like—

[sound roll out]

[cut]

00:00:41:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THANK YOU, SIR.

INTERVIEWER 1: I'LL REPEAT THAT QUESTION. A LOT OF OUR VIEWERS AREN'T GOING TO HAVE ANY IDEA OF WHAT THE SOUTH WAS LIKE AROUND 1955. CAN YOU DESCRIBE FOR ME WHAT MONTGOMERY WAS LIKE AROUND '55, ESPECIALLY IN TERMS OF RACE RELATIONS AND SEGREGATION?

Lewis: What Montgomery was like around 1955? Well, Montgomery from then on back had been a highly segregated environment. Blacks lived in one neighborhood, whites lived in others. There was no mixture of, of black and whites in the various neighborhoods except where whites have blacks living in their yard as servants. That was the kind of mixture that you would find. Now, other than that there was a sharp distinction between the activities of the blacks and the activities of the whites. Blacks usually was the servant and do—did the labor. There was some few blacks did other things, such as insurance and business of that type, which did—dealt solely with blacks. As far as kids were concerned, there was no—very few associations of black and white kids. I remember when I was a boy, going from—off Gould Street over here to Swain School, Booker Washington School, many times white would wait for us and throw us, throw rocks at us to run us out of the community. That happened frequently, but we got used to it and even changed our ways or we got rocks and threw back at 'em. So that was—that was a kind of normal situation between black and white. They didn't work together except in areas where blacks and whites agreed on some things.

INTERVIEWER 2: CAN WE STOP FOR A MOMENT PLEASE?

00:02:45:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THAT LAST TAKE WAS JUST TOO MUCH CLOTHES NOISE ON THE MIC. OK, WE'RE GOING TO START THIS ONE OVER AGAIN. WE'LL JUST LET IT ROLL.

00:02:47:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ROLLING AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK. IT'S ALL YOURS LOU.

INTERVIEWER 1: WHY WERE YOU SO WELL KNOWN IN MONTGOMERY? WHAT WERE THE, HOW WELL KNOWN WERE YOU AND, AND WHY WAS THAT?

Lewis: Well, how well known I was and why? I guess it was because I was born here in Montgomery right across town. I was an athlete in high school and in college. So playing football and baseball, especially if you playing colleges and schoo—schools from other, other sections, you become fairly well know, because athletics was very popular for us then. And, I guess, that was the beginning. Later on I became interested in political activities and for some reason I started working with voter registration and I thought that was the, the finest thing I could have done, and I still believe, that's the finest thing I've ever done, to help people get registered. And I did that as, as broadly as I possibly could and that is the other thing that caused me to be known in Montgomery. Then, following that, I coached football and where people come to see Tuskegee and Alabama play, they going to know the coach, you know, [laughs] and that is the other thing that, that caused me to be known in this area. I think those are some of the things.

00:04:37:00

INTERVIEWER 1: LET'S TALK A LITTLE BIT MORE ABOUT THE VOTER REGISTRATION. YOU WERE VERY ACT—ACTIVE IN THE COMMUNITY. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE KINDS OF THINGS YOU DID TO GET PEOPLE REGISTERED AND HOW THAT WORKED?

Lewis: Well, yes. In getting—in, in, in, in encouraging people to get registered, you first have to get the registration blanks. We had—we got a mimeograph machine, had a little committee of us. We got a mimeograph machine and we would get copies of the questions that the county would ask people to, to, to answer for registration. We had a large number of those printed and we would take them in the community and let the people study them and we'd go over it with them. So when they come to answer the questions, they would know how to do it. And this is, this is, this was our method of registration. And we had a projector showing, blacks especially, getting registered in certain areas. I think we got that, that, that film from the Labor Department. And we showed this in the various counties of the district. And this encouraged and inspired the people to come—become registered. They see other blacks getting registered, and they were having fun doing it and they want to emulate them. So that was some of the methods.

00:06:10:00

INTERVIEWER 1: DID YOU ALSO HAVE A CLUB HERE THAT WAS A PART OF THAT WHOLE—

Lewis: Well, we had what was known as a Citizens' Club, and it was, well, we did everything the other clubs did, but in addition to that, we said, you had to be a registered voter to be a member of the Citizens' Club. Well, we had dances, we served drinks, and this, that and the other. But we didn't let people come in who were not members. If you wanted to become a member, and it was a popular club, [laughs] you would have to get registered. And that was a little scheme in which we used to get a number of people registered.

INTERVIEWER 2: STOP FOR A MOMENT PLEASE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I THINK WE BETTER RELOAD.

[cut]

00:06:59:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 124]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ROLLING AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THANK YOU. OK, LOU IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER 1: YOU WERE JUST TELLING ME ABOUT DR. KING COMING TO THE CITIZENS' CLUB TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO REGISTER. CAN YOU TELL US HOW THAT HAPPENED?

Lewis: Well, well, I was a member of the church, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, of which Dr. King was a pastor and I had worked in the church getting folks registered. In fact, I worked everywhere, going to houses, individual homes, getting registered, going to clubs, and running a club myself—

INTERVIEWER 2: SORRY, WE NEED TO STOP FOR A MOMENT. I'M SORRY, THE—

[cut]

00:07:39:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

[sync tone]

Lewis: Bless his heart now.

INTERVIEWER 1: CAN YOU TELL US AGAIN ABOUT THE CITIZENS' CLUB AND HOW DR. KING CAME DOWN TO, TO TALK THERE?

Lewis: Well, I was, I was operating—I, I owned a Citizens' Club. It was organized with the effort in mind of getting people registered. We served drinks and we had dances. We had parties. We had a nice patio. And in, in, in getting people registered, we invite different clubs to come in, and we would have registration forms for them to fill out. We'd show them how to fill them out and, and, and show them and sometime we would take them to the Courthouse to get registered if they come in groups. So this, this was some of the things we did at the Citizen Club [sic]. Now, Reverend King came into the Citizen Club to talk to various groups, not only about registration, about other things, family problems, and he was very helpful in, in, in helping the citizens in that area with his conferences. But he had regular conferences in the, in a room we called the—I can't recall now what we called the room, but it's a room which was set aside for him to have conferences with the citizens.

00:09:12:00

INTERVIEWER 1: WAS THIS A SURPRISE TO SEE A REVEREND FROM DEXTER AVENUE CHURCH COME DOWN?

Lewis: Yes, it was a surprise to some people, but it was an excellent thing to others to know what he was doing. Now, he didn't participate in the drinks of that sort, at all, but he did make good, close contact with the people who came in there, and especially, those special groups who, who came in there to hear what he had to say.

00:09:44:00

INTERVIEWER 1: WHAT KINDS OF REASONS DID THE, THE REGISTRARS GIVE FOR TURNING BLACK AWAY WHEN THEY CAME TO VOTE?

Lewis: Well, the most effective reason they would have, is that, if you miss any single question, any, any unimportant answer, you were turned down. And that was the reason why we had to get the registration forms and get mimeograph machines to mimeograph a large number of them, so that our people wouldn't miss a single question. Now, some of the questions was not important at all. But if you missed a question, you were denied. And that was the reason that we went into this getting as prepared as we possibly could to, to answer the questions and we did a fairly good job, because we studied them as thoroughly as we could. The people who went down then to register, they knew the questions, cause they studied them carefully. And many times I would take them down there and wait for them and bring 'em back. Now, if they didn't get registered, then, we would send a, a complaint to the, to the Governor.

INTERVIEWER 1: WAS THAT EFFECTIVE?

Lewis: I think so, because we got registered.

INTERVIEWER 1: CAN YOU DESCRIBE—CAN WE STOP FOR A SECOND?

[cut]

00:11:29:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER 1: WORKING WITH VOTER REGISTRATION MUST HAVE GIVEN YOU A REALLY CLEAR SENSE OF THE KIND OF BLACK COMMUNITY MONTGOMERY WAS AND THE DIFFERENCES IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY. CAN YOU, CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THAT FOR A MOMENT?

Lewis: Yes, I think I can. It was not only getting people registered here in Montgomery County. I went to the thirteen counties in the Second Congressional District to get people registered. And that, that took quite a, quite a job. But it was just a joy to me, because I could do it and sometime I would have people, persons, go with me and sometime I wouldn't. But I had the means by which to go to these various counties and we set up meetings in the churches or wherever we could set up meetings, and the people would be there when I got there. I would come, with a stack of registration forms, pass them out, go over the questions with them, and see to it that they answered all the questions correctly. Then we would make some plans to go to the Courthouse to get registered. And in, in, in instances I would take some of them to the Courthouse. That was the procedure that was used throughout the Second Congressional District. Now, I, I guess that accounts for my being known throughout the, the, the area and throughout the District.

00:13:07:00

INTERVIEWER 1: BUT HERE IN, HERE IN—SPECIFICALLY IN THE TOWN, IT MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO COORDINATE BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY DIFFERENT GROUPS.

Lewis: Well, I don't think it was a difficult task. If such-and-such a church would permit us to have a registration meeting in that church, we would ask all the people who wanted to get registered meet at a certain time. We would go there with the registration forms and pencils and pass those applications out. Take one and go over it with the group, being sure that they didn't miss a single question and, therefore, let them fill it out there, let them study it and set a time, when they would go to the Courthouse for registration. Now we do this, this church one Sunday or whatever, in one night, and go to another church, another who want to get registered. Now we—when or two people get registered that's going to inspire some of the others. And we have less difficulty in, in getting them together 'cause it becomes a kind of a little game, then, and they like it.

00:14:25:00

INTERVIEWER 1: YOU KNEW ROSA PARKS BEFORE THE BOYCOTT. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT—CAN YOU DESCRIBE HER FOR US? WHAT WAS SHE LIKE?

Lewis: Miss Parks was kind of a quiet woman. Apparently a quiet woman. But she had a, a motive—a, a motivation in her that you didn't see right off. And it takes, it takes some pushing to get her motivated, but her appearance and what was within her was two different things. She looked like a very quiet and peaceful woman. And she acted like that in most instances, but there were some things that disturbed her greatly, and I think, this, this matter of riding the bus, [coughs] just went right to her heart, so to speak. And then she's not a quiet woman, she's an outspoken person.

INTERVIEWER 2: STOP FOR A MOMENT. YOU KNOW, MAYBE WE—

00:15:30:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER 2: THAT'S REAL GOOD. THAT'S A REAL GOOD ANSWER TOO.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CAN I CUT?

INTERVIEWER 2: YES PLEASE.

00:15:33:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, LOU IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER 1: CAN YOU DESCRIBE FOR US THE, THE SEGREGATED BUS SYSTEM THAT UPSET ROSA PARKS AND OTHER BLACKS? WHAT WAS THAT LIKE?

Lewis: Yes, I think I can describe the bus system that upset Mrs. Park [sic]. Because I've been here all my life. And the, the segregated bus system operated that, when blacks want to get on the bus, they would enter a kind of a back, a side door, getting in. And they would sit from the back, about half-way or as much as they could, near halfway, from the back to the front. Whites get on, they get on the front of the bus, they would sit from the front to mid-

way the back or as much as they need to—much seating as they needed. So, that was the situation that exist and had been existing for years. The blacks get on in the back and the whites get on in the front. The blacks sit down from the back up and the whites sit down from the front back. Now, that was not the law, except, that was what they insisted that you must do. And, I think, this was an un—undesirable thing for some people, because they figured if they paid their fare, they ought to be able to sit anywhere they wanna [sic]. And I think this was the feeling of Mrs. Parks when she got on the bus. She didn't go to the back. She got on at the front. And she went through the front in a certain area and sit down in the front area, front, front section. And the bus driver ordered her up. And this is when she refused to get up. Because she figured she paid her fare then she had a right to sit anywhere she want. That is the way I see the bus situ—situation during that time.

INTERVIEWER 1: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: BEFORE YOU RUN IT WE BETTER RELOAD.

[cut]

00:17:59:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 125]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: IT'S ROLLING. I HAVE SPEED AND MARKER.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER 1: NOW CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT, NOW CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT MARTIN LUTHER KING IN, IN 1955 AND WHAT KIND OF MAN HE WAS AND, AND HOW YOU CAME TO NOMINATE HIM AS HEAD OF MIA.

Lewis: What kind of man Martin Luther King was and how I become to nominate him for the chairmanship of the MIA? Well, Martin Luther King was a young man. I was quite a bit older than Martin Luther King when he was a pastor, when he became a pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. But Martin Luther King was a forthright man, he—you could, you could feel what he said as well as hearing what he said. He, he looked like he talked from the heart, and he was sincere about his, his, his sermons or whatever he's talking about. He was a good man. He was a smart man. He was highly educated and in that—from that background, he was more effective in influencing people than, than, than anybody we had in the group at that time and, especially, for the MIA. Because, here, you need to have somebody who can influence the public. Who can influence small groups and Martin Luther King just was ideal for that sort of thing. That's why I nominated him. There was some others who wanted to be the chairman, but they did not have the ability. They didn't—they had the desire, but that was all. But Martin Luther King, as quietly as he was, he had all that was necessary, it seemed to me, to be the chairman. And for that reason, I nominated him first, because I didn't want the

whole thing to be cluttered up with so many others who didn't have the, the, the background and the experience or the knowledge in dealing with people.

00:20:21:00

INTERVIEWER 1: WHY WAS KING ACCEPTABLE ONCE HE WAS NOMINATED?

Lewis: [pause] I couldn't answer that for others, but I believe people just knew him and, and, and his expression convinced him that he could do the job more effectively than anybody else it seemed—any—anybody else in our group, it seemed. And there was no question about opposition, after he was nominated.

00:20:57:00

INTERVIEWER 1: WAS IT IMPORTANT THAT HE WAS NOT CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH OTHER GROUPS, THAT HE WAS NEW TO THE COMMUNITY? WAS THAT IMPORTANT?

Lewis: That, that was important because it wouldn't be out of this group or out of that group and that group or this group would figure they had an, an advantage over the others. But he was a neutral man, a good man. And a man that could do the job and a man that was not on this side or that side. I think that was the reason.

00:21:30:00

INTERVIEWER 1: WHAT—WHERE THERE—[pause] WHERE THERE QUALITIES THAT, THAT KING HAD THAT ENABLED HIM TO INSPIRE BOTH EDUCATED BLACKS AND EVEN UNEDUCATED BLACKS? TO REACH ALL THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEOPLE IN MONTGOMERY?

Lewis: Ask that question again, I didn't—

INTERVIEWER 1: WHAT—HOW WAS IT THAT KING WAS ABLE TO REACH ALL THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEOPLE, BLACK PEOPLE IN MONTGOMERY? EVEN THE EDUCATED PEOPLE AND THE UNEDUCATED PEOPLE? WAS THERE SOME SPECIAL TALENT HE HAD?

Lewis: Yes, I think it was a special talent he had. He could talk to people. People believed him. He was honest. He was sincere. He, he could talk their language. But he could talk the language of any other group. And he was convincing in his conversation. It wasn't a make-believe. He was sincere and you could feel it. And, and you could, you could go with King, any—wherever he went.

INTERVIEWER 2: LET'S STOP FOR A MOMENT PLEASE.

00:22:37:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER 2: —ANYONE ONE SPEECH THAT HE JUST REACHED OUR AND TOUCHED YOUR HEART?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THERE'S TWO HUNDRED FEET OF FILM LEFT, AT THIS POINT, AND, I THINK, I HAVE ABOUT EIGHT MINUTES OF AUDIO STOCK.

00:22:49:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED. AND TURN AND MARK. OK.

INTERVIEWER 1: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK.

INTERVIEWER 1: I'LL, I'LL—

INTERVIEWER 2: LET'S HAVE YOU, ELSE, GET SETTLED.

INTERVIEWER 1: GO AHEAD AND START. TELL US ABOUT KING'S SPEAKING ABILITY AND IF YOU CAN DESCRIBE WHAT THAT WAS LIKE.

Lewis: *It's, it's very hard for an ordinary person to describe Reverend King's speaking ability, because he was such an outstanding man. He could, he could, he, he could make you feel what he was saying as well as hearing what he was saying. He was sincere and dedicated. And he could lift you out of the seat. You, you couldn't, you couldn't, you couldn't just be quiet, look like, it was such a stirring thing that it would affect you, it, it would just go right through you. So, I can't, I can't say much more than that. It was such a stimulating thing. And he was carried away, looked like, with his own speech.*

</hi></hi> [Eyes on the Prize; Episode 101-37

He, he couldn't be quiet. He had to speak. It was something in him that had to come out and had to be known by the people and he would tell them in such an effective way. To, to, to, to describe Reverend King's speaking ability, you'd have to be Reverend King. I can't do that.

INTERVIEWER 1: CAN WE STOP FOR A SECOND?

[cut]

00:24:20:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND YOU CAN MARK IT.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: LET'S GIVE ME A SECOND STICKS THERE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THIS'LL BE SECOND STICKS.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THANK YOU.

INTERVIEWER 1: CAN YOU TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE KIND OF JEALOUSY THAT SOME PEOPLE FELT ABOUT KING?

Lewis: To talk about the jealousy some people felt about King is a difficult thing to do. Because King was, was highly enlightened, had superb ability with the English language, and there was not many ministers in our area who could come up to that height. And I'm sure that there was some who were jealous from that point of view and some that were fairly close to him, wanted to have this sort of position in the community, but did not have what it took. And therefore, it is easy to see how they would be a little jealous because here is the man, coming out of another city or town or state, coming into Montgomery, and taking the leadership, and inspiring and moving people into action where, where they have been here for years, and have not had that opportunity or had that ability to do this sort of a thing. So that is the kind of thing you can imagine the jealousy came from. But whatever it was King had what it took to move Montgomery and the nation, I believe.

00:26:12:00

INTERVIEWER 1: CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE AND, AND HOW THAT WORKED?

Lewis: Well, I can probably tell you more about the Transportation Committee and the working of it, because I was the chairman because I had access to cars at the funeral home. When, when, when we needed cars, I could get a car right then, and go and do what was necessary. But to organize the transportation was a much bigger job, because we had to get cars for the entire community some time and cars that would be sent to certain areas in the community. Therefore, we, *we asked for persons who had cars and would voluntarily put them in the transportation pool, to let us know, and what, what time they could be used, and in that way we could know when we will have cars and where they had to go to pick up people.* So the, the, the people who had work, who worked in the various outlying areas of the city, would register their place of regis—of working and the time they'll get off, and

where they would be, for cars to pick them up. And this is the type of arrangement we had the committee working on to be able to pick up the people when they get off of work. Now, we had several people in, in one area to be picked up, a couple of cars would do that. Several people in another area, couple of cars would do that and at certain time. This is the general idea and the way the Transportation Committee was set up. And those folks who had cars would register them in the pool and that—register the time that they would be usable and, from that, we could serve the people.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HOLD JUST A SEC.

INTERVIEWER 1: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU ALL SET?

INTERVIEWER 1: YEAH. YOU WERE SAYING EARLIER THAT THERE WAS, YOU WERE SAYING EARLIER THAT THERE WAS A TRANSPORTATION CENTER IN MONTGOMERY.

Lewis: Yes, that was downtown on Monroe Street right back of the Pekin Theatre. There was a lot, a park—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I'M SORRY—THAT WAS MY MISTAKE.

INTERVIEWER 2: STOP PLEASE.

00:28:41:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I BLEW THAT.

00:28:43:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 126]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND SPEED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: LOU, IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER 1: OK. I'M GONNA ASK YOU AGAIN IF YOU CAN TELL US ABOUT THE, THE DISPATCH CENTER THE TRANSPOR CENTER, THE TRANSPORTATION CENTER AND YOU WERE ABOUT TO TELL ME ABOUT HOW THAT WORKED.

Lewis: Well, the transportation center was a place, a vacant lot, downtown, rather, the parking lot downtown that we were able to use. The cars that came from the various sections of the county, I mean, the ci—city, or the county they would bring all the people in that area and there would make the transfer. Some people coming from North Alabama had to go to East Alabama. And we'd bring them all in and get them re-classified as far as the directions in which they were going and send them on home. Now that was our, our main headquarters down in the heart of Montgomery.

00:29:51:00

INTERVIEWER 1: WERE THERE DISPATCHERS WHO, WHO TOOK CALLS FROM PEOPLE?

Lewis: Yes, yes. We—this is, this is, this is the way we would know that the people had to be picked up. *People would call in and say, I'm out here on Cloverdale Road, on such-and-such a block, and I'm, I'll be ready at such-and-such a time. But this was, this was being done all through the day. And we would know what time they was to go to be picked up and where they were.* When we, when we bring them to the center then all of those people who lived in North Montgomery, would get into a car and car—carried to their place in North Montgomery. So that was the way of operating.

00:30:38:00

INTERVIEWER 1: DO YOU, EXCUSE ME. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MANY PEOPLE YOU WERE MOVING? OR HOW MANY CARS YOU HAD?

Lewis: It's, it's hard for me to try to guess now. An idea—we had, I suppose around twenty-five or thirty cars or more. It's hard to know, because, if my car could be used today at such and such a time, another—and my car may not be able to be used tomorrow at that time, don't you see? In, in the cars that come in, who volunteer or put their cars in for service, wouldn't do it—some of them couldn't do it day by day. But they could do it as their conditions permitted them. Therefore, we couldn't say exactly how many cars, because it varies as to the number of cars within the car pool. We had a considerable number, however.

00:31:39:00

INTERVIEWER 1: LET'S TALK A MOMENT ABOUT THE CITY OF MONTGOMERY AND THE MAYOR AND POLITICIANS. WHY WAS IT THAT THE CI—WHY DO YOU THINK IT WAS THAT THE CITY AND THE, THE MAYOR WERE SO SLOW IN

BEGINNING TO NEGOTIATE SERIOUSLY WITH THE MONTGOMERY IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION?

Lewis: Well, well, why Mon—the, the officials in Montgomery was slow to deal with the movement, I think, they did not want to deal with Reverend King. He was just too, too much for them. They didn't want to do what they knew was right. They wanted to do what they had always been doing. And King was so forceful against that. They just couldn't deal with him. He was for right.

00:32:31:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: EXCUSE ME FOR A MOMENT. I'M ACTUALLY GONNA ASK YOU TO DO THAT OVER AGAIN SIR. I'M SORRY. HAVE YOU ASK THE QUESTION AGAIN, LOU?

INTERVIEWER 1: IS THAT A CUT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OH NO, LET'S KEEP ROLLING. IF YOU COULD JUST ASK THE QUESTION AGAIN. I'M SORRY.

INTERVIEWER 1: YOU'RE, YOU'RE JUST FINE. LET'S BEGIN.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I, I MADE A MISTAKE.

Lewis: [laughs]

INTERVIEWER 1: WHY—AGAIN, WHY WAS IT THAT THE, THAT THE CITY AND THE MAYOR WERE, WERE SO SLOW IN BEGINNING TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE, THE MONTGOMERY IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION?

Lewis: Well, the reason I believe that the city was slow, Reverend King was such a forceful influence for right. He was such a forceful influence for doing away with the, with the segregation system in the city, until they didn't want to deal with him. He was just too straightforward for them. I think that was the main reason. He was too intelligent, he was too courageous, he was always willing to, to make whatever commitment he had to make for right.

00:33:36:00

INTERVIEWER 1: DO YOU THINK THAT THE CITY OFFICIALS WERE SURPRISED BY THE KIND OF SUPPORT THAT HE HAD FROM THE BLACK COMMUNITY?

Lewis: I'm sure they were. I'm sure they were. Because they couldn't see how the whole Negro group, so to speak, would rally around a man as young as Reverend King. But Reverend King was a different man. He had what was necessary to grab people and he had the spirit to do it and the knowledge and the intelligence to do it.

00:34:11:00

INTERVIEWER 1: WERE YOU EVER DISCOURAGED? THIS WAS A LONG, LONG BOYCOTT, OVER A YEAR. DID YOU EVER GET DISCOURAGED DURING THAT TIME?

Lewis: I don't know whether you'd even think about being discouraged. If, if you hear Reverend King talk, if you get into the conversation or into the meetings or into the services, you are inspired. You're not, you're not discouraged. The job may be extremely difficult, but you are inspired to do it, irrespective of the difficulty. He was, he was a character that stimulated and moved people. You can see that—he, he has moved the country.

INTERVIEWER 1: WHEN KING'S HOUSE WAS BOMBED—HOLD ON JUST A SEC.

INTERVIEWER 2: STOP FOR A MOMENT.

INTERVIEWER 1: CAN WE STOP FOR A SEC? ARE YOU OK—

[cut]

00:35:15:00

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND—THANK YOU, SIR.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THANK YOU, SIR.

INTERVIEWER 1: I'LL REPEAT MY QUESTION AGAIN, I MEAN, WE STOPPED IN THE MIDDLE OF IT OR SO. WHEN KING'S HOUSE WAS BOMBED, YOU SAID HE WAS NOT TOO FAR FROM—HE DIDN'T LIVE TOO FAR FROM YOU, BUT HOW WAS THAT—HOW DID THAT EFFECT THE PEOPLE IN THE BOYCOTT—THE BLACK PEOPLE WHO WERE SUPPORTING HIM.

Lewis: When King's house was bombed, it, it affected the whole black community, because they, they, they acted as though their house was bombed and the—crowds of people gathered right down the street here, where he lived, soon as they heard it. It was a mass of people in the streets. That's the way they responded to him. Now, King had to come out to tell them that his wife and children were safe and they could go home. But, but they didn't respond to that, they, they wanted to do something to, to make amends for, for someone bombing his house or bomb somebody else's house, because his was bombed. That was the way they felt. But he quieted them down and told them that nobody was hurt. His children were well, his wife was not hurt, he was not hurt and later on, during the night, they gradually went back home.

00:36:47:00

INTERVIEWER 1: WERE PEOPLE DISCOURAGED WHEN THAT HAPPENED? DID THEY WANT TO QUIT AFTER THE HOUSE WAS BOMBED?

Lewis: No, no, no. They wanted to get revenge, but King had to get that out of their system.

INTERVIEWER 1: DO YOU THINK THAT IT MADE PEOPLE EVEN MORE STRONGER?

Lewis: It made them cling to King more tenaciously.

00:37:12:00

INTERVIEWER 1: FINALLY, I HAVE ONE LAST QUESTION. HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN THE, THE BOYCOTT WAS OVER AND, AND YOU GOT BACK ONTO THE BUSES WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING AND RALPH ABERNATHY AND OTHERS?

Lewis: [laughs] You, you feel like you have accomplished something, you know. I remember, you see, the bus go right down the street there. Going right to the college. And the, *when the bus boycott was over, the people just, the blacks got on the bus to sit on the front seat, just to, just to, just to, just to show off. [laughs] And they had a lot of fun sitting on the front seat, riding, riding to, to the college or on their way back from the college. Nobody sat in the black then, 'cause all of them sat on the front. It was, it was a jubilation. It was a joy.*

INTERVIEWER 1: I—FIRST RAN OUT OF QUESTIONS. YOU WANNA STOP?

INTERVIEWER 2: STOP PLEASE.

[cut]

00:38:16:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THANK YOU, SIR.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THANK YOU, SIR. LET ME JUST GET SQUARED AWAY HERE.

INTERVIEWER 2: YOU CAN JUST TELL US THAT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK, LOU IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER 1: IF YOU COULD, IF YOU COULD JUST TELL US, AS JEZZ [sic] WAS ASKING, WHAT WERE BLACK PEOPLE LIKE IN MONTGOMERY? JUST—

Lewis: How can black people be any different from black people in other places? Look at my black and your black? We about the same black. Now, what's going to make me so much different from you? The only thing I can see is the type of pressure being put on me that may not be put on you that would make me respond in a more vigorous way. But now, all blacks are segre—su—subjected to a certain sort of a way of life. I wouldn't say all, but very near all. Now, I, I—Montgomery is the heart of Alabama. Alabama's a southern town. Segregated, been segregated as long as I can remember and much longer. Now, what it is in Chicago, I don't know. What it is in Boston, I don't know. But you can—

00:39:42:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Lewis: —you can tell me that there's pretty near the same sort of situation.

INTERVIEWER 1: DO YOU THINK THAT WAS—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HOLD ON. JUST, JUST RUN OUT. WE GOT THAT NAME.

00:39:50:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 127]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER 2: OK, WE'LL, WE'LL, WE'LL WRAP IT UP.

INTERVIEWER 1: WHEN—YOU WERE SAYING THAT ALL BLACK PEOPLE WERE PRETTY MUCH THE SAME, BUT WHY—IF THAT'S SO WHY, WHY DID THIS HAPPEN IN MONTGOMERY? WHY, WHY MONTGOMERY AND NO OTHER PLACE?

Lewis: We had a type of leadership that inspired people to strive for what was due them and what was right. And that leadership was more forceful and more penetrating than the, than what you could find in some of the other places. I think that was the cause of Montgomery

being a little different in reacting to the situation than some of the other places. That's what I think.

INTERVIEWER 2: STOP FOR A MOMENT.

[cut]

00:40:47:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER SPEED AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THANK YOU, SIR. AND YOU CAN TALK TO LOU. OK.

Lewis: I think Dr. King was different, because he had something in him that, that made him different. He, he had to almost save the blacks in the community from, from being misused, so to speak. He was just a different man. He was highly intelligent as religious and straightforward as any man I've ever known and he could inspire people to do many things they thought they would not do. This is the difference, I think, in Reverend King.

00:41:42:00

INTERVIEWER 2: JUST ASK YOU ONE MORE QUESTION, IF YOU WILL.

Lewis: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 2: DID WE ASK—I ASKED YOU THIS BEFORE, WAS HE AN AMBITIOUS MAN?

Lewis: Was what?

INTERVIEWER 2: WAS DR. KING AN AMBITIOUS MAN?

INTERVIEWER 1: AN—ANSWER TO SA—ANSWER TO ME.

Lewis: Ambition in—not—he was ambitious, but not in acquiring wealth. He was ambitious to inspire and to lead and to open the way for people. He was ambitious for people's development. He was ambitious for knowledge of, of, of, of people in situations where they needed change. This was the kind of ambition that he had. [pause] He wasn't after wealth at all. He was after the soul of man. And he, he could change whites just as he could change black if they would listen to him. And this is the thing that disturbed the whites. Because they knew he was making changes and they didn't want changes. That was his ambition.

INTERVIEWER 1: COULD I FOLLOW UP ON THAT?

INTERVIEWER 2: OH I GOT GOOSE—YOU GOT—YOU GIVING ME CHILLS UP MY SPI—

[cut]

00:43:02:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER 1: YOU—JUST A MOMENT AGO TALKING ABOUT CHANGING WHITES AND CHANGING BLACKS.

Lewis: Yes.

INTERVIEWER 1: DID YOU FEEL LIKE—THAT YOU CHANGED—

INTERVIEWER 2: DR. KING.

INTERVIEWER: DR. KING CHANGED, EXCUSE ME, MANY WHITES IN MONTGOMERY? CHANGED THEM AROUND?

Lewis: Yes, I think Dr. King changed many whites. But there were also changes in both sides, those who want to keep the situation as it were, they were radical. They, they, they, they went the other way, don't you see? He was too much of a force. You had to go with him or you had to go against him. And many of the whites went against him. There were some who went with him.

INTERVIEWER 2: STOP PLEASE. THAT'S A WRAP.

INTERVIEWER 1: EXCELLENT.

INTERVIEWER 2: THANK YOU VERY MUCH, MR. LEWIS.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:43:57:00