

Interview with **Rev. Frederick Reese**

December 5, 1985

Production Team: C

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Interviewer: Callie Crossley

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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 564]

[sound roll 1530]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK I HAVE FLAGS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK. THANK YOU.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE ARE SET. IT'S ALL YOURS CALLIE.

INTERVIEWER: OK. REVEREND REESE, LET ME START OFF BY ASKING WHY WAS SELMA CHOSEN AS THE SITE FOR VOTING RIGHTS CAMPAIGNS, FIRST BOTH IN 1963 AND THEN LATER IN 1965.

Reese: Selma was chosen because of its commitment on the part of local people here who were displeased with the number of persons in this community who had been denied the right to vote. Out of some one thousand, one hundred fifteen, fifteen thousand rather, people in the county who were eligible to become registered, only about three hundred were really registered and were on the rolls and that percentage really caused a lot of alarm on the part of the people here in the city and county, and then caused a commitment to push for the right to vote. Also we had as a sheriff at that time, Sheriff Jim Clark, who was the symbol of resistance in the South and he was a prime target to agitate in order to get the type

of opportunities to have the public and the whole country aware that there were people in the South, particularly in Selma Dallas County who had been denied the right to vote.

00:01:36:00

INTERVIEWER: SO THAT COMMITMENT AND SHERIFF JIM CLARK TOUCHED SNCC AND SCLC AND DREW THEM TO SELMA THEN?

Reese: Yes, because of the local commitment, we invited SNCC in in '63, and '64 and then at the end of '64, December of '64, because of the dwindling resources of SNCC toward the commitment for the drive and the demonstration for the right to vote, I as president of the Dallas County Voters League signed an invitation and request to Dr. King and the members of SCLC to use their resources in helping us to keep alive that commitment to gain the right to vote.

00:02:26:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME GO BACK A LITTLE WHILE AND ASK YOU WHY DID YOU AND OTHERS DECIDE TO FORM THE DALLAS COUNTY VOTERS LEAGUE?

Reese: Dallas County Voters League is and was an organization that time that had been in existence some twenty years. Only about a hundred people who were registered voters kept that organization alive. It was comprised of people who really were voters and of course when I returned back to Selma in 1960, then I joined the Dallas County Voters League after getting the right to vote myself. And then I was chosen as President of that League and then a type of enthusiasm was developed to forge ahead in a more dynamic manner to gain the right to vote under my leadership.

00:03:21:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, WON'T YOU JUST, FOR PEOPLE WHO JUST HAVE NO CLUE AND IT'S REALLY NOT CLEAR WHEN YOU READ IT IN HISTORY BOOKS, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU WERE A BLACK PERSON AT THAT TIME AND YOU WENT TO THE COURTHOUSE TO REGISTER TO VOTE, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN?

Reese: You would—if you were a black person, and went to the courthouse, first of all, more than likely you would have to stand in line because of the number of persons who would be there to get registered. During the commitment in 1964, efforts were made to really get as many people as possible to stand in line at the courthouse to get access to the Board of Registrar's office, however, in the run of a day's time, out of three or five hundred people standing in line around the courthouse you'd have about twenty-five would get into the Board of Registrar's office during that particular day. And out of the twenty-five that would get in, to fill out applications, only about two or three might receive their registration certificate. You would have to undergo written, written tests as well as an oral test. The oral test comprised of questions relating to the Constitution of the state of Alabama. And of course at some time it would get quite obnoxious, dubious questions, like how many bubbles in a bar

of soap. It, it, it got to a point of being ridiculous and you felt that really when you finished that your application would be thrown in the trashcan as soon as you walked out the door. So really it was a matter of resisting, to try to dramatize and to get people to understand there were people who were being denied the right to vote in Selma Dallas County who really wanted the right to vote and who were willing to pay the price to get that right.

00:05:27:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DO YOU THINK WHITES WERE SO AFRAID OF, I MEAN WHY GO THROUGH ALL OF THIS ASKING PEOPLE HOW MANY BUBBLES IN A BAR OF SOAP, TO KEEP THEM FROM REGISTERING TO VOTE? WHAT WAS THE BIG DEAL?

Reese: The big deal, particularly in the Black Belt of Alabama, you have concentration of black people and counties in Alabama and the resistance to the right to vote is greater in those counties that have a majority black population than in other counties in the state of Alabama. And that is true throughout the South. And consequently the white power structure certainly feared what might happen if blacks in large numbers got the right to vote. Because of the type of treatment and discriminatory practices that had existed prior to the quest for the right to vote, they felt that many of those persons in power would suddenly be taken out of power by the vote.

00:06:32:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME JUST, SO I CAN BE REALLY CLEAR, HOW WAS IT THAT SOME PEOPLE LIKE YOURSELF WERE ABLE TO GET THE RIGHT TO VOTE, I KNOW MRS. BOYNTON HAD VOTED IN '30S OR '40S, OR WHATEVER, HOW, WHY WERE THERE A FEW BLACKS THAT COULD GET THE VOTE AND OTHERS, PRIMARILY WERE DENIED THAT RIGHT?

Reese: At some point I think, it was an understood thing with the members of the Board of Registrars that in the city and county there were certain blacks who were chosen as persons who had great respect, who earned great respect by the white power structure. And those persons, would be asked if they would recommend certain persons to receive their voter registration certificate. In other words, they had to recommend the persons who would be accepted. And this took place for quite some time prior—down to 1960 that I was aware. And if a person did not recommend you, then you certainly would not get registered. These were quote, the good black people who were making the recommendations. Now, I became registered, when I joined, connected myself, connected myself rather, with the Dallas County Voters League. Because of my resistance, I went up several times myself to file application and because of my participation in civil rights and so forth and my commitment then they felt that they would certainly allow me the privilege of receive [sic] my registration certificate and I would just go home, and, and be quiet and be thankful. However, there were persons who were teachers who had master's degrees who had gone down five and six times and had not been registered. Their applications were thrown in the wastebasket and some did not get registered until after I really began to wage a campaign for the right to vote for teachers. I

was an instructor at R.B. Hudson High School at that time in '64, '65 and also President of the Selma City Teachers Association and I made a point to get teachers interested in going down, file an application to become registered voters. I asked the question, how can you teach and, teach citizenship, and you're not a first-class citizen yourself? So therefore, we waged that campaign and we were successful in getting many teachers the right to vote.

00:09:30:00

INTERVIEWER: ALL RIGHT, YOU MENTIONED TO ME EARLIER THAT SCLC WAS CALLED IN BECAUSE SNCC'S FUNDS WERE DRYING UP. WAS THERE ANY OTHER SENSE THAT BRINGING A MARTIN LUTHER KING TO SELMA IS GOING TO ELEVATE THE STRUGGLE TO A NATIONAL ONE? WERE YOU AWARE OF THAT?

Reese: I think that we were primarily concerned about continuing the struggle because we knew that it would take financial resources as, as well as personal sacrifice and commitment to be successful in obtaining this right, and that was foremost in our minds. And knowing that SCLC, Dr. King had waged successful campaigns in other towns and cities we felt that SCLC was the most appropriate organization to approach, to have them come in and continue with the work that SNCC had begun here with us in the community.

INTERVIEWER: HOW MUCH MORE IS LEFT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I THINK YOU BETTER RELOAD.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I THINK YOU'VE GOT ABOUT ANOTHER COUPLE MINUTES, OR COUPLE SECONDS.

INTERVIEWER: OK. I THINK WE BETTER RELOAD IF WE'VE ONLY GOT A COUPLE SECONDS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: COUPLE SECONDS.

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 565]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SPEED.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK WE'RE BACK IN BUSINESS.

00:10:51:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, KING HAS COME TO TOWN AND IT'S JANUARY 2ND 1965, CAN YOU TELL ME SOMETHING OF THE SPIRIT OF THAT FIRST MEETING, THAT COMING TOGETHER OF KICKING OFF THE CAMPAIGN OF '65, WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

Reese: When Dr. King was invited, to come to Selma in December '64, it was first thought that he should come on January the 1st which was the day that Selma Dallas County celebrates the Emancipation Proclamation signing. However, due to the fact that we had already planned a program for the first of January, we asked that he would come on January the 2nd. At that time we were under an injunction. We had been on an injunction since 1964 by the Circuit Court here in Dallas County which prohibited the members of the Dallas County Voters League from holding mass meetings in the churches or for congregating on the streets of Selma in groups of five or more, if so you'll be arrested. That injunction kept us from meeting and it somewhat slowed the momentum of the movement. However, there were those of us who were officers of the Dallas County Voters League met in groups at homes and so forth to keep the fire burning so to speak. And we were at Mrs. Boynton's house in December of '64 when I as President of the Dallas County Voters League made the request and signed officially the request for Dr. King to come to Selma and because of the commitment for January the 1st, we decided we would meet at Brown Chapel Church January 2nd and at that time to break the injunction, to keep a piece of paper, so to speak from, from allowing people to congregate for mass meetings and so forth. We were ready to go to jail, or whatever it took, we were ready to break that injunction at all costs. And we felt that Dr. King would be a most appropriate person to come and to speak at that meeting that we had chosen to break that injunction. And so, January the 2nd, I vividly remember it snowed and there were those who felt that many people who not show up at that meeting because of the fright, the fear of being jailed, or whatever the case might have been. However, at 3 o'clock, January the 2nd at Brown Chapel Church, that church began to fill up, it was packed people was sitting in the windows and the law enforcement agencies instead of arresting us for meeting, they only directed the traffic around the church to make sure that everybody had a parking space. And from that point on due to the fact that there were so many people there and having to arrest that number of people, then it would have caused—would have been a liability on the city to feed all those people in jail and to house them and so forth. So therefore, we heard nothing else about an injunction, we kept meeting from that point on, and of course the momentum of the movement was renewed and then it moved toward March the 7th.

00:14:35:00

INTERVIEWER: WAS THERE A LOT OF EXCITEMENT IN THE AIR BECAUSE KING WAS IN TOWN AND THIS WAS GOING TO BE SOMETHING PROMISING FOR THE COMMUNITY?

Reese: There was a lot of excitement, yes. Dr. King had a very dynamic, magnetic personality. He could draw people, many people wanted to not only see him but to be a part of any meeting that he shared because he was an inspiration he was very articulate, very in a sense convincing to remove the fears that people might have had in standing up for the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and to opening the eyes of people to their rights and so forth and somehow injecting into them a commitment to want to go and to do those things that they felt would be necessary to obtain the rights guaranteed by the Constitution. So therefore, there was a lot of excitement on that particular day, and of course a lot of skepticism, not knowing what was going to happen. However, the kind of inspiration that was received in all of these mass meeting is like the you know, the Indians when before they would go to war, they would have a war dance and they would get you know spirited for the battle. And these mass meetings served as that type of thing. And so once you get in a mass meeting with Dr. King and other persons who were there you, you just kind of picked up a kind of commitment and you wanted to come to the next mass meeting and you then sensed the kind of commitments the others have, you want to become involved and that's the kind of spirit that was exhibited in that January 2nd meeting.

00:16:33:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU TALKED A LITTLE BIT EARLIER ABOUT THE TEACHERS AND WE KNOW FROM READING THAT THE TURNING POINT IN THE SELMA CAMPAIGN WAS THE TEACHERS' MARCH. I WONDER IF YOU COULD JUST TELL ME HOW THAT CAME ABOUT AND WHAT HAPPENED AT THE COURTHOUSE WHEN YOU GOT THERE WITH THOSE TEACHERS BEHIND YOU?

Reese: On—during the month of January we had you know, mass meetings after that particular January 2nd meeting and I was just in the right place, I guess at the right time with the right commitment. I was President of the Selma City Teachers Association, I had developed a kind of [background noise] confidence of the teachers in my quest-

INTERVIEWER: HOLD ON ONE SECOND. THESE PEOPLE ARE REALLY KILLING ME.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: WE'RE CUT. THEY'RE PROBABLY JUST PASSIN THROUGH.

INTERVIEWER: YEAH.

[cut]

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YOU GOT IT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THANK YOU. OK CALLIE.

00:17:31:00

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO HAVE YOU START AGAIN WITH THAT STORY.

Reese: Ok, in January 1965 I was President of the Selma City Teachers Association and had developed confidence of the teachers in my quest for the many advantages for teachers with the Selma City School Board and what have you. However, at the same time I was President of the Dallas County Voters League and that gave me an opportunity to have influence with teachers as well as with the common laborer, or people you know, in the community in general. And I used that influence to try to get teachers registered and one of the things that brought about that commitment was the fact that many teachers had gone down and been denied the right to vote. I felt that that was a good indication that there was some discrimination in their efforts because teachers who have degrees and who had master's degrees had been denied and so, working with teachers then would have been more of a type of justifiable position to take requesting the right to vote. And on January the 22nd I had asked that teachers would meet at Clark Elementary School at 3 o'clock at which time we were going down to the County Courthouse to ask the Board of Registrars to have the Board office open so teachers could get registered. We knew that on Friday that the Board is not open, in fact the Board only was open on the first and third Mondays of each month. But I had written a letter to the chairman of the Board of Registrars requesting the office to be open because I felt that if we could go to the courthouse to pay our taxes any day of the week then we oughta be able to go and get registered any day of the week. And of course, when we got to the courthouse, and by the way, there were many people who just didn't believe that teachers were going to march, the middle class professional group had somewhat divorced themselves from participating in the movement at that point, and the common laborers and you know, people who were workers were carrying the main load for demonstrations and marches at that time. But to say at a mass meeting prior to that march, I told the mass meeting, I said, "On Friday, teachers would march to the County Courthouse." They said, "We don't believe that." However, that Friday at 3 o'clock, there were [sic] only one car on Clark school campus and then the campus began to fill up with cars of teachers. Ninety-nine percent of the city teachers came and participated in the march. There were several teachers who were elderly, who came and sat in the meetings and said, now we, are not able to march to the courthouse, but we came here to give you moral support. And when we came out of Clark school which is in the area of the housing project, there were parents and people standing on the outside they couldn't believe that teachers were marching for the right to vote for the first time in the United States. I led the group down to the Courthouse and when we got to the Courthouse, we encountered Sheriff Jim Clark and his deputies who had a line across the door at the Courthouse. And we marched in pairs and went up to Jim Clark and his deputies and we al—almost rubbed noses—

[cut]

[wild audio]

Reese: —and he informed me that I should get off of the steps—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OH JUST ABOUT TO ROLL OUT.

INTERVIEWER: [laughing]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: CAMERA ROLL OUT.

INTERVIEWER: I THOUGHT I HEARD IT SORT OF CLICKING BUT THEN I SAID “NAH”.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 3: WE’RE GOING TO 566.

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 566]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

00:21:58:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANT YOU TO START WHEN YOU GOT TO THE COURTHOUSE.

Reese: When about three hundred teachers who participated in the march arrived at the courthouse, we encountered Jim Clark and his posse lined up across the door of the courthouse. And we marched directly up to Jim Clark and his posse almost rubbing noses and he informed me that I was making a mockery out of his courthouse and I was asked to, to take those teachers back to the school where they came from. And I reminded him that, that courthouse did not belong to him, the courthouse belonged to us also and we were there, citizens to see if the Board of Registrars was in session as we had requested. We had a right to go in the courthouse and I would not back down from that right. And of course he informed us that if we did not get off those steps he would move us. And of course by the way, I had, beforehand asked teachers to come prepared, to bring their face cloth, toothbrush and what have you so that if they were arrested, then by Monday, we would try to have them out to attend school. However, he gave us one minute, at the end of that one minute, he, along with his posse took their billy clubs and knocked us down the steps. I asked that the line would not move unless they were moved. And six couples that occupied the steps, then regrouped and I gave the command that we would go back the second time. We went up to Jim Clark again, he gave us another minute and aft—at the end of that minute, he knocked us down the steps again. So then I said we would try it a third time and of course, after thinking back, my partner who was the incoming President of the, of the Selma City Teachers

Association. He had somewhat big eyes and so forth and he just wanted to know whether or not I really meant what I said during the third time. And I assured him that we were going back a third time. And when getting on the steps again, he gave us another minute, about forty-five seconds had passed and someone out of the courthouse came and pulled Jim Clark's coat and took him into the courthouse door. I do not know exactly what they told him, but I could imagine, he was told not to arrest those teachers as he said he would do if we were not off those steps in that, that minute. And so, he came back out of the courthouse and jabbed us down the steps again, *so I saw then that he was not going to arrest us as I really wanted him to do. Therefore, we asked that the teachers then would regroup and we marched back, not to the school, but to Brown Chapel Church, at which time there was a rally held* commending those teachers for the first time to march for the right to vote in the United States.

00:25:21:00

INTERVIEWER: THIS PULLED MORE MIDDLE CLASS PEOPLE INTO THE STRUGGLE?

Reese: More middle class people certainly. This march by teachers, middle-class population, teachers, the largest profession, professional group in the city and county then enlisted others to come and join in the movement. There were all kinds of groups after the teachers march *then the undertakers got a group and they marched. The beauticians got a group; they marched. Everybody marched after the teachers marched because the teachers had more influence than they ever dreamed in the community.* And those students who had been arrested in 1964 and '65, then saw their teachers marching, so that teachers participating in demonstrations and so forth, and this just was a turning point in the momentum for that movement. After those teachers marched then, everything just went upstream.

00:26:30:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, VOTING, OR THE WHOLE QUESTION OF THE REGISTRARS AND THE OPENING AND THE REST OF THAT AND REGISTERING TO VOTE WAS REALLY NOT A CITY ISSUE. IN OTHER WORDS, IT WAS A STATE ISSUE SO WHY PROTEST LOCALLY?

Reese: It was a local commitment. All that we were aware that, that there were many people in many counties, in this state, and in the South who had been denied the right to vote. But because of a local commitment and we wanted in Dallas County to address the issue of the right to vote on a local level with state and national implications. To start here, then because of that we enlisted, you know, others to come and share in our desire to get that right to vote. And we invited other persons to come in and speak at mass meetings from out of town, and different places and other states. Officials from the various civil rights organizations came in to speak. To try and give motivation to the people to want us to persist and not give up until something really happened to gain that right to vote.

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE STOP?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: WE SURE CAN.

WHAT'S THAT SQUEAK?

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I HAVE FLAGS AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: DO YOU HEAR IT NOW?

00:28:03:00

INTERVIEWER: NO. WE'RE SKIPPING AHEAD TO MARCH 7TH AND I WANT YOU VERY BRIEFLY TO TELL ME WHAT DID YOU FEEL LIKE WHEN YOU GOT UP THAT MORNING. YOU DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING WAS GOING TO HAPPEN. DO YOU REMEMBER BACK TO WHAT YOU FELT LIKE WHEN YOU GOT UP ON MARCH 7TH?

Reese: I got up early on March 7th. I went to church, to the church that I was pastoring at that time in Summerfield, Alabama, Macedonia Baptist Church. We knew that we were going to have the march, and of course I cut the service short in order to be back in Selma to give direction and so forth for the march. I felt some anxiety, you know, wondering just whether or not we would get off as we had planned to get off on time or not, and too, I was thinking about my commitment in getting people in companies and groups for the march. So, there was some desire on my part to make sure that everything went out as we had planned. Not knowing exactly what would happen. But we had an idea that the possibilities however we had discussed certain possibilities, but we didn't know what would happen.

00:29:27:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, I'M SKIPPING AHEAD AGAIN ON MARCH 7TH, THE FIRST ROW OF THE MARCHES HAS BEEN AFFECTED, THE TEAR GAS HAS STARTED, WHEN THE TEAR GAS FIRST HIT YOU WEREN'T AFFECTED RIGHT AWAY, WHAT DID YOU SEE BEFORE IT REALLY GOT TO YOU.

Reese: When the tear gas was lobbed over into the crowd but prior to that time, the state troopers had made their, their advance on the crowd and there were persons on the ground who had been beaten to the ground. Some were injured and the state troopers were asked to regroup and then they put their gas mask on and then they lobbed the gas canisters over into the crowd. And this, you were in a state of disbelief, you just couldn't imagine that such atrocity was happening in the United States of America. That such inhuman, inhumane

treatment was in effect at that time. You had pandemonium breaking out in, the crowd of marchers that was screaming, crying in disbelief. And of course when the gas was lobbed over into the crowd, they were, those of you who have been gassed know that you cannot just remain, you have to move out and then the crowd dispersed to either side of the highway, preferably to the east side of the highway into a field, but it was quite a, a state of disbelief on the part of most people.

00:31:11:00

INTERVIEWER: SO—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: [INAUDIBLE]

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera roll to 567]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND ROLL FLAGS.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK WE'RE BACK.

00:31:21:00

INTERVIEWER: AFTER ALL THE PANDEMONIUM, THE GAS AND PEOPLE WERE TURNING TO BROWN CHAPEL YOU SAID WHEN YOU GOT BACK TO THE CHAPEL AND SAW THE FACES OF THOSE PEOPLE THAT NONVIOLENCE WAS ON TRIAL. HOW, WHY WAS THAT?

Reese: There were many people who participated in the march and some who had relatives in the march who viewed the violence and there was a great question in the minds of many people whether or not the nonviolent method really was a method that should be employed continually in the movement. There was some indication that there were those who really wanted to take up whatever arms they had and retaliate with violence. And of course, this had to be subdued and also discouraged. And when looking in those faces of those people who had seen their, some children, some relatives injured, gassed and so forth, the question was, is it worth all of this and should we continue to take this? I think that, that human nature somehow aroused the, the need to retaliate or try to, to get even somehow. But we had been teaching and preaching nonviolence throughout the movement and just a question, and I remember vividly about 6 o'clock that evening Dr. King called me at Brown Chapel and he called me Mr. President because I was the President of the Dallas County Voters League he said, Mr. President, I understand that you had a little trouble. I said, Dr. King that's the understatement of the year. I said, we have encountered a lot of trouble down in Selma and of

course he was somewhat being facetious because he had heard really what had happened. But he told me that he had sent out a call to people in America, those who want to come to Selma to share in and participate in the struggle that we were engaged in at the time. And about 10:30, 11 o'clock that night, we were still at the church, there was a group of people who came from New Jersey, they had chartered a plane and they walked into the church. That was one of the most exhilarating experiences that I think I've been a part of. The rejuvenation that took place on the part of people who had just before questioned whether nonviolence would continue to be the method or not. Then their hopes and dreams were somewhat renewed and enthusiasm arose in their minds and there seem to have been a consensus of great determination now because they felt as if they were not fighting this fight alone, there were people who were willing to come and share in. And from that point on many groups came in, many people came in to Selma. Selma was a place of ecumenical gathering of all races, creeds, and religions. And people came in to share with us. And to me that saved nonviolence.

00:35:03:00

INTERVIEWER: ALL RIGHT—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE'RE GOING TO STEP DOWN HERE.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS AND—

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK CALLIE IT'S ALL YOURS.

00:35:15:00

INTERVIEWER: REVEREND REESE, WHEN YOU TOLD ME THAT STORY ON THE PHONE, ABOUT THOSE PEOPLE COMING IN, YOU TOLD ME SPECIFICALLY WHAT THEY SAID WHEN THEY CAME IN THE CHURCH AND WHAT YOU ALL SAID BACK. AND I WANT YOU TO JUST REAL BRIEFLY, JUST TO TELL ME EXACTLY WHAT THEY SAID WHEN THEY CAME IN THE CHURCH AND SORT OF GIVE ME MORE SENSE OF THE SPIRIT OF RECEIVING THEM FROM THE PEOPLE.

Reese: Yeah, if you could imagine the congregation being somewhat subdued and their spirit low. And all these question marks whether or not we wished to continue in this same vein or not. Then you hear the door of the church opening and *here are a group of people, black and white*, coming to the church walking down the aisle to the front *and saying to us, we are here to share with the people of Selma in this struggle for the right to vote. We have seen on the television screen the violence that took place today and we're here to share it with you.* And there was a round of applause in the church *and you could feel a change in the*

atmosphere, a spirit of inspiration, motivation and seemingly hope coming back into the eyes and into the minds of these people. And then renewed commitment to the non-violent method. And from that point on it was just a matter of executing whatever commitment that had been made on the part of the leaders you know, of the movement.

00:36:58:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANT TO ASK YOU ANOTHER QUESTION. WERE YOU AWARE AT THE TIME THAT SNCC AND SCLC WERE FEUDING, AND WHAT KIND OF—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: [INAUDIBLE]

INTERVIEWER: —POSITION DID THAT—

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THANK YOU. ONE SECOND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 3: 200 FEET REMAINING ON THIS CAMERA ROLL.

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

00:37:19:00

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU AWARE THAT SNCC AND SCLC WERE FEUDING AND WHAT KIND OF POSITION THAT PUT YOU IN AS A LOCAL ACTIVIST?

Reese: I was aware that there were philosophy differences. In many instances, logistical differences, even on projects that, you know, had been approved by SCLC and SNCC at any one time. My role was more of a mediator. As a local person who had, in a sense, invited these national organizations to come in to assist to try to reach consensus and agreement on policies and procedures. Often time, I would be in the middle trying to lead the two groups into consensus.

00:38:15:00

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU EVER THINK IT WAS, IT WAS THREATENING ENOUGH TO SPLIT THE MOVEMENT APART? DID YOU FEEL THAT IT, DID IT EVER GET THAT INTENSE?

Reese: Well, I felt that all persons on both sides really were concerned about the success of the movement. However at some time they did not want to give on certain points. But I felt that they really were concerned about that movement being a success regardless to whom might have been the person responsible for initiating you know, the, the movement itself. So they had arguments and so forth but we would mediate and then we would come out and find grounds to proceed and this was done quite often.

[background noise]

00:39:04:00

INTERVIEWER: HOLD IT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK.

INTERVIEWER: STOP.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: WE'RE OUT.

[cut]

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND YOU CAN MARK. AND FEELING ABOUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED THAT DAY.

INTERVIEWER: RIGHT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND YOU CAN TELL, TALK TO CALLIE. OK.

00:39:18:00

Reese: At the end of that day, March 7th, after leaving the church about 12:30 that night, I went home. I had the feeling that the day had been quite an unusual day, however. But it ended with a sense of, of satisfaction; knowing that I had participated in an effort that had aroused at least the conscience of a nation to all of the discriminatory practices with regard to the right to vote for blacks and minorities, not only in Selma, but throughout the South and the country. I felt very tired, but I felt as if something good had been accomplished on that day. I went to sleep shortly after I lay down, I felt real good the next morning.

INTERVIEWER: OK. THAT'S A WRAP FOR ME. HOW MUCH FEET DO I HAVE LEFT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: WE GOT ABOUT 50 FEET LEFT.

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: JUST A, YOU KNOW WHAT THAT FEELING WAS WHEN YOU STARTED—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: I ONLY GOT TIME TWO SENTENCES NOW.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SECOND STICKS. SECOND STICKS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SECOND STICKS.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: On that final march, I felt that we were in a march that was a victory march because it was a victorious moment after having gone through all the violence and so forth from the previous march.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: WELL LET'S RUN IT OUT.

INTERVIEWER: [laughs]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: I HAVE, I HAVE, I HAVE A QUESTION.

INTERVIEWER: OK. YOU BETTER STOP IT OR IT'S GOING TO RUN OUT.

[cut]

[wild audio]

00:41:00:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: I'M CURIOUS IF YOU CAN TELL US ABOUT THE WIND ON THE 7TH OF MARCH?

INTERVIEWER: THE WIND? OH YOU MEAN THE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: IT WAS A REALLY WINDY DAY. REMEMBER HOW LEWIS—

INTERVIEWER: OH YEAH. WELL WE SORT OF, WE SEEN THIS FOOTAGE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: YEAH OF THE TEAR GAS BLOWING IN THE WIND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CUT?

INTERVIEWER: YEAH.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

00:41:18:00

Reese: On March 7th, there were those who felt possibly it might rain, but after getting across the bridge, there was a wind that had come up and of course, it was somewhat strong at the point of confrontation and many of the coats and wraps that the people were wearing could be seen, you know, flaring in the wind. But that was nothing compared to the gas that the wind brought over the crowd.

INTERVIEWER: NOW YOU OUGHT TO BE HAPPY [laughs].

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: I AM.

[cut]

[end interview]

00:41:53:00

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