

Interview with **Emory Douglas**

Date: October 13, 1988

Interviewer #1: Louis Massiah (Interviewer #1) and Terry Rockefeller (Interviewer #2)

Camera Rolls: 3009-3010

Sound Rolls: 304-305

Team: C

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

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #3009]

[sound roll #305]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Scene three take one.

[slate]

00:00:17:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Could you talk about the reception that the Panthers gave for Betty Shabazz and how that influenced you to, to join the Panther Party?

00:00:26:00

Emory Douglas:

Well, it influenced me in the sense that I wa-was not active prior to that in any type of—

00:00:35:00

Interviewer #1:

Let's just stop one second.

Emory Douglas:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

You should make sure, make sure that—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

00:00:40:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark two.

[slate]

00:00:43:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. How did the reception that the Black Panthers gave for—

Interviewer #2:

Oh wait, sorry.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

00:00:51:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark three.

[slate]

00:00:54:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. How, how did you feel, I mean what, what, what did you think when you heard about the reception that the Panthers gave for Betty Shabazz, and how did you learn about it and how did you feel?

00:01:05:00

Emory Douglas:

Well, [coughs] I learned about the reception for Sister Betty Shabazz was in 1967, is when I joined the Black Panther Party. And at this particular time there was a group of young brothers in San Francisco who called themselves the Black Panther Party. I had also heard about a group of young brothers who were in Oakland, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, who were trolling the community and, with law books and guns. And they were, like, watching the actions of the police who were at that time basically outright just murdering a lot of young Blacks and nothing wasn't being done.

00:01:44:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, le-let's just stop. Could, let's just stick to Oakland, sorry.

[cut]

Crewmember:

Mark.

00:01:52:00

Crewmember:

Mark four.

Interviewer #1:

[clears throat]

[slate]

00:01:54:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Once again, how did you hear about the reception for Betty Shabazz that the Black Panthers were planning? And you might tell about the history of the Black Panther Party and how you learned about it.

00:02:06:00

Emory Douglas:

OK. [clears throat] Well, there were two Black Panther parties. There was a Black Panther Party in San Francisco and there was a Black Panther Party for Self-Defense which was in Oakland. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which was led by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, and there was the Black Panther Party in San Francisco, which was led by another group of young brothers. [coughs] And I was under the impression at that particular time that the San Francisco branch of the Black Panther Party, which was organizing the Sister Betty Shabazz ho—welcoming committee, were a part of the Black Panther Party in Oakland. But just what happened is that Bobby Seale and Huey Newton came to an organizing committee meeting. And I seen them there and I was very impressed with the way they carried themselves and articulated their positions which were much more sound and much more in tune with the community than that of which I had encountered with the Black Panther Party in San Francisco. So from there I began to become a part of the ideals of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which was under the leadership of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

00:03:24:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. What were some of the first activities that, that you, you did as a member of the Black Panther Party? What, what was it that you did? And, yeah, just describe it to me.

00:03:34:00

Emory Douglas:

Well, the first month was, was just the, being able to go on the patrols and to observe the actions of Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in action in Oakland, California, confronting the police in Oakland, California, who were notoriously known at that time in the Black

community when they would confront them in relationship to the rights of, of young Blacks who were being stopped in Oakland and being harassed for no particular reason. And the police not being able to deal with the fact that here were young Blacks with guns and law book being able to articulate the law to them. This was one of the first activities of which I was involved in. Also being able to participate in, in some of the rallies that took place in North Richmond around the murder of Denzil Dowell, and also trying to incorporate North Richmond into a city of which it would be a base of political power for Black people because it was an unincorporated area.

00:04:40:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. How did the, the march to, or, or the, the appearance in Sacramento take place? Could you just talk us through that a little bit?

00:04:48:00

Emory Douglas:

Yes. Well, OK. The, the, the Sacramento, when we went to Sacramento to the legislature. This was something that evolved out of a meeting that took place at the Black House. Black House was a place, a house in San Francisco which was in, was started in 1967. It was a place that was divided between those Blacks who were involved more so particularly in the cultural aspect of African history in this, in this country and in the world and the Blacks who were more involved in bla—in the politics of this country and in the world. And that, those who were, were involved in the more cultural aspect were like LeRoi Jones, Ed Bullins, Marvin X and what have you. On the other side there was Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther Party. And also you had the Black Student Unions in San Francisco and what have you. At, at the Black House there would be cultural events and there would also be your political discussions and debates. So, [coughs] the whole thing with Sacramento came about out of a, a, a meeting of, of leadership of the Party at that time, which was Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, and then incorporated Eldridge Cleaver because he was working at *Ramparts* magazine as a reporter at that particular time. [coughs] And from there the discussion was to go to Sacramento to observe the legislature and see what they were doing in relationship to some gun laws and some other things that were being discussed, so—

00:06:31:00

Emory Douglas:

So, how, how did it feel to be marching in Sacramento, into the state legislature with a gun? I mean, what, what was, what, what, were you afraid? You know, what, what, what was goin' through your head?

00:06:40:00

Emory Douglas:

Well, for me it was a new experience now because of, you know, this is, here this is still 1967. This, you know, this, this is Huey and Bobby were veterans of doing this routine on a daily basis in Oakland. So, but for me it was something of, of, new, but it was something I knew that had to be done to stand up for and to demand respect. So, it was like a, it was a, a fear but not a, a fear of the unknown, more it was the fear of wanting to not be there and be a part of that, or to want to run or what have you. It was just the unknown. But [clears throat] all that kind of was, became mist in the air as we got to Sacramento, because you, from the leadership and observing them and, and, and the whole, whole delegation. See, the delegation wasn't just Black Panther Party members. There were community people who were there. At the particular time the De-Denzil Dowell family, they were a part of the dele-delegation. There were also other men, women and children who were there, who were part of the delegation.

00:07:57:00

Interviewer #1:

How, how did your family feel and, and your neighbors when they learned that you were Black Panther and then you, you were patrolling the Oakland Police, and that you were carrying a gun? What, what was their reaction?

Emory Douglas:

Well, it was the same stereotype kind of thing that you're moving too fast and that, you know, you should slow down and be more conservative in, in the way that you do things. You know, perhaps that you're going to get killed or what have you.

Interviewer #1:

OK. Could you say "my parents or, or my neighbors would say?" Or just begin it with so we know what you're referring to.

00:08:31:00

Emory Douglas:

OK. *My parents or my neighbors we-were kind of reluctant, kind of standoffish in their attitudes towards the Black Panther Party because here you had a new dynamic kind of organization coming out and doing things that never had been done in the history of this country before; carrying guns, standing up to the police, standing up to the power structure*, demanding, demanding the rights that were, that we were supposed to have when we came to this country.

00:09:06:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Did you, in, in the Panther writings there's a lot of talk of revolution. Did you believe that this was the beginning of a revolution, your, you know, your work within the, the Panther Party? Did you believe that you were part of the revolutionary vanguard, or—

[rollout on sound roll]

[cut]

[sound roll #305]

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, we're [unintelligible] revolution—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

00:09:38:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark five.

[slate]

00:09:41:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, once again. Did you really believe revolution was, was, was beginning to happen, was going to happen through your involvement in the Black Panther Party?

00:09:49:00

Emory Douglas:

Well, you know, you see a revolution is a process, and you see how the processes is about making social change. So, you know, if you could bring about community control of the police in the community, that's a part of the process of bringing about a revolutionary change in the whole concept and thinking of the, the, the police and the establishment in this country. So that's a part of the proc—I felt that we could influence and change the thinking of people in this country, yes.

00:10:16:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, stop.

[cut]

[camera roll #3010]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark.

00:10:20:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark six.

[slate]

00:10:23:00

Interviewer #1:

All right. Could you just talk about the patrols, just explain how they work, pa-patrolling the Oakland Police? What was the process?

00:10:32:00

Emory Douglas:

Well, [coughs] Huey and Bobby would be in groups. Huey would be, [coughs] would be with a cadre of party members. Bobby Seale would also be with a cadre of party members. And

they normally would be patrolling, just ridin' around the community observing, seeing what was going on, talkin' to people. And if they seen the police harassing someone in the community, they would get, come out, observe what the policeman was doing. Policeman was violating that person's rights, they would interject themselves into the, into the, the, the situation, and to let them know what the rights of that individual was.

00:11:14:00

Interviewer #1:

Could you answer that question just once again?

Emory Douglas:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

So, explain the process of, of community patrols.

Emory Douglas:

OK. Process of community control was going out—

Interviewer #1:

No, I'm sorry. Of, of patrols. The patrols in Oakland. Could, could you explain that process once again?

00:11:30:00

Emory Douglas:

Well, it was, it was about going out into the community, observing the, the police when they were out stopping someone for no particular reason, harassing people in the community. Being out there to be like a, a watch, to make sure that these people weren't brutally beaten or, or shot for no [stutters] un-known reason.

00:11:52:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. What was your involvement with the survival programs of the Panthers? What, what, what did you do? What was your day like in, in relation to the survival programs?

00:12:02:00

Emory Douglas:

Well, I, I worked on the breakfast programs. I also did a lot of the, the, the, the information, developing the print material that had to be distributed to let people know about the different programs. So, I did a lot of the artwork that reflected the, the survivor programs and what they were about.

00:12:25:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. How did the Panther paper come about?

Emory Douglas:

Well, the Panther paper came about out of a newsletter, a, eight and a half by fourteen newsletter.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Can you repeat that? I'm sorry, I was bob, I bobbed there.

Interviewer #1:

OK, once again. How, how did the Panther paper come about?

00:12:39:00

Emory Douglas:

Panther paper came about out of newsletter that Hu-Huey and Bobby had put together. The first one dealing with the Denzil Dowell, murder of Denzil Dowell in Richmond, California. And from there it, they had a second edition which was also a newsletter. Then the third edition which evolved, which became a tabloid was when the march on Sacramento to the legislator.

00:13:02:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. And could you talk a little bit about some of the alliances that the Panthers formed with other White radical organizations? How did they come about? What were some examples of those? You might talk about the Peace and Freedom Party and also the Vietnam War [unintelligible].

00:13:15:00

Emory Douglas:

Oh, well the Peace and Freedom Party, that alliance came out of, out of the time when Eldridge Cleaver was in prison, and to bring attention to his, his case at that particular time. So, there was alliance for him to run as President of the United States, so he ran as President of United States on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. At the same time is also the time when Huey Newton was in prison, and he ran for con-congressman, I think, in, in the 7th congressional, 8th congressional district in Oakland on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. Our alliances with the Vietnam veterans wa-was one because we had a lot of veterans who were involved in the party.

00:13:55:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. And could you, could you talk about the anti-war work that the, that the Panthers were involved with? Any alliances dealing with anti-war work?

00:14:06:00

Emory Douglas:

Well, you know, the anti-war work alliances was just that we were involved with the different student movements on the different campuses who were involved in the, the Vi-Vietnam veterans, the Black Vietnam vets who, who were, who were also participating. And you had a lot of young, young Blacks who were coming outta the service, or who, who were, who were expelled, you see, from the service, who, who were also involved in, in the, in that particular struggle.

00:14:37:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. I'm particularly interested in the work of the Panthers in alliance with White radical organizations. And I know there were a number of mobilizations in the spring of '68 dealing with anti-war. Do, do any of those come to mind? Any, any, any work with White radical organizations on anti-war work?

00:14:57:00

Emory Douglas:

OK, I have a list, but I don't have the list with, yeah, yeah.

00:14:59:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, then we'll just stop. Stop please.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

And marker.

00:15:06:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark seven.

[slate]

00:15:09:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Huey Newton was arrested, shot and arrested in October of '67. And there were a number of rallies that took place afterwards, one at Alameda Courthouse. Can you talk something of the feeling that, that you experienced at those rallies to see so many people there gathered in support of Huey Newton? Facing, you know, facing the state, that's, that's a pretty big deal. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Emory Douglas:

Yeah. Well, well, you know, you got the, the feeling that there was a, a comradery there, that there was a unity of ideals [truck passes] on the issue of police brutality and murder.

Interviewer #1:

Let's just do that once again, there was a car.

Emory Douglas:

Oh.

Interviewer #1:

Go ahead.

00:15:48:00

Emory Douglas:

You got the feeling of there was a unity of ideals, a comradery there. That people were, had a unity of ideals around the issue of community control of police. You had this, also had the feeling that, that there was, you know, that you could, wi-within the numbers and amount of people, that we could overcome a lot of the difficulties. You had a, a positive energy that you could say that existed, that carried over not only into there but carried over into developing and people becom-coming a part of the programs themselves. So, it, it, it was a carry-over from not just people coming out to support Huey and, and the, and, and what was happening at the courthouse, but also becoming involved in, in, in what was happening in the community.

00:16:39:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, stop.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Hit it.

00:16:43:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mark eight.

[slate]

00:16:45:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Emory, could, could you talk about your decision to join the Panthers and, and the feelings that, that Terry just referred to?

00:16:52:00

Emory Douglas:

Yes. My decision was, was very easy. Once I had seen Huey and Bobby and what they were about and the positive energies and things that they were doing, I was ready to join. [clears throat] It brought, the feelings were it brought a lotta pride. *It, it was like bein' a part of, of, of a movement that you had seen on TV, and now being able to participate and share in that movement. When you, you heard and talked, heard talk about Malcolm, seen Malcolm on TV [coughs] at that, at that time, [clears throat] you had heard and talked about [clears throat] Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown, and SNCC and what have you, and all the different things were happening. And to become a part of a movement that had encompassed all these different concepts and ideals in its own creative way, it brought a sense of pride. But there was also, there was the doubts and the fear of whether you were going to survive or exist, but which became a part of your make-up, and you, you know, went on, took care of business the way you had to.*

Interviewer #1:

OK.

00:17:59:00

Interviewer #2:

When, at the Betty Shabazz, escorting her, did, was that something that produced a real emotional reaction? What, what did it look like?

00:18:08:00

Emory Douglas:

OK. [coughs] Well, it was a very, it, it, it was a, it was a, it was a very colossal event because of the fact that you had, here you had Huey Newton and Bobby Seale going to the airport with a cadre of Black Panthers and community people with guns to meet Sister Betty Shabazz as she got off the airplane. They went all the way to the runway of the airplane to meet her and to escort her off, and went up, some went up to escort her off the plane. I think this had a powerful impact wi-within...to the world, matter of fact. It was also a powerful event, the fact that when she went to visit, I believe, *Ramparts* magazine when she was here also, so it, it, it was a very dynamic experience.

00:18:58:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Thank you.

Emory Douglas:

Uh-huh.

Interviewer #1:

Any, any other questions?

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:19:07:00

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