Interview with **Eleanor Holmes Norton**
Date: August 2, 1989
Interviewer: Jacqueline Shearer
Camera Rolls: 4128-4131
Sound Rolls: 475-476
Team: D

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

Preferred Citation
Interview with Eleanor Holmes Norton, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on August 2, 1989 for *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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 #4128]
[sound roll #475]

[slate]

00:00:14:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take one.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible].

Camera Crew Member #1:

Anytime.

00:00:26:00

Interviewer:

OK. Well, let's begin. Can you give me a twenty-five words or less for popular consumption definition of affirmative action?

00:00:36:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Affirmative action is a set of techniques that…I, I mean, your twenty-five words or less, excuse me. [laughs]

00:00:47:00

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

I mean, [inaudible] you set me to counting words.

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. I meant that—

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

I mean, it's very hard to define affirmative action at all.

Interviewer:

—right.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

Well, just think about, remember—

[beep]

[cut]

00:01:00:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:01:05:00

Interviewer:

OK. What is affirmative action?

00:01:07:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Affirmative action is a very diverse set of techniques that remove barriers that have excluded minorities and women from the workplace and from promotion within the workplace.

00:01:22:00

Interviewer:

Excellent. Cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

It's a cut?

Interviewer:

Yep.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

I think that may even be twenty-five words.

[beep]

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take three.

00:01:29:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:01:34:00

Interviewer:

OK. So, now place yourself in 1977 and tell me, as newly appointed chair of EEOC, what was the status of affirmative action and what effects had it brought about in the country?

00:01:49:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Well, 1977 was in some ways a high water mark. A new President who supported affirmative action had just been elected. We had just had a President, two presidents, Republican, not of the same party, who had also strongly supported affirmative action. And already we were beginning to see extraordinary changes in the American workplace. Women and minorities, who had always been at the bottom, had begun to filter out through the various levels of the workplace. At the same time, there was an awesome challenge awaiting me because the Bakke case was pending in court and I had to decide how to advise the President and how to deal with the Justice Department on what the government's position should be on that groundbreaking case.

00:02:35:00

Interviewer:

Now, what was your feeling about the significance of the Bakke case? Was it merely symbolic? If it was symbolic, is that merely?

00:02:43:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

The Bakke case, I felt, was the wrong case at the wrong place at the wrong time, it was an education case. It seemed to me quite inappropriate for law on affirmative action to be set by a education case since most affirmative action in this country occurs in employment and it occurs in employment as a matter of law, while the affirmative action that went on in the university was very often self-initiated by educators. As it turns out, we won the Bakke case,

Bakke got into school and I had no problem with that, but the standards that emerged from that case were fairly much confined to education and left the road open in a positive direction for the next case, the Weber case, that would indeed address employment discrimination and affirmative action.

00:03:41:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. That was wonderful.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Did you say cut?

Interviewer:

Cut, yeah, sorry.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

I thought that was, I'm sure that that was, you know—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Interviewer:

OK?

00:03:54:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:03:55:00

Interviewer:

Why and how were White ethnic immigrants able to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, while Blacks needed affirmative action?

00:04:03:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Almost anybody who didn't have a stigma attached to him or her could pull themselves out—up if they came in the late 19th or early 20th century because the wonderful American economic machine drank up all the labor it could find. Reached out to the far reaches of Europe and thus the Poles and the Jews and the Italians and the Germans and this great variety of Americans that have assimilated into our population now got off boats with no skills, with only their, their drive and their, their yearning for a new life. They experienced enormous deprivation, enormous discrimination, overt and terrible discrimination. The, the grandparents of the Jews and the Irish and the Italians will tell you about that. The difference is that a White skin quickly absorbed them into the workforce, they were needed desperately, and up they went generation by generation. Meanwhile, there was in the South of the United States an indigenous workforce that spoke the language, knew the customs of the country, and had an extraordinary work, work ethic, and those people, of course, were African Americans, but they could find no work in the North or the South. Both labor unions and corporations are conspired to keep them out of jobs. Not until World War One interrupted the su, su, the supply of White labor from Europe was there any tendency to hire Blacks at all, even in Northern factories where there was no de jure segregation. And then Blacks were hired only in the meanest jobs for which there was no, there were no White takers. That artificial effort that specifically and overtly excluded Blacks when jobs were available, not only available but when they went wanting, that effort after the Civil War until virtually the time of, of World War Two is responsible for the retardation of Blacks in the workforce compared with the wholesale success of White immigrants. We would not need affirmative action today if Blacks had been let into the factories the way the White immigrants were and if, if, if they had been, the, the controversy that now surrounds this issue never would have taken place. It, it—we now are making up for what we did not do when jobs were readily available and, of course, the great tragedy is that Blacks have gotten the right to work where only Whites worked before only as the economy has become stagnant and no longer drinks up labor as it did in the late 19th and early 20th century. It is a, a real American tragedy. The only way to make up for it now, of course, is by using what amount to artificial means, temporary remedies, affirmative action remedies that bring Blacks in even as they bring women in and Hispanics in who, who have also been excluded and then fall away after the entrance of these groups who were kept out, del, and deliberately kept out.

00:07:36:00

Interviewer:

Now, you had a very interesting, to me, analysis of the way that economic change happens over generations and you attributed the growth of the Black middle class, in part, to affirmative action. Could you speak to that?

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

You wanna speak to the Black middle class now?

Interviewer:

Yes.

00:07:54:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

We have had only since the late '60s, finally, the tardy emergence of a Black middle class. Part of the reason, of course, is that people got access to education. But all the studies show that affirmative action has been critical to the formation of a Black middle class. A Black man with a college education in, in the generation of, for example, my husband's father, did what my husband's father did, worked in the poto—post office with White men who had eighth grade educations. That, by the way, had the effect of discouraging Black men from going to get a college education. Black women, of course, could teach once they got a college education. Black men were as likely to work as laborers even when they had great, a great amount of education. Today, today, beginning in the late '60s after the Civil Rights Act was passed, it became possible for Blacks to penetrate business, albeit at the lower rungs. It is business which is the business of this country. And, and when it became possible to be hired in business and in federal, local, and state governments, we began to see, finally, the emergence of a Black middle class. It is fragile, it is still too, too small but Black people today, the majority, are at least in the working class or the middle class while a third of Blacks remain poor.

00:09:32:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. That's wonderful. Now—

[beep]

[cut]

00:09:39:00

Camera Crew Member #1

Mark it.

[slate]

00:09:44:00

Interviewer:

What effect did the crazy economy of the 1970s have on Black economic progress?

00:09:50:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

The, the great tragedy is that the extraordinary expanding American economy that has been available for virtually all White immigrants has not been available to Black people because by the time Blacks got the right to work where everybody else worked, the economy itself was stagnating because it operated within an international economy where we are not always competitive. So that in the '70s when affirmative action is just beginning to be felt, we, we also have an economy that is not cooperating, so that while, while Blacks who, in fact, were able to get education, were able to have access to the networks that increase one's mobility, have done very well. Blacks who were imprisoned by the economy because they had working class skills no longer had available to them the great manufacturing sector that indeed is responsible for the creation of a White working class. If, if indeed they had been able, they had access to that, to, to, to those same jobs, entry level jobs, jobs that require no skill, good-paying union jobs or jobs that are competitive in scale, if they'd had, had, had access to them twenty years earlier, not to mention forty or fifty years earlier, then Black people would, I predict, have stood quite equal to White people by, by 1980.

00:11:10:00

Interviewer:

Excellent, cut, great.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Reload.

Interviewer:

What do we have—

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #4129]

00:11:19:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:11:24:00

Interviewer:

Is preferential treatment for Blacks in and of itself reverse discrimination against Whites?

00:11:31:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

The, the, the—let me see, what's the word? I forget the name of the word I wanna use. [pause] Words like "reverse discrimination" and "preferential treatment" are understandable considering how controversial this subject is, but they misdescribe affirmative action. Affirmative action, indeed, requires the employer to reach out for people who have been excluded but it also has other rules that protect those who've not been excluded. People cannot be hired for jobs who are less qualified than, for example, the White males who, with whom they compete. So, there cannot be reverse discrimination or discrimination against such people. Understand we have a kind of a logistical problem here. ***If, in fact, women, Blacks, Hispanics have been excluded, the question becomes how do you include them? How do you make up for the legal wrong?*** Well, you obviously have to reach out and show evidence that they have, in fact, been recruited and hired. In doing that, however, it's important that those people be equally well-qualified, that people who are less well-qualified not be hired. What causes the controversy, of course, is that there have been many court orders where the courts have required specific numbers of people to be hired in order to make up for past discrimination. But what is seldom alluded to is the fact that those same courts require a division of the jobs between those that have suffered no exclusion and those who have. So that typically, let's say, a police department and every police department in the United States of any size has been sued successfully for discrimination. A police department is found to have discriminated and is ordered to hire qualified Blacks, all who have passed a test even though they may not be at the top of a list for the test. The court then says usually, For every, for example, two Whites that you hire, hire one Black, even if the employer has deliberately and overtly kept Blacks out, for example, by saying, I'm sorry, we do not hire Blacks here and we haven't hired them for ten years and we don't ever intend to hire them. Even in that kind of situation, the court would require that the employer not hire only Blacks to make up for his deliberate discrimination but that the jobs be divided between Blacks and Whites until there is a critical mass of Blacks in the position. Not necessarily until all the discrimination has been overcome but until there is a critical mass of Blacks who then, by their very presence, signal to other Blacks that this is an open workplace and by the word of

mouth in the Black community then begin to bring other Blacks in. Such orders of courts usually last several years, they are not permanent and cannot be permanent. They are remedial only and it is the, it is the concept of remediation and not preference which more aptly describes what affirmative action is in this sense.

00:15:05:00

Interviewer:

Excellent. Great. Cut. Good. Now, the—

[beep]

Interviewer:

—the last question that I have on—

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Interviewer:

So, can you tell us what you think some of the political implications were of the decision on the Bakke case? [buzzing noise] Hold on a second. Do you want us to cut [unintelligible]?

Camera Crew Member #3:

Yeah, cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut. [inaudible].

Camera Crew Member #3:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

That's it.

[beep]

[cut]

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #2:

If that happens in the middle of the take do you wanna just—

Interviewer:

I want you to use your discretion and don't be purist.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[laughs]

Camera Crew Member #2:

[laughs]

00:15:43:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

That's, that's good, that's good advice.

00:15:47:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

You have that on tape. [laughs] Speed. This is take eight.

[picture resumes]

[cut]

00:15:53:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:15:59:00

Interviewer:

OK.

00:16:01:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

One of the more unfortunate things about the Bakke case is it, is that it became the vehicle for educating or should I say miseducating the public about affirmative action. The, the public learned about affirmative action lit—almost literally for the first time through the sound bites, ten second sound bites on television, with people polarized against one another. As a result, what is really a quite complicated concept, one hard enough to explain even if you have a lot of time, became digested as an element of un, of unfairness. Now, if indeed affirmative action of the kind used in, in Bakke or in later cases had been unfair, you could have depended upon the conservative Supreme Court to have struck down such measures. Instead, in case after case after case, the court approved affirmative action and as time went on even strengthened affirmative action. For the public to understand this somehow, however, it would have required the kind of, of—for the public to have understood affirmative action as the Supreme Court was explaining it would have required a level of sophistication or education on the subject that simply was not being done. Above all, it would have required the kind of leadership that increasingly we did not have on this complicated and controversial issue.

00:17:31:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. Good.

[beep]

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Interviewer:

November 21, 1984, a demonstration took place at the South African Embassy in Washington D.C. I'd like you to describe why this demonstration was so significant, or even necessary, and why you felt it was important for you personally to participate in it.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

[background noise] Well, Randall Robinson, the head of TransAfrica—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry, cut.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sorry. [inaudible]. We can go now. Are we still on?

00:18:05:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yeah.

00:18:05:00

Interviewer:

OK, good.

00:18:07:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Randall Robinson, the head of TransAfrica, came to see me and, and told me what the plot was. Four of us were to go, if I was willing, to the South African Embassy where we would ask about conditions in South Africa and I was to come out and inform the press that the other three did not intend to come out until trade unionists being held incommunicado were released. We were driven to this tactic because the relatives of these trade unionists, their lawyers, could not get to see them and we feared the fate of Steve Biko, the Black student who was murdered in custody. It seemed to me just the right thing to do. Struggle did not be—does not begin or end at the borders of the United States. To be sure, I have some i—some, some level of identification with people who are oppressed in South Africa. There is a kind of logical extension of the civil rights struggle. Remember, Martin Luther King didn't get the Nobel Peace Prize for leading an indigenous movement in the United States. He got the Nobel Peace Prize because of what his work showed the world about equality and freedom. And those of us who live after him, it seems to me, have to be responsive to similar problems throughout the world and thus to move on the South African Embassy to raise

consciousness in this country on brutal oppression based on color seemed to me to be just the next step in the American civil rights struggle.

00:20:01:00

Interviewer:

Excellent. Cut. I know they'll be happy with that and I—

[beep]

Interviewer:

—think that you captured both—

[cut]

00:20:09:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:20:14:00

Interviewer:

As a Black woman who has been involved in many of the struggles for civil rights, what is your personal philosophy of struggle and moral authority?

00:20:22:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

When, ***when the civil rights movement is no longer needed and we ask ourselves, What did it mean? it seems to me the answer will mean that it meant something universal. It meant something beyond Chicago and Detroit and Mississippi.*** And if so, it meant that because of its impact on people who were not only Black but who were other things as well. We see the evidence, the women's movement, for example, was directly inspired by the civil rights example. Hispanics and American Indians understand about equality because of the civil rights example. And people all over the world took this as, as an example and color discrimination in the United States, as well as in the rest of the world, is among the most despised kinds of discrimination, in no small part because of the universalism of the civil rights movement. Blacks get their moral authority not only because they were pressing for

their own rights but because they did so in a way that wrote equality lessons large. And they wrote those lessons large enough for people throughout this country and people throughout the world to understand the meaning of equality. And our movement, it seems to me, is important far more for what it meant to millions of people all over the world than what it meant for twenty million Americans. ***Our own freedom is precious and important, but in the end what gives our movement its majesty is the example it set throughout the world for people of color and for people who in, in, in any way were oppressed and found in that example a reason to hope and strive for a different life.***

00:22:14:00

Interviewer:

Cut. That was wonderful, thank you.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Oh, God.

[beep]

Interviewer:

Thank you. [laughs]

[cut]

[camera roll #4130]

[sound roll #476]

00:22:23:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

[door closes]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:22:36:00

Interviewer:

Did the Black consciousness climate at all influence your decision to get an afro?

00:22:40:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Oh, certainly so. I'm the oldest of three girls who had her hair straightened for her whole life and every two weeks had to press her edges. And the notion that I could be free of this and embrace my identity was utterly alluring. On the other hand, as an early afro wearer, I, I would also have not been in conformity with what most Black women at the time were, was doing. And added to that was the fact that I was a young lawyer representing unpopular clients because I was an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer professionally. So, I had to, I had to consider my own utter attraction to the afro, and you can see it hasn't left me yet, along with my professional responsibility. Particularly, did I have a client who was appearing before the military authorities and I wanted, wanted to make sure I didn't prejudice him, so I had to think long and hard. And finally, I thought, My goodness, judges are trained to disregard everything but the evidence and I'm going to get my hair cut. It had to be cut real short because it had straightener in it. So to get down to the nap, they had to really, really cut me short. I didn't tell anybody what I was gonna do. But often when I went to the hair dresser, and we lived in New York then, my husband and I would eat dinner with my in-laws at their apartment in Harlem. So, I told them that I would be by after I went to the hair dresser's. I walked in the door and everybody's mouth flew open. Nobody dared criticize and I think they didn't really wanna criticize but they were, to say the least, shocked. I said, I certainly hope the judge before the military court of appeals isn't as shocked as you all are or else I'm in trouble, at least my client is. My own parents, I have to give them credit, seemed to absorb this well when I came, again, I gave them no forewarning. I think I, I was at least interested in seeing what the first reactions of the generation above me would be when, when, when straight hair was, was vanished for, for, for me. I recognized though as more and more Black women embraced the afro that we were not only engaged in an act of fashion, that we were embracing our Black identity, and that that was indeed healthy and that it had to happen. At the same time, as the styles have gone diverse and many people now straighten their hair, I am not critical of that. The reason I am not critical of it is because I think the point is now made. Once that nappy hair came out and got the approval of Black people then we were free to do anything we wanted to do, including straightening our hair so that it would not then be an act in any way of implied self-hate. So that while I must tell you, as I tell my son, who wonders why I'm out of fashion with my afro, well, I must tell you that I'm gonna go into my 90s or however long I'm able to live in this world with this afro. Because it's, it's easy and because my identity is so wound up with it, I am not at all critical of Blacks who are, who in their womanish ways want to embrace whatever is the fashion of the moment and that just might happen to be straight hair sometimes.

00:26:00:00

Interviewer:

Now, can you just give me a topic sentence and tell me when you—what year it was that you go, got your afro?

00:26:07:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

That's where I need Edward because I think it was '68, but I could be wrong. My, my, my husband has a photographic memory and forgets nothing which is also bad, to have a husband who forgets nothing. I, I literally wanna see, see—

Interviewer:

Cut.

[beep]

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

—I don't wanna get this wrong, because what, what—

[cut]

00:26:28:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:26:37:00

Interviewer:

OK. When was it in time that you went natural?

00:26:41:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

It was the late '60s when the afro had begun to emerge but was by no means yet fashionable. Indeed, you were subject to be asked, Why didn't you go get your hair done if you came up with an afro at that time, even though it was beginning to flower here and there.

00:26:57:00

Interviewer:

OK. I'm sorry, could I have that again and could you give me and open it—

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

—you know, "I," something, something--

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Oh. Oh, I see. [sighs] Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

OK.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

OK. I began to wear an afro in the late--

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sorry. Can she start over?

00:27:14:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Mm-hmm. I began to wear an afro in the late '60s when the afro had begun to emerge but was by no means fashionable. Indeed, you were subject to be asked in the streets, Why didn't you go, why didn't you go get your hair done, if you had one, but it was beginning to flower here and there by that time.

00:27:34:00

Interviewer:

OK, great. Cut. OK. Now—

[beep]

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Fourteen.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:27:51:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:27:52:00

Interviewer:

How did you understand what was commonly referred to as the backlash phenomenon in the—in 1968, say?

00:28:00:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Well, there was ever the concern in the movement about backlash. We had known only a White resistance to integration and equality so that we feared that every advance we made would meet its own counter move, and we called it the backlash. We were sure that that would happen from the sit-ins. We were sure it would happen from the March on Washington. We were sure it would happen from the urban rebellions, the great riots that swept the cities. Frankly, we, we thought White America had a very low tolerance for actions by Blacks to cor, to correct their conditions and certainly for un-unlawful actions. The rebellions, the city rebellions, of course, had a, a high unlawful content and you began to hear the language of law and order, the code words that came to be applied to movement activity even that was not unlawful. As it turns out, backlash full-face did not emerge until around 1980 with the election of Ronald Reagan.

00:29:15:00

Interviewer:

Great, cut. Good.

[beep]

Interviewer:

How much do we have left in this?

[cut]

00:29:21:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:29:27:00

Interviewer:

As a movement activist who chose law as a strategy, how did you feel about others like the Black Panthers, specifically, whose choice involved picking up arms? Did you feel that they were jeopardizing hard-won gains of the movement? Did their language, you know, "Off the pig," and so forth and their posture have an effect on you?

00:29:47:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Well, as a lawyer, as a follower of Martin Luther King, Jr., I did not identify with unlawful activity or with violence, for example. On the other hand, I certainly identified with brothers like the Panthers and chose to identify with their peaceful work. Not with the advocacy of violence that, that sometimes one heard from them. The, the breakfasts that they served seemed to me to be the example. I remember being on the Johnny Carson show one night with a Black Panther who was advocating a right to bear arms under the Second Amendment. And, and I was brought on to tell the story of the Second Amendment as a lawyer and that is to say that it was not meant to empower individuals to bear arms, but was meant to empower states to have state militia. But in the proce—in, before we went on the show, even though the brother knew that I was there to speak differently about the Second Amendment, he and I became fast friends. There was a terrific bond, you see. He had his way to meet color oppression, I had found mine. I believed mine would prevail, I believed mine was the better way, but it was impossible to, to break entirely with him. There was too much that united us and ultimately, of course, after the, the Panthers got in all kinds of trouble, what remained,

certainly in my mind, was the benign activity, the ki—the breakfasts, the care, the care they showed for, for, for young, young people. What I think Americans have to remember is that it is a national miracle of the first order that Black Americans after 300 years of slavery and discrimination chose nonviolence in the first place as a way to liberate themselves. And that only a few groups emerged ever who advocated violence. That is a blessing for this country for which it should be profoundly grateful.

00:31:49:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. That's wonderful. OK.

[beep]

[cut]

00:31:55:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:32:00:00

Interviewer:

OK. We're in 1972. The news has just broken nationally about COINTELPRO, the government operation to set up the movement actually to self-destruct. As a former movement person, were you surprised at this news?

00:32:16:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Movement people were not surprised that there had been surveillance by the FBI, set-ups to try to get people to do illegal activity, because we had heard enough clicks on the phone, had seen enough pra, people who we believed to be provocateurs so that we suspected this all along. I must say though that this is one of the factors in American life that I think has never worn off. A kind of distrust of, of government, of, of, of White people's real intentions. There was a tendency on the part of some to see this as part of a large White conspiracy against Black people and here it was proved. Here we were operating nonviolently in the best traditions and there is the government, the FBI, and others trying to get us to do things illegal, trying to catch us in doing things illegal. And that, that had a profoundly cynical

effect and to this day, I think that there is a line of mistrust among many Black people that will not be wiped away until they are replaced by another generation.

00:33:27:00

Interviewer:

Good. Cut. Is that a rollout?

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #4131]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Roll forty-one, thirty-one.

00:33:37:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:33:47:00

Interviewer:

Did the prison uprising at Attica seem part of or an extension of the movement to you?

00:33:53:00

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

In some ways it did. We have a kind of continuum here. The movement begins with ministers like Andrew Young and Martin Luther King. The students, middle-class students mostly, like myself, take up the movement. The masses in the great cities and in the great rural areas take up the movement. And finally, the movement reaches into jails where Black men mostly are being held in quite inhumane conditions. We knew that they had heard us. We also knew that many of them were criminals. But the, the '60s and early '70s were a period when drugs and venality did not nearly as much account for criminal activity as they do today, when opportunities had not been as available they are today, so there was a much greater tendency to identify with people in jail. Today, the Black community is very hostile on, on, on issues

of crime because Black people have been so victimized by criminal activity by Black people. But interestingly, in the late '60s and early '70s, Black people tended to identify with people in jail. Many had relatives who were in jail. Many knew the kinds of streets, the kinds of circumstances that produced people who went to jail. So, we've had a great change in the way crime is viewed. And yes, we saw the rebellions at Attica, particularly given the way it was put down, as an indication that Black life was cheap and that even in jail, even in inhumane prisons that were far removed from the city, as Attica was, that the message that you didn't have to take it had found its way.

00:35:57:00

Interviewer:

Great. Cut. I think—

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible].

[beep]

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:36:04:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK. Coming up is wild lines. OK. This is for take two.

Interviewer:

OK.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Black men who had been to college often found themselves working beside White men who had eighth grade educations.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Actually, what I need is for you to say it exactly.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

I don't know what I said, I could—

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible]

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

OK.

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Perfect.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Hold on. [pause] Go ahead.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Even when they had an education—

[cut]

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

—manage to just then. [laughs] Even when they had an education. Black men, even when they had an education.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Great. I just need one other thing. "Masses."

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

The word?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Right.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

You wanted to say just the word.

Camera Crew Member #2:

One more wild line for possible use in take seventeen. Hold on.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Masses of people in the great cities.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Mm-hmm.

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

The masses of people in the great cities.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Now just "masses."

Eleanor Holmes Norton:

Masses.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:37:16:00