

Interview with **Amelia Boynton Robinson**

December 6, 1985

Interviewer: Callie Crossley

Camera Rolls: 572-576

Sound Rolls: 1533-1534

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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 572]

[sound roll 1533]

[sync tone]

[inaudible production discussion]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OKAY, WE ARE SET. LOOKS GREAT. LOOKS GOOD. OKAY CALLIE, IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: OKAY, MRS. ROBINSON, YOU TOLD ME THAT BACK IN THE EARLY 1960S, SELMA WAS A RURAL TOWN, LOT OF FARMING, THAT'S WHAT BLACKS WERE INVOLVED IN. COULD YOU DESCRIBE A LITTLE BIT, GIVE ME A WORD PICTURE OF WHAT IT WAS LIKE FOR BLACKS AT THAT TIME IN SELMA, WHAT THEY WERE DOING.

Robinson: When I came here in 1930, I was surprised to know that Selma was the type of place where people came from throughout the entire county with their goods to sell because this is a rural section. And this is the only place that they had that they could sell their goods. It also served as a shopping center for the counties that surrounded it. Consequently, there were more rural people and more people of Dallas County who would come to the city and would improve the, the income of the city than any other place. However, the city officials and the whites were somehow encouraged to take their monies, but they were not treated in any way, in many cases, as human beings.

00:01:37:00

INTERVIEWER: SO YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT BLACK PEOPLE NOW WHO WERE NOT TREATED AS HUMAN BEINGS.

Robinson: Black people were servants, and they were people who were sharecroppers and then sharecropping, it means that it was just a matter of apartheid because many of them could not leave the farm anytime they wanted if crops were being made.

00:02:00:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW YOU TELL ME THAT IT WAS YOUR HUSBAND'S INFLUENCE THAT GOT YOU TO REGISTER TO VOTE, COULD YOU TELL ME YOUR PERSONAL STORY OF GOING DOWN TO REGISTER TO VOTE. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?

Robinson: In 1930, when I came to Tuskegee, I was not a registered voter because I was barely twenty years old. And when I reached the age of twenty-one, my late husband, who at that time was a county agent, brought me to the county courthouse and said you are going to register. Well, I was acquainted with becoming a registered voter because when the women were given the right to vote in 1921, my mother with a horse and buggy used to go about and get people to go down to the registration office and help them to register and that was in Savannah, Georgia. So I was acquainted with a little of the political way of doing things. Then when he took me down there to register, I had no trouble whatsoever, because I was a single person, just one. But when he began to take many people down there, they became suspicious, and this is long before the civil rights movement, much mo—people were concerned, black people were concerned about civil rights, the right to vote, or what not. They just were, decided that what we'll just take what comes along. And the only positions people had here were teachers, they had one or two doctors, other than that, most of the people were servants in the city, and of course, in the county. Most of them were sharecroppers. Some of them were renters and a very few of them were landowners living on the farm.

00:03:57:00

INTERVIEWER: LET'S SKIP AHEAD TO WHEN YOU, ALONG WITH YOUR HUSBAND, YOU'RE NOW VOUCHING FOR PEOPLE WHEN THEY—FOR BLACKS WHO WANT TO VOTE. AND COULD YOU GIVE ME, JUST PAINT A PICTURE FOR PEOPLE WHO CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN LIKE, OF WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO G—BE A BLACK PERSON AND TO TRY TO REGISTER TO VOTE. WHAT HAPPENED?

Robinson: During the time before the civil rights movement started, which was about thirty years, between twenty, twenty-five and thirty years, before the whole country became interested and registration and voting for the more downtrodden people. My husband and I

decided that we were going to help people to register, at that time, they had two pages to fill out. And these two pages were questions that were pretty hard for the average person to fill out. And it was terribly hard for those who were illiterate. We had more illiteracy in this county, than they had in most counties throughout the state, or in any other state. But we would teach them how to fill these blanks out, we could not do it by coming in the open and doing it, so we started with the people with whom we worked who were the rural people. My husband as a county agent, and I as a home- demonstration agent would have meetings in the rural churches, and even in the homes. And we would show them how to fill out these blanks, how to present themselves when they went down to the registration office. At that time, my husband was a registered voter and a voucher. [car horn in background] Each person that came down to register had to have a voucher with him. But when he began to bring a number of people down there, three or four at one time—

00:06:03:00

INTERVIEWER: LET, LET ME STOP YOU. I WANT YOU TO START THAT AGAIN, YOU CAN STOP FOR A MINUTE, JON—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SURE, YEAH.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OKAY.

00:06:15:00

INTERVIEWER: OKAY, WE'RE DESCRIBING THE PROCESS OF VOTING.

Robinson: My husband was very, one of the very few people who was given the opportunity to bring people down there and as he brought them down—that is, they were expecting him to bring one every now and then, he was supposed to tell that he knew these people, he knew where they lived, he knew their ages, or around their ages, he knew that they were, during their lifetime, they were people who had contributed whatever they could to the, for the benefit of the city, or the county, and if he could tell all of that, saying that they were good negroes, as it was said, that they would consider letting them become a registered voter. These people were known as vouchers, my husband was a voucher. When he began to bring three and four people at a time, then the registrar became very much upset about and said, you're bringing too many people down here to register, why is it you're bringing these people down here? We have been registering and voting for them all the time. Now, you are doing the wrong thing by bringing these large numbers of black people to register and vote. So he said, they would like to be citizens, and later on, and this was in the '50s, later on, they found

out that he was training these people to register and vote. He was also helping them to come off of the plantation, as they were making crops for the plantation owner, rather than to make something for their family. And when he began to tell them that you can make crops for your own family, you have so many, so many children, and why do you let them stay tied up? If you want to get off of the farm, I will help to find some place for you where is for sale and then I'll find a man who would loan you money to put down your option, you can move off of this place and become your own boss, and your children will be free. When he said that and it got back to the city fathers and to the, the landowner, they became very much disgusted with him because he was not teaching them how to make more corn, and more cotton for them. Other than that, they felt that he was doing more harm than he was good. They tried to find where he was doing something against the, the Hatch Act, which would have been the thing that would hang him.

00:09:33:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME INTERRUPT YOU AND ASK YOU, GET BACK TO THE ISSUE OF VOTING AND ASK YOU WHAT DID THE WHITE PEOPLE HAVE TO FEAR FROM SO MANY BLACKS REGISTERING? YOU'RE TELLING ME ABOUT HOW THEY WERE UPSET WITH YOUR HUSBAND, AND WITH YOU, WHAT WERE THEY AFRAID OF?

Robinson: Well, first, these two things were the things that actually caused them to fear. Number one, if they became a registered voter, many of the blacks would seek positions in the political field. They would be out, they would fight for justice, if they were registered voters. They would turn the city completely around, and, that is the reason why they did not want to see black people become registered voters. One lady said to her cook one day—

00:10:27:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I'M SORRY, WE JUST RAN OUT OF FILM.

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: OH, SHOOT.

[cut]

[change to camera roll 573]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAG AND—

[sync tone]

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

00:10:39:00

INTERVIEWER: OKAY, WHY DON'T YOU JUST PICK IT UP?

Robinson: The white employer said to her cook, "Mary, why is it you're so interested in doing something you never thought of before? Registering, when you register, what are you going to do?" She said, "I'm going to vote." "Well, what are you going to vote for because you don't know anything about anybody." She said, "Just like I learned to cook in your kitchen, I can learn how to vote after I become a registered voter." She said, "Mary, we've been voting for you all the time. Then what makes the difference? And I know that man that you've got around here calling the county agent, why, he is disturbing your minds. And you folk don't know what to do, you'd better look out, he will lead you into jail." She said, "Well, I have been registering, I have been trying to register for the longest, and, I been down there several times, and I'm going to keep on until I do become a registered voter." But now, you know what a voucher is, now, I vouched when, my husband died in 1963. The night that he died was the first night that black people had the guts and the courage enough to go down to the church and that was the Tabernacle Baptist Church to see what it was all about, because Bernard Lafayette who was the first SNCC young man, and that's the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee organization, and it was a branch of SCLC, which is the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. When my husband passed, he called a number of people and he went from door to door, and he told them that Mr. Boynton has passed, and we are going to have a mass meeting. The people came in, but they didn't just come without fear for the streets were lined with all kinds of peop—whites out of the woods who were told you come in and I'll give you a gun, and I'll deputize you, you will be a sheriff. And they came on however, many of them lost their jobs when the Sheriff, the Police Department found out these people, many of them were working for white people. But I became a voucher, and the sad thing about it is the registrar was an eighth grader, and he could not read many of the applications that were sent down for registered—for people to register and vote. I remember very vividly a man who asked me to vouch for him, and we went up to the registrar and as he began to write in a very unsteady way, his name and when he wrote his name, he wrote it across the line and the voucher said, the registrar said, now, you're going across the line, old man. You failed already, you can't register, you can't vote, you just as well get out of line. And the old man looked at him and said, Mr. white man, you can't tell me that I can't register. I'll try anyway. For I own a hundred and forty acres of land I've got ten children who are grown and many of them are in the field where they can help other people. I've got a man who's a preacher and a man who's a teacher and all of them are out there and I took these hands that I have and made crops to put them through school. If I am not worthy of being a registered voter, than God have mercy on this city. And with that I stepped back. I figured he had said it all. I had nothing to say. But they let him go on and fill the blanks out. After having filled the blanks out, he didn't become a registered voter, and no did—neither did many others for in eight years time, we had less than twenty-five people who became registered voters.

00:15:33:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME JUMP IN AND ASK YOU ON FREEDOM DAY WHEN SNCC WAS IN TOWN, YOU MENTIONED BERNARD LAFAYETTE, AND THERE WAS FREEDOM DAY WHEN A LOT OF SNCC WORKERS TOOK PEOPLE DOWN TO THE COURTHOUSE TO MAKE A MASS PROTEST. DO YOU REMEMBER THAT DAY AND TELL ME A LITTLE BIT OF WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT—NOT SO MUCH OF WHAT HAPPENED, ACTUALLY, WHAT WAS THAT IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY, HOW DID THAT IMPACT THE COMMUNITY, JUST THE EFFORT OF SNCC SORT OF JOINING FORCES WITH YOU?

Robinson: Well, the very first thing is, so many of the whites tried to discourage black people and getting together. When SNCC came in was a time that Jim Clark, who was the man, the Sheriff, and having entire control over the city, over the county, over the people who came in. When he saw that SNCC came in, who were outsiders, he began to put articles in the papers talking about outsiders coming in disturbing the Negroes and changing our way of life. He did not stop with just talking about it, he decided that the best way to do is to put these people in jail. And there were many, many people who went to jail, they were old, they were young, they were children, they were college students. It made no difference whatsoever. He would herd them out and throw them in jail, the picture that you might have seen where, where Jim Clark caught me by my, the back of my coat as I came out of the courthouse, vouching for some of the people, whirled me around and, I was unprepared for what he did. Because I left the courthouse with the intention of going to my office, and my office was also, the office, half of it was given to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. I was going back and Jim Clark said to me, "You get in this line." And that line was one where he had sixty people standing up. He had planned on taking them upstairs in the Courtroom, cursing them out and saying that if you do this again, you will go to jail. But when he grabbed me as I was going down the street and would not get in the line, I didn't know whether I should go limp, or whether I should turn around and knock him out, or whether I should just fall to the ground or let him go in and take me. These people who were standing waiting for him to give him, them a charge said to me, "Go on Mrs. Boynton. You don't have to be in jail by yourself, we'll be there." So it gave me courage and I let him almost pick me up off of the ground by grabbing me, throwing me in the car. I was taken to the jail and there I was given the prints, the number of a criminal, I had finger prints taken, and mug shots and I was made a criminal. However, SCLC and SNCC, SNCC was in the forefront and they knew what was happening. Some of them were also in that line and when they were taken upstairs to be cursed out, they said, "We're going to jail." And when I knew anything, I heard the footsteps of these people, including some of SNCC folk, because Jim Clark was after the "outsiders," as he called them. They took them up the steps, some of these people were old and crippled, some were walking with sticks, some were youngsters but it made no difference whatsoever. I was in the cell, and I felt very badly at first, but when I heard the footsteps of these people and heard them in the mumbling tones, saying something to the jailer. I knew then that I had courage to come back again if I had to. When they tried to open the big iron doors that they had to the jail, they could not get it open. They told the jailer to change your keys don't you have some more keys. They tried it and the door wouldn't open. And during that time, these people started singing when God closes the door,

no man can open it. And they sang to the top of their voices and I felt good, being behind bars, I felt better than I think I felt during the whole time I was working and struggling and sacrificing in this movement. They could not get it open, they sent for the locksmith, the locksmith said I'll have to take the door off. Then they took all of those people back downstairs and brought them up on the elevator which they should have done from the beginning. And they said to me as they passed my cell, I told you we would be here with you, I told you, you would not be here alone. And it was just a beautiful demonstration of the determination that our people had to be, try to get free.

00:21:15:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU SING A LITTLE BIT OF THAT SONG

Robinson: I can't sing [laughs].

[cut]

[wild audio]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: JUST, JUST RAN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OK, WE'RE GONNA CHANGE HERE [laughs].

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ROLL OUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: YEAH, THAT WAS ROLL OUT.

[cut]

[change to camera roll 574]

[slate]

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OOPS, JUST ONE SECOND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SECOND STICKS.

[sync tone]

00:21:36:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANT TO BACK UP A LITTLE BIT TO JANUARY 2ND, THE FIRST MEETING HERE IN BROWN CHAPEL. DO YOU REMEMBER THAT MEETING, CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT THE FEELING WAS LIKE THAT DAY?

Robinson: I can describe to you the, the feeling of the people throughout the entire county as well as in the city. It seems as though people didn't realize that they were not citizens until they became registered voters. Because they had no part in helping to elect, or people who were, would be kind to us, who would do away with the discrimination, who would see that they got better jobs, would see that they were able to have the opportunity to do what anybody else is supposed to do as American citizens.

00:22:36:00

INTERVIEWER: IS THIS WHAT DREW THEM TO THE—I WANT YOU TO TALK ABOUT THAT PARTICULAR MEETING JANUARY 2ND, THAT FIRST MEETING WHEN MARTIN LUTHER KING WAS HERE.

Robinson: Martin Luther King came long before the first meeting. But when he came to the meeting, we had a number of people. He was very popular because of the bus boycott in Montgomery. And Southern Christian Leadership Conference had representatives here, and SNCC also came in and got the people to realize that they could register and they could vote. And they—we were having this meeting at the Church, Brown Chapel Church and it was then when many people who were rather nonchalant and who decided that they would let somebody else try to register and vote and break open the segregated pattern, then they would come in. Those people were people who were professionals. Those people who had jobs that they feared if they should try to register and vote, that, they would be thrown in jail, or they would let, they would be fired. It's the case of let John, letting John do the work. However, when it was said that Dr. King would come in, and he was very popular in the movement, but at that time the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was organized. And the people in Montgomery were also struggling. They knew Dr. King by seeing him on TV and when it was said that Dr. King would be in and of course, we had no, no press coverage because of the fact that the newspaper would not say anything that was good only that that was derogatory. The people who came in, they came in because many of their children had been involved in trying to register and vote. And the older ones, the younger ones, the children, all packed this auditorium to the extent that you didn't have standing room. And as usual, Dr. King gave the most uplifting sermon about people and God making, having no respect of people. It was wonderful, it gave them the courage. It was really an encouraging sermon. It gave them the courage to go out and to realize that they must struggle as he had done. Now an example of that is, after he had spoken to the group, many people said that, I'm leaving my job and I'm going out there and register because Miss Ann who people they were working with, can, can get her own meals or can do whatever she wants to do, I am going to take a day off or two days and I am going to try to register. One woman whose daughter she's, was sent to the store and she had told her daughter, don't you have anything to do with that mess. You stay out of it. The daughter stayed out of it. Then, she sent her daughter to the store and she knew she didn't go any farther than the store. She, you see the word that the daughter was in jail. For the first time she became angry, she became angry enough, to do something about it. She came down to the office and said to me, Mrs. Boynton, I sent my daughter to the store and they put her in jail. I'm going to that meeting tomorrow night, I don't care what happens because I know my daughter was not involved.

Then I am going to register and vote if it's the last thing I do because I see now that they're taking advantage of me. These are the things that helped to fill this auditorium when the people were arrested and then Dr. King came in, they had a new look on life.

00:27:25:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME SKIP AHEAD TO, MARCH 7TH, 1965. WHEN YOU GOT UP THAT MORNING, DID YOU HAVE A, YOU KNOW THERE WERE PLANS FOR A MARCH THAT DAY, DID YOU HAVE A SENSE OF, WELL, JUST GIVE ME YOUR SENSE OF WHAT YOU FELT LIKE THAT MORNING, YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN, WAS IT LIKE ANY OTHER DAY, OR WAS IT...?

Robinson: Well, having been a leader through the years, and having laid the foundation for the civil rights movement from 1930 until 1964, I felt as though all through that time it was my duty to lead. I felt that way because I came first from a family that was involved in politics. Then too, I knew that I could not let the people down. I had a young person that there ask me that day that we were getting ready to leave the church, on this March, which was Bloody Sunday, on the, the 7th of March. This youngster said to me, "Are you going to march Mrs. Boynton?" I said, "Yes, I'm going to march." So she said, "I'm going to march too." I had no feeling of what was going to happen, but I knew one thing, that I was determined to go all the way. I notified my office and my secretary that I may not be back that day. We started out with this long line, I was with Mrs.—with one more person, we started out together, we were the first women in the march. And we went on. I noticed that Jim Clark did not tell us to walk as he had done before because during the other marches and demonstrations we had down to the courthouse, and he would tell us "March one at a time, you can't couple up." But this particular time, he permitted us to march two at a time and instead of being four feet apart, he just let us march as closely as we wished. We marched on and when we got across the river, I said to the lady who was with me, "This is the strangest thing I ever saw. Just look at those, those officers, they look like tin soldiers." They were so close together. These were the deputies, the Sheriff, the people whom he had deputized which were people he had gotten out of the field—whites of course—out of the ter—turn time still, out of any place he could get them because he told them if you want to be deputized, and want to be given a gun, you come to the sheriff's office. Consequently they came in large numbers and almost every white man who wanted to hurt a black person was given a gun, and was given permission to carry that gun and became deputized. Adding to that number of local people, we had the state troopers who had their uniforms on and lined the two sides of the bridge, of the land across the bridge and I—we walked on and finally, when—

00:31:19:00

INTERVIEWER: HOLD ON ONE SECOND. SORRY

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ARE WE CUTTING OR NO?

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE CUTTING

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE ARE CUTTING, OK.

INTERVIEWER: YEAH.

[cut]

[change to camera roll 575]

[change to sound roll 1534]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SHALL WE ROLL?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: FLAG.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

00:31:29:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW YOU WERE JUST RIGHT UP ABOUT, ON THE BRIDGE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OH, YOU KNOW WHAT? I THINK YOU BETTER, I THINK YOU BETTER PUT YOUR ARM BACK UP ON TOP OF THERE. THAT'S...

Robinson: Ok.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: LET ME JUST GET SET HERE. OK CALLIE, IT'S ALL YOURS.

00:31:39:00

INTERVIEWER: HMMM? OH YES, AND WHEN YOU TELL ME THIS, WOULD YOU SAY, INCORPORATE THE NAME OF THE BRIDGE TOO SO YOU KNOW, PEOPLE KNOW WHERE YOU, WE SAY THE BRIDGE LIKE I KNOW AND YOU KNOW—

Robinson: The Edmund Pettus Bridge spans the Alabama River, the highway is Highway 80 that leads from—it really goes from California to the Atlantic Ocean on the other side of Savannah, of Savannah, Georgia. This bridge is known as the, the Edmund Pettus Bridge, for one of the outstanding political figures years and years ago. This is the bridge that we went across going to Montgomery, Alabama. Our objective was to go to see the Governor.

00:32:29:00

INTERVIEWER: WAIT, WAIT A MINUTE, I JUST REALIZED THAT YOU'RE JUMPING AHEAD, WE WANTED YOU TO FINISH TELLING THE STORY ABOUT BLOODY SUNDAY.

Robinson: Yes, well, I was just saying that—

INTERVIEWER: OH, OK [laughs].

Robinson: — that's where we were going.

00:32:37:00

INTERVIEWER: I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO JUMP AHEAD TO THE FINAL MARCH, I JUST WANTED TO MAKE SURE WE WERE ON THE SAME PAGE.

Robinson: No, no. No, no.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Robinson: Our objective was to see the Governor and let the Governor know that we were demanding that we become registered voters being American citizens. We did not know that he was in cahoots with the state troopers who lined the both sides of the road while we were en route to see him. He gave them the opportunity, the state troopers and anybody else that he wanted to. When we got to the first light across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, there was a wall of officers right across the street that we were going to march on. And we were told to stop—don't go any farther. Hosea Williams, who was at the head said, May I have something to say? And through the bull horn that was, “No, you can not have anything to say. Charge on them, men.” And the men came from the right side, from the left side from in front of us, they came upon us and started beating us with their night sticks, they started cattle prodding us, they started gassing us with gas. The helicopters were ahead of us, and I said to the lady who was with me, “What in the world do these people mean?” And I remember having seen a horse, a white horse and then I saw several other horses. One of the officers came to me, state trooper, and he hit me across the back of my neck. And I made a slight turn and he hit me again, and I remember having fallen to the ground. From that, I don't remember anything else, except the pictures that I saw and what was told to me. And that was this, that every person, every black person they saw, they started beating on them. They tried to run the horses over some of them, and the horses would not step on them. But they took their night sticks and they gassed them, and I was gassed and I saw the picture where I was lying on the ground and this gas, was being pumped over me, possibly thinking that, this is the leader, if we get them we will destroy the movement. I understand that someone said, get out of the road. The officers came out and said, get out. And realizing that I could not move somebody said, she's dead. Well, he said, if she's dead just pull her on the side and let the buzzards eat her. Some of the people on the other side of the bridge, said to Clark, Jim Clark, send an ambulance over there, somebody is dead and some people are hurt badly. And he said, I'm not going to send any ambulance over there. Let 'em do the best they can. Someone else said

to him, if you don't send an ambulance over there you're going to chaos on your hands because these people are going to be angry enough to tear this town up. Then he permitted the ambulance to come. I was put in the ambulance and was taken to this church, Brown Chapel AME Church. They could not revive me. They sent me to the hospital. And when I knew anything I was in the hospital.

00:36:48:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE STOP DOWN A SECOND?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH.

[cut]

[wild audio]

00:36:50:00

INTERVIEWER: I'M GOING TO ASK YOU THIS QUESTION OFF CAMERA AND THEN JUST HAVE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS.

INTERVIEWER: —JON ROLL ON THE ANSWER. JUST AS SOON AS—

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK.

Robinson: Dr. King had planned on coming in and leading that march. But his aides told him no, don't you go. No doubt they had a feeling that something was going to happen. But he came in immediately after that night, and they had a meeting after I came out of the hospital, we had a meeting and he said, we are going to march regardless. And someone said, we have to reorganize. He had had contact with President Johnson and President Johnson said, don't march until I federalize the troops. Dr. King was very much disturbed because all over the country and foreign countries, people said, we're coming and we're going to march and he said, I don't know what to do because, the people are coming in and they want to march. But President Johnson says it'll be dangerous because the troops have not been federalized and he will federalize the troops. After having gotten together, we decided that we will make an attempt to march the next Sunday. And if they say that we couldn't go through then we will kneel and pray. The next Sunday, we started another march—

INTERVIEWER: IT WAS TUESDAY.

Robinson: The next Tuesday, I'm sorry. The next Tuesday we started another march, we got as far as we got before which is where the light is across the bridge. And we were told again that you can't go any farther. We knelt and we prayed and we turned around, came back to the church and back to their respective homes.

00:39:04:00

INTERVIEWER: A LOT OF PEOPLE WERE MAD ABOUT THAT. DID YOU THINK THAT WAS ANYTHING FOR, THAT WAS THE PROPER THING TO DO, WAS TO TURN AROUND? YOU FELT, YOU AGREED WITH DR. KING?

Robinson: Yes, I agreed with him knowing that the whites felt that these people, people of color were not human beings.

INTERVIEWER: NOW, WAIT A MINUTE [laughs] SHE'S—MRS. BOYNTON IS WATCHING YOU ALL.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AM I CUTTING?

INTERVIEWER: CUT, YEAH.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ARE WE CUT?

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ONE SECOND HERE. MRS. BOYNTON, IF YOU COULD—DON'T LOOK INTO THE CAMERA, YEAH, THERE YOU GO.

Robinson: Yes, mmm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK.

00:39:43:00

Dr. King was very much disturbed, and he said, I want to please these people who have come in to help me. Yet, I don't want to jeopardize their lives knowing that there are many white people who were as state troopers and who had been deputized would do anything because the shedding of the blood of a black man was no more than killing a deer, or killing a rabbit.

And these were the things that we all feared, however, with the determination I had, I knew I had only one time to die. Well, Dr. King said, I don't know what to do, will you decide, let us get together and decide what we are going to do. Some said, march on, we will go regardless. Some said, suppose we wait until we hear from Dr.—from the President of the United States. Then he decided that we would wait after we were turned around and Dr. King was leading that group where we prayed and turned around.

00:40:57:00

INTERVIEWER: I WANT YOU TO TELL ME IF YOU AGREED WITH HIS DECISION TO TURN AROUND.

Robinson: I definitely agreed. Not because of myself because I was not thinking of myself, but I thought of the many people who had been beaten, who had been thrown in jail, whose children were turned out of jail in the coldest of the night to come back and I felt that those people did not want to lose their lives and their children and I agreed for the safety of the other people that we should wait until the troops, federal, was federalized, and it was.

00:41:35:00

INTERVIEWER: LET ME ASK YOU JUST ONE LAST QUESTION THEN, WHEN YOU FINALLY GOT TO THE STEPS OF MONTGOMERY AT THE END OF THE FINAL MARCH, WAS IT ALL WORTH IT?

Robinson: By all means. One of the greatest things in the world was when we were able to show to the Governor that we were solidified. That we were together, that if he didn't do something, that we were going to over him and we were going to get our rights regardless of what happened.

00:42:09:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT ABOUT WHEN LBJ SAID, “WE SHALL OVERCOME” AND ASKING THE NATION TO SUPPORT VOTING RIGHTS—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OH, WE BETTER SW—THIS IS IMPORTANT, WE BETTER LEAVE.

INTERVIEWER: OKAY.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YEAH. HOLD ON ONE SECOND.

[cut]

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[slate]

[sync tone]

Robinson: When President Johnson—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: HOLD ON ONE SECOND, LET ME GET SETTLED. OK, WE'RE FINE.

Robinson: When President Johnson said that we shall overcome and federalized the troops I realized that our theme song, which became a prayer to us, We Shall Overcome, deep in our hearts, we realized that we will overcome. And I had noticed that that song to this day is sung throughout the entire world and when we got our President to realize that fact that we shall overcome, I feel that we had at least converted him to the fact that the old way of life had passed out forever, never to be returned. And we, as Americans, black and white together, shall overcome and deep in our hearts, I do believe we shall overcome someday.

00:43:22:00

INTERVIEWER: ALL RIGHTY, THAT'S IT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YEAH, THANK—

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:43:29:00

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