

Interview with **Patricia Harris**

February 23, 1979

Interviewer: N/A

Camera Rolls: N/A

Sound Rolls: 3

Interview gathered as part of *America, They Loved You Madly*, a precursor to *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Preferred Citation

Interview with Patricia Harris, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on February 23, 1979, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. 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*.

00:00:02:00

[sound roll 3]

[wild audio]

[hand slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK.

INTERVIEWER: THIS IS PAT HARRIS. PAT, MAYBE YOU CAN JUST—WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO—WELL, HOW OLD WERE YOU AND HOW DID YOU FEEL BEING IN THOSE DEMONSTRATIONS?

Harris: Well, I was like, I say, I was about eight, maybe—well maybe ten, around the age of ten when I started. And really it wasn't of great significance to me, at that time, per se as to what was really going on and I remember seeing the, the, the segregated fountain should I say, like black here and white here and schools for black and schools for white, but, you know, bein' so young—

INTERVIEWER: —FOLKS IN THE BACKGROUND. YOU GOOD? OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CAN YOU TALK ABOUT—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: NOW HOLD IT DOWN.

[hand slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: CUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 3: NO GOOD.

00:01:07:00

[cut]

[hand slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK.

INTERVIEWER: PAT, WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING INVOLVED IN
DEMONSTRATIONS AND HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED?

Harris: Well, my mother she had been involved and as I became old enough she talked to us about it, to find out how we felt about being discriminated against. So, you know, she started takin' us to the meetings and listenin' to what we were going through actually. I didn't really even know it, that it was really happenin' at that time. But when she started takin' us there and we, you know, could hear what was happenin' and then beginnin' to see what was happenin' I felt that I didn't want to, you know, live the rest of my life facin' a situation of this sort. So, we got involved in the movement and started several marches, you know, for freedom. You know, right to do everything that the white man did. And, you know, I remember this particular time that I went to a doctor's office and my mother, she carried me, but I, like I say, I didn't really know the significance about, you know, black go here, and white go here until I walked in the wrong door and it was white in there, but, you know, I didn't think none of it until some white kids started laughin' and, and sayin', what's she doin' in here? And then I thought, well, this is one of those places that I had been hearin' [sic] about, you know. That, you know, you had to go in your door and not in the white door. So, you know, I was very young and I felt that I wanted to do anything that I could, you know, to help better, you know, the conditions, the standards of livin' for the black people. So, that's mainly the way I got off into it. You know, as a whole just from being, you know, with—bein' around people that were already involved, you know, and just listenin' and following up on it, you know, I got more and more involved in it myself and the youth even got an organization of their own. You know, we had a youth movement that we would talk and discuss different things and we would go out. We would sing, you know. And just sing for freedom, actually. It was all involved with freedom songs and, you know, and we'd march and we'd wear our signs as to equal rights and this type thing is what we were really lookin' for. And we would get talked about, you know, and—the people on the street would look at, look at us as if we were, you know, some type of trash, you know. But that didn't stop me. As a matter of fact, I thought it was, you know, [laughs] quite fun you know, to be able to sort of get the point over that you wanted to and try to make things better. You know, this place at least a better place to live in.

00:04:26:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW OLD WERE YOU AND WERE YOU INVOLVED IN ANY OF THE SERIOUS VIOLENCE?

Harris: Well, not—I were—I was about nine or ten, but I wasn't involved in any of the serious violences, [sic] but I could have been, but at the pa-particular times that I was, it was happenin' somewhere else where I wasn't at that time. But, you know, I know about 'em and my mother and my brother they were involved in 'em. You know, they were locked up. They were—dogs were put on 'em and water was skeeted [sic] on 'em and this type thing. But at that time, I guess by me bein' so young, my mother just didn't want to get me off into it. But I'm sure I could have been. Because she was. But the serious violence, no I wasn't. I wasn't involved in that. But just, you know, the verbal abuse, you know, is mainly what I bec—you know, came in contact with. No physical, no physical contact just verbal.

00:05:27:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID YOU REACT TO THAT?

Harris: Well, it hurt, you know. True enough, you know, and I, you know, the type of person that, you know—I can take a whole lot, you know. And like today, you know, bein'—my occupation bein' a nurse, I still see some of the things happenin, workin' with the white people. They call me nigger names, you know, and this type thing. But I've been around it long enough to, to understand the importance of not getting angry about it, but just trying to do things to make it better. You know, just trying to keep working at it until you get people to realize that, you know, God put us all here, you know, you know, to live in an equal way, you know. But, I felt, you know, real bad about it and it hurt to know that, you know, you had certain water fountains to drink from and certain schools you could go to, certain places you can visit, you know. But I just had confidence that one day it would be better. And I think it's better. [laughs] It is a little better now. Even though you still run into some of the same things that happened then.

00:06:43:00

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU, COULD YOU TRY AND LOOK AT ME THE WHOLE TIME YOU TALK TO ME.

Harris: Oh yeah, ok.

INTERVIEWER: AND TELL ME DO YOU THINK IT HAD ANY, ANY EFFECT ON YOU?

Harris: Well let's see.

INTERVIEWER: HAVING LIVED THROUGH THAT PERIOD AND PARTICIPATING IN THE WAY THAT YOU DID?

Harris: You mean like had an effect on me now as to the way I feel about—

INTERVIEWER: THE WAY YOU FEEL ABOUT LIFE OR BIRMINGHAM OR—

Harris: Well—

00:07:10:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Harris: —it had some—

INTERVIEWER: RAN OUT. SORRY.

Harris: Ran out.

00:07:15:00

[cut]

[hand slate]

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK—WHAT KIND OF EFFECT DID, DID YOUR PARTICIPATION HAVE ON YOU?

Harris: Let's see. Well, I'm sure like most of the black people feel, you know, very envious, you know, toward the white people 'cause mainly, you know, this is what the thing is about black and white, you know, gettin' together and workin' together and sharin' things equally. So, you know, it had to have a, a big effect on me knowin' that we were treated this way and why we were treated this way because we were looked upon as bein', you know, less than what the white man was. So, you know, it had an effect on me as wanting to really let them know that we are just as good as you are, you know, and that things that you do we should be able to do 'em also and that we shouldn't be ran over or discriminated against because of the color of our skin. But, you know, as far as me want [sic] to get out—well, I, I guess, there have been times that I did want to get out and do some of the things that I had been told that were done to us, you know. I would have liked to have seen it happen to them even though I never felt that my—myself, you know, would do it, but I've wanted to see it done. I would have loved to have seen it done to them, to let them see, you know, and feel some of the torments, you know, that we had to go through, you know. And just from bein' young and lookin' at it and seein' it happen I, you know, would wonder, why is this happenin', why—I mean, what happened to let it be this way in the first place, you know, whatever started the whole thing, you know. But like I say I always have wanted—that's the reason I fought with the movement and marched with them to, to see that things would happen to the white race like it did to us, you know, in order to get back at them for what they had done to us, you

know. Just to see justice done, really.

00:09:44:00

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU, WERE YOU AFRAID WHEN YOU WERE, WHEN YOU WERE IN THE MARCHES? HOW DID YOU FEEL?

Harris: Oh yes. I, I were afraid, you know, like a couple times, you know, people that—it was long lines in marches, you know, and some might happen to the people up front that didn't happen to you in the back or something like that. And some of the times that we marched, you know, like some people would be out there and they would throw rocks. They would throw different things at us, you know. I was afraid of getting hurt, you know, per se, but still I was willin' to march on to have justice done you know. I, I was really afraid because I had seen and heard about the things that could happen, the real bad things. How one of these marches can really get out of hand and, you know, everybody would be fine. You know, and I used to often wonder if one—if this broke out, what would I do, you know? Where would I run to, you know? So many people and everybody tramping [sic] over everybody else, you know. What would happen to me? You know, yet and still I knew what was happenin'. I knew the conditions, you know. And you understand I was willin' to, you know, continue and just go on and just see what happens. I was willin' to find out, you know, what would really happen. So I wa—I was really afraid. I was afraid. Because like a lot of things you were called, you know, and like I say, times that rocks and cans and just balls just anything somebody can find that, you know, they would throw it at us and stuff. But, you know, I wasn't afraid of this enough to just say, well, I don't want to go on any longer, cause actually I marched quite a bit, you know. Here in Birmingham and like when I went to Montgomery and Tennessee and places like this it really wasn't a march then, it was one of the big meetings you know. You know, tellin' us like what we have to do as black race to try to make things better for us, you know. And at this time the polices [sic] that were around were more for protection to us, at this time, more so than against us. You know, they were there to make sure nothin' really break out, I think, you know. And this was just—these meetings were just amongst ourselves as to tell us what we need to continue to do to make you know, things better. You know.

00:12:10:00

INTERVIEWER: WERE YOU LIVING IN BIRMINGHAM AT THAT TIME?

Harris: Oh yes. All the time. Right here.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT HAPPENED WITH SCHOOL? DID YOU HAVE TROUBLE IN SCHOOL?

Harris: Well, no. At the times I were going, you know, we would g-get out of school. We would get out of school, going straight down to the movement, you know. Going down wherever they gonna meet. It's whatever church they are going meet at. You know, I might have missed a couple of days out of school when we went out of town or something like that,

but it never affected me, you know. Not me, you know. It could have, but it didn't. You know 'cause it's just something I wanted to do and I had thought about if it came to the point that I would have to repeat a grade, you know, I was willin' to do that because I was seein' more of what was really happenin' the older I got. You know, I was realizing that, what was happening was really bad and something had to be done about it. You know. So school it didn't really bother me as far as missing school at that time. I didn't really think about it. And my mother was so off into it, you know, because like I say, she had really been treated bad, you know. She was one of those probably on a lot of those pictures down in the office that you saw down there. She was involved all in that. So, just—

00:13:22:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR MOTHER? DO YOU KNOW ANY OF THE THINGS SPECIFICALLY THAT?

Harris: Well I know she was once when—

INTERVIEWER: IF YOU COULD SAY "MY MOTHER."

Harris: My mother, when she was down at the—where downtown somewhere at one, at one time, you know, she was—the firehouse, you know, at the time when they were doin' all this, she was—in with that when they skeeted water on all of them. And then, you know, the ones that were really being—aggressive, you know, the fighters, the movement workers, they were real aggressive, they even put dogs on 'em. Well, she wasn't bit by a dog, but she was one of the victims of the water and after which they took 'em all and locked 'em up. They were locked up for not going, you know, when they told 'em to leave, they wouldn't leave. They were determined to stay there and fight it out. So she was one of the ones that were locked up, you know. She were pushed around. She was pushed around, but not really beat on, you know. She wasn't one that even though she was there at the time, you know, she just happened to be one of the lucky ones, I think, you know. That didn't get, you know, abused, you know, like that. But she was put in jail and water was put on her and everything but—

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID YOU DO WHILE SHE WAS IN JAIL?

Harris: Well, I was quite young then. I guess I just stayed at home and just wondered when would she get out, you know, and really, I guess, I was really trying to figure out at that time what was really happenin' you know, what was really goin' on. And a lot of it, my grandmother kept away from us 'cause she didn't really want us to worry about what had happened to my mother, but, you know, after we did notice she was in jail and my grandmother tried to explain to us what it was all about, you know, it worried me. It upsetted [sic] me. And I wanted—I did go down there. We went down there to see 'em. I remember going down there to the jail. To see 'em, but of course, they wouldn't let any of us in to see 'em at that time. You know, we just stayed outside. I remember going down there, stayin' outside and we would say, we're not leaving until you turn the people loose. And until justice is done we will stay here, and I thought at that time, we were going to get picked up and put in, but they didn't bother us, you know. They told us that we had to go, but our leaders would

say, no we're not going. You know, so we stayed there and, you know, we waited and waited until, finally, they let all of the people out that they had locked up, you know.

00:15:41:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW LONG WAS THAT?

Harris: How long did they—

INTERVIEWER: HOW LONG WAS SHE—

Harris: Oh I—maybe a day, two days something like that. You know, it wasn't long. I don't think. Not this time it wasn't. I think she was locked up twice as I remember correctly she was. But several days I think they had 'em locked up like that.

INTERVIEWER: OK DO YOU HAVE ANY? OK. WONDERFUL.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:16:09:00

© Copyright Washington University Libraries 2016