

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Mississippi Director, NAACP

Interview by Trey Ellis

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Total Running Time: 1 hour 12 minutes

00:00:00:00 TREY ELLIS:

Well, this is just- again, it's such an honor to talk to you. And we're just going to have a conversation about Reverend Martin Luther King, so if you tell us about the first time you met Doctor King.

00:00:15:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Well, I met him when I was a senior at Spelman College and he came to speak in Chapel. And Chapel was compulsory, and I was a rebel about that too, except that I remember more about Chapel now than about all of my classes. And the first thing that I did when I began to chair the Spelman Board was to reinstitute compulsory Chapel. But we had all the great speakers of our time, and- this was in my senior year of nineteen sixty- nineteen fifty- nine, sixty. I'd been abroad for fifteen months, studying abroad. Spelman was really ahead of the term then. And he came to speak in Chapel. And I remember it as if it were yesterday. And I quote him right now, and when I'm having a hard time I think about what he says about never giving up, but he talked about nonviolence and he talked about love. And, but more importantly, he talked about the importance of keep going forward and keep moving forward. And he said, if you can't fly you drive, if you can't drive you run, if you can't run you walk, if you can't walk you crawl, but keep moving forward. And it rings in my head when you are dealing with all these folk in Washington who keep wanting to move us backwards, but we're never going to go backwards. Never. And we're going to build on the progress of the last, almost fifty years, which has been progress, ebbs and flows, go forward go backwards, but we've gone forward a lot and we're going to finish this job of ending poverty in America, but starting with our children.

00:01:50:00 TREY ELLIS:

Did you get a sense, when you first saw him speak, that you- that he understood the burden of this movement, of, like, the- what he was taking on, the- changing the world and the weight that might have been?

00:02:04:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Oh, yes. He was always accessible. And I think that most of the times that I saw him, he was depressed, didn't know what the world was going to do next. But he was always accessible, and I think I went to meet him right after that, said I wanted to come see him, he said, "Come see me," and- and he- I loved him because he was one of those adults who didn't feel he had to have all the answer, who could listen, who didn't feel ashamed to say, "I don't know what the next step's gonna be." And I

guess most of the conver- many of the conversations I had was when he was struggling like we were struggling, for the next steps. He was not somebody who was chosen to lead- who chose to lead, I think he was chosen by Joanne Robinson and the people- and the women- and the ordinary people of Montgomery. He was new in the block- new kid on the block, didn't have a whole lot of baggage, and they needed a spokesperson, and so Joanne Robinson picked this new minister at Dexter, thank God. And the rest is history. But he was always humble, he was always accessible, he was always struggling. And that gave you confidence that you didn't know all the answers. And I know we used to laugh a lot about how terrified we both were of police dogs, what it felt when he was in that car going down after one of his arrests at Rich's. And the isolation. I will cross a block to get away from a police dog since I first met them in Greenwood, Mississippi. But he- he was able to laugh, but to talk about fear, but to say you don't let it paralyze you. And that was always reinforcing, I think, for young people struggling to find solutions to life's questions.

00:03:46:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can you talk about how your relationship with him changed- how it evolved from the first time you met him at Spelman?

00:03:52:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Well, when you're nineteen and you don't know- you say, "I want to come see you after that wonderful talk, okay?" And, and he said, "Certainly." And again, the accessibility was always there. And I remember he had to bump me because President [unclear] was coming, but he kept his word. He was always there to kind of talk one on one. And during that year, which is when the sit-ins began to bubble up, and Greensboro happened, and obviously all of us in Atlanta were absolutely determined to follow. And we were- set up our own committee for human rights and published an appeal for human rights, and ere meeting with our college presidents who- and the chief of police in Atlanta, who was- they were about more containment, but wanting to listen and Doctor Mays was- all of our north star in many ways.

00:04:44:00 But during that period, wherein again, they were more concerned about keeping the lid on, but they were accessible, we were talking to our college presidents, and they asked that we do this campaign for human rights- or write a statement, and I must say I re-read. It stands up as well today as it stood up did then. It was terrific. And they thought that the students couldn't read- thought that the commoners had written this, no the students couldn't write anything so eloquent and thoughtful and strategic.

00:05:10:00 But in planning the protests in Atlanta- and we started testing our nettles before the sit-ins actually occurred. Howard Zinn was our chairman of history and we used to have an annual ritual of sitting at the state legislature, in the white section, and the whole place would grind to a halt, "Tell the, you know, the folk to remove these students." And we tested the public library, we tested a little bit of everything. But when Greensboro came, and that was clearly the signal to say "we can do this too." And we met very, very quietly, and planned it, and then met with our college presidents and laid out what we were about. And I think it was one of the best sit-ins because we picked all public places. I went to City Hall, another delegation to City

Hall. But we took public places, bus stations and the court statehouse. But it was always the places where we knew we'd have the best legal chance, and, and, you know, that was the first sound, and then the question was what was next. And Ella Baker- I'm sorry, don't let me-

00:06:16:00 TREY ELLIS:

Well. Sorry. The focus here, so we're talking about Martin the man, but also, and your jumping forward to the later radical King, post- starting at the March on- the March Against Fear. The Meredith March. So, can we jump ahead-

00:06:33:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Don't want to go quite there that quick because one of the things that we did was to plan a march across Atlanta. When- after this appeal and student stuff was bubbling up, the Klan had said- basically threatened us that if we kept making all this noise that they were going to put us in our place, and so we obviously had to push back. And we planned a march across town, when they said that they would meet us, and we were meeting with our college president and with Chief Jenkins, we had a great police chief. And all said "don't go." And we decided we would go. And- I think one of the loneliest mornings I could remember was each of us in our respective college students- college campuses, going up to tell the kids what time we're going to meet and where. And our college presidents, after we had had this thoughtful process, double crossing us.

00:07:26:00 And so the president of Spelman got up after I spoke, told us where we were going to meet, and said, "I want you- don't- you shouldn't go." And I don't know that I felt quite as lonely, except in Mississippi, going out in front of Atlanta University Library, and there was Lonnie King, there was Julian Bond, Otis Moss, Jr. and few others, and there was nobody else. And Doctor Manley got up after I spoke and told the Spelman girls not to go, Doctor Brawley from Clark locked the dormitories so the kids couldn't get out. This was after we'd had all these quiet negotiation sessions and sort of- at any rate, we stood there and we stood there and we said, lord have mercy, what is going to happen here? But then we heard the Morris Brown students, coming, singing from- they were farthest away. And all of a sudden, it was filled up and we- King is in this- and we all began our march, the kids from Clark jumped out of the windows and there was this big march. Chief Jenkins took his words, since we didn't take his advice, but he was there to protect us against the Klan who were there, and we got over to Wheat Street Baptist Church, which was where we were going, just to show that we could march wherever we wanted.

00:08:36:00 And who was there? Our six college- seven college presidents were there to welcome their students, but more importantly, Doctor King flew up from Montgomery to welcome us, knowing that we have sort of gone against the grain, and it was just a wonderful reaffirmation. And then we moved to- when SNCC began to get formed and Ella Baker, and sitting with him for those days at Shaw. But again, that was really again another thing of affirming the power of young people and the voice young people. And we've never forgotten it.

00:09:09:00 TREY ELLIS:

Wow. I did not know that story, that's amazing. So, we talked about the- the March Against Fear, can you talk about your- how that came about and the- you know your- just tell us that story-

00:09:24:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

How are you defining the March Against Fear? That was James Meredith and that's was many years in advance, and one big thing occurred with- my first plane ride, many of our first plane ride, we went to Shaw and we formed SNCC. And Ella Baker was the midwife, and Doctor King was the host, and we spent two or three days, and Ella Baker was very important because she told us not to become a part of SCLC. But we spent three days with him and again he sat through all the meetings, he listened. I mean, he listened. And we came away from that, my first plane ride, and we came away from that having decided we'd start our own organization called SNCC. He was the midwife, but we did not want to become part of SCLC. And so that was the second big support system that he provided. And between the time I finished Spelman- I mean, again he was always there to meet if you wanted to talk and to listen. And I went off to law school, and I would see him when he came to different colleges, we sort of have the younger generational programs, went to Wesleyan, went to different religious groups. But again, he was always, again, again, accessible. And that was really very important, I never lost touch with him during law school.

00:10:50:00 And then I went to Mississippi to practice law. And the Meredith March was a part of that. At the time we went it was still a hell hole. The Mississippi Summer Project had ended in nineteen sixty-four, everybody had left for different reasons. The press left when the white kids left. And, and Meredith didn't consult with anybody, he still doesn't- bless his heart. He's all gray and gorgeous now. I just took my grandchildren to meet him this summer, went on a civil rights tour. But at any rate, he did this march and it wasn't on anybody's agenda, he didn't consult with anybody. And so, Doctor King and civil rights leaders rallied around that, and we all walked from- almost from Memphis, down to Jackson. And that's when the first- and every night, and again- accessibility, listening, we would stop and sleep in people's houses because motels were not available.

00:11:49:00 And Stokely and Willie Ricks and the SNCC kids- I was now kind of a former SNCC kid who was now more part of just getting people out of jail [*unclear*]. Anyway, I was bridge. But we'd meet every night and it was amazing to me how after long walks he would listen to them vent, listen to all of us vent, and it wonderful to be a fly on a wall, with great patience. And I remember him often saying, "Stokely, is it that bad? Is it that bad?" But he listened. And that was when "black power" first began to emerge, and I will never forget Doctor King's face when in Greenwood, we had a rally, and Willie Ricks got up and started saying, "Black power." He looked like the most stricken man. But again, what- I remember was the listening the patience, trying hard to understand, because he really was committed to nonviolence. How to connect. And I don't know if I would have the patience to do that, but he listened in Chicago, he listened whenever there was an outburst. The black power thing reinforced itself in, in Canton where they had gas

canisters. And then in Jackson, but that was the first real breach in the nonviolence commitment that many of us had grown to accept. But he was not judgmental, he was always there to say, "I don't go there, but I really want to understand why you go there". The patience- I mean patience of Job, which I didn't have. And an ability to kind of just kind of be present.

00:13:31:00 TREY ELLIS:

Were you toying yourself between the Stokely- your former SNCC colleagues, and the name change and King? Did you feel you had to make a choice between these two-?

00:13:40:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

I didn't feel I had to make a choice. I mean, there's always going to be a continuum of views and I had- I mean I knew all my SNCC colleagues very well- didn't agree with them a lot. The role of women in the movement was always complicated and I wasn't somebody who was going to take a lot of guff off of any of them. And, and it was- you know, and they were my friends and friends disagree, husbands and wives disagree, people in complicated situations disagree, and when some things are moving very slowly, it is the job of young people to be more impatient and to push it. And I remember what it was like to be a young person and to push it. And- but my job was to get them out of jail, and try to keep them alive if I could, try to keep us all alive. So, no. I strategically disagreed. But I don't think I'll ever forget until I die, the stricken look on Martin's face when they stood up in several places publicly saying that, and he would constantly try to understand, I mean, "Is it that bad? Are you- I mean, is it really that bad?" But he stayed present.

00:14:44:00 TREY ELLIS:

So, going back to this, sort of, the black power bit- what were the discussions like after the- at night, between, in the cabins, and the talking- was Martin-

00:14:55:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

They were heated, they were, I mean, the young people say what they got to say. Okay? And with the shooting of Meredith and with the aftermath of the nineteen sixty-four Summer Project, and everybody left Mississippi, the repression was not terrific, you know. People were bitter about the slow pace of change. And the Vietnam War had begun to encroach upon us and people were preoccupied with other things. And I was left there not only as a lawyer with hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of cases to handle, and everybody had gone and the press had gone, but the issue was how were people going to eat, because that was the first thing that began to emerge after the folk left. Mississippi wanted black folk out. After the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenged in- challenged in Atlantic City, they just wouldn't get out, so they tried to starve them out. And they switched from poor- food commodities, which were not wonderful, but they were free, to food stamps, and they charged for food stamps. And many people had no income and could not afford food stamps, and so in the aftermath of the Summer Project of sixty-four, hunger became a very big problem.

00:16:10:00 And secondly, the poverty program emerged in nineteen sixty-five and the state turned down the Head Start program. And there was a provision built into law, which I'd like to see built into every federal law that's designed to serve people- poor people- was that if the state didn't want to take the Head Start program, or the community action program, that community groups could apply. Boy, we should have that in the Medicaid program with all these governors turning down tens of billions of dollars to give basic healthcare to their folk. And so, community groups applied. And King is in this story too, because we ended up getting the largest Head Start program in the nation. The Child Development Group of Mississippi, CDGM in nineteen sixty-four, that created the first- in sixty-five, I'm sorry- first jobs free of the plantation structure that had ever existed, because they were pushing people off the land, wanted them to go north, most people didn't have enough literacy or enough money to get on the bus or find a bus station or to pay for the ticket. But it turned out to be a revolution in many ways. Folks saw that children could be excited, they saw that they could build schools, didn't matter how ugly they were, with their kids they saw books that reflected the images of their children, and it was a revolution and the state cracked down. And Senator Stennis and Senator Eastland were- and Jamie Whitten were among the most powerful senators with seniority in Washington, and they immediately demanded that they cut off this communist program- this, this, this thing.

00:17:43:23 And, and we were determined, having seen the life that was there, that came from this program, people say, you could tell the CD- the CDGM kids they don't sit still, they always ask all these questions. And parents began to understand how to help their kids and learn to read with their kids. And so, they cut it off after a few months, after the first thing, and we had knockdown, drag out refunding struggle with Sargent Shriver and others. And in the middle of the toughest negotiations- it was in Atlanta at the regional office and I called up Martin and said, "You got to help," and he showed up, and I'll never forget Shriver's face when Martin walked in to help us and he said, "I didn't know you were inviting outsiders," I mean, come on, I mean, he was there along with his staff. And again, just the presence, and whenever you needed him he would come. And, and that was that accessibility I try to remember, remind myself of when, when every seventeen-year-old wants to talk, or when you've got something that really needs to get done. But I think that, you know, he was wounded, but trying to understand and to listen to see where this bitterness had come from. And they maintained the contact, and when he began to take a position against the war, and Stokely was in church and told him to come to the Ebenezer one Sunday, he had something he thought he'd like to hear, but never kind of let go of trying to sort of build a line of understanding.

00:19:16:00 TREY ELLIS:
So from the Georgia- from the Head Start program, I'd like to talk to you about the Poor People's Campaign, how you, how that came about. You talk really eloquently about visiting RFK and then bringing this message to King and then King being depressed until you give him this idea. Could you walk us through that?

00:19:39:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Mississippi wanted black folk to leave, they didn't want to be there to vote, they didn't want to feed them, they were trying to starve them out. They were trying to- the violence continued. The attacks on federal programs and moving to food stamps where people had no income and it was inconceivable to many people back then that there was no income. And it was terrible in sixty-five and sixty-six and sixty-seven. And hunger was epidemic. And the- if you went out, as I did try to go out every day or every week in the communities, you just saw the suffering. And- you had to do something. And the Poverty Program and CDGM brought a lot of hearings and harassment about why the federal government was giving this group of church folk and civil rights folk and that we were mis-spending the money. I was its general counsel. And one of the things that I feel very strongly about is that poor people have to have better management than non-poor people. And some of the SNCC kids were not managing everything right, and I always would say, "Don't screw up the program by not making sure that every dime is spent." But most of it was wonderful. And parents came alive and children came alive, and the school people began to say you can recognize the CDGM children, they're just always asking these questions, thank God.

00:21:03:00 And so that that became an ongoing struggle, but meanwhile the hunger increased. And we got called- I got called to Washington to testify about the child development program and about poverty and what was happening in Mississippi, to Joe Clark's subcommittee. And we had Jacob Javits back then, we had Joe Clark, we had- where are they today? And in the middle of it all, I asked them to come see for themselves, because they were- the repression and the misuse of the dollars, and the attacks on the Head Start program were all unjustified, and they agreed to come. And Bobby Kennedy came with them. And- I hadn't- I was supposed to talk about food and misuse of dollars, and they did politically use the community action program- Mississippi misused everything. But in the middle of it all, I saw a wonderful picture recently, with Unita Blackwell and Amzie Moore who was somebody that ought to be put up on every billboard as a servant leader who was the wisest, smartest, he kept us all alive, he was where we all kind of lived in the Delta.

00:22:15:00 But in the middle of it all when I was talking about Head Start and Stennis was there to testify, I said that people were starving in the Delta and that they should come see it. And to my absolute joy, they agreed to do it, and Amzie could tell you exactly where to go out on one day's notice, a half days' notice. And so that was the thing that really sealed me with, with Robert Kennedy, because I had had an image about Kennedy's. And, and that's when I first met my husband because they sent him down to advance that hearing and I was really very busy. And I was expecting somebody like Pierre Salinger with a cigar and arrogant and all the other, and it was quite the opposite. But the bottom line is we went up in the Delta, and we- and Amzie found these children with bloated bellies and with- had had no food, and poor parents. And watching Robert Kennedy, outside of the cameras, was one of the most moving experiences. And there's a famous incident of going in the back door of the baby with the mother in a dark room, I don't think they even had a wooden floor, sitting there, and I watched him just poke to try to get any kind of reaction out of that child, and couldn't and you know- and I- it changed my whole sense about who he was, and he came outside, he was somebody who touched a lot, which was

surprising, I mean when I would say hello, he would just kind of, you know, do a little pat. And he touched a child, there was some older children standing outside with lots of reporters who hadn't gone inside to look at Annie's child, and we asked the little boy what he had for breakfast, said he had nothing yet, and asked him what he had for lunch and, said nothing yet, and- you could just see how any adult and parent would respond to that.

00:24:09:23 And the second thing that happened on that trip, with the committee traveling out to see hungry families, was in, I think it was in Cleveland, Mississippi, but in one of the Delta counties, and a little boy, little white boy's dog ran out in front of the procession- what do you say when you got a- all the cars out there screeching, I mean they are the- what do you call the thing- at any rate, our procession of cars, and the child's dog ran out and got killed, and Robert Kennedy was furious and stopped it- got out to talk to the boy, and told them to cut off the sirens. And so, I became a groupie then, I had had a very different image about who he was. And he went back after this trip and with Joe Clark, they went over to see Orville Freeman the next morning, said, "You got to get the food down there, Orville." And they became- they began to be pushers. And yet it was hard, even for a Kennedy, and even with key people on committees and bipartisan people trying to do something. But at any rate, he stuck with it and in August, I'd gone by to see him at Hickory Hill just on my way back to Jackson and he was around his pool and I told him how bad things were and nothing was moving and they were still charging for food stamps. Change is hard, folks, and you have to stick with it.

00:25:31:00 And he said- I told him I was going to stop through Atlanta and see Martin, and he said, "Well, tell him to bring the poor to Washington." By this time, he was running, he had decided he was running for president. And I went down to Atlanta from there before I went back to Jackson, and went to SCLC, and he was depressed. I mean he was sitting in his office by himself. He was- all of us were struggling- he was struggling to see, what do you do next? You had the Vietnam War; the country's attention was moving away from civil rights- and from the poor. And I walked in, and he was by himself in the back of- I loved it, he always lived very modestly, and this was a very modest office. And he was- he was depressed. And I told him what Robert Kennedy said, he ought to bring the poor to Washington, and he lit up, he just lit up. And he went home, and you can see what Coretta said about it. And he immediately began to sort of get the staff, who was not happy, I'll just tell you that- engaged and people came over from Marks, Mississippi just to talk to him. And he had been in Marks, he'd been in Marks for a funeral and had gone to a center and saw children who were- the teacher had one apple for lunch, and she's carved up that apple for four kids. And that was the first time Ralph Abernathy said that he's ever seen Martin cry in public, but he had to leave the school because he couldn't believe they were each getting a fourth of an apple. And the hungry Marks was palpable.

00:27:08:00 But any rate, he responded immediately, and called his staff together who was not happy about this. And there was robust debate over the ensuing months about whether Vietnam should be the big issue or whether it should be economic opportunity and jobs, and obviously it was by- obvious by then that the next step that the talking about changing laws was to get people jobs. They had to eat, they had to survive, they had to work, they had to have an income. And so that was a very

interesting follow on set of months, but he stuck with it. And committed himself to doing a Poor People's Campaign. And...

00:27:45:00 TREY ELLIS:

So, talking about the- I'd like to talk in depth about Airlie House in September of sixty-seven and the, the sort of divide between- you should talk about- like Baez and sort of the- non- the anti-war factions and you sort of- leading the anti- poverty sections. Those kind of- what was the mood there and what were the discussions like?

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Well, they were always robust discussions [*laughing*]. And I-

TREY ELLIS:

So can you go back and tell us a little bit about Airlie House-

00:28:16:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Well, Airlie House was a gathering or a retreat, where- I don't remember how many of us there were, I mean, whether it was forty, whether it was fifty, Joan Baez was my roommate, but I'd never saw here. And- but Andy and all of his people, with some outside folk. And it was about where do we go next? And I always loved him because he had very big tolerance for different views. And Bevel is not a- was not an easy man to- and I loved Hosea Williams. I mean, they all had very strong views. And Jesse preached, in fact I remember Jesse really did preach. And, and Martin listened. But it was a very robust discussion about where one should go next with a lot of resentment about this Poor People's Campaign. And that Vietnam was the issue and that black boys were dying over there and that was draining all the money. On the other hand, you had all these hungry people right here in America with no jobs and no income. And I don't think he wavered, and he waited for Andy always to find the bridge- Young to find the bridge between all these robust discussants who never were lacking for a word or a view. And again, the patience of Job, as far as I'm concerned, I go- I'm for having opposing views with some folks- here's where we're going. But he was amazing, but it was a very moving meeting. A good meeting of open- I'm not going to say- debate.

00:29:53:00 And... and Jesse- it's funny I can't remember Jesse's sermon, but he sure did preach.

And we moved away from there knowing we were going to do a Poor People's Campaign, not with a plan, not with a whatever, but that this is where he thought he should be next, but he also spoke on both, because they were so interrelated. And again, the bridge role, and the listener role, and the trying to find the way forward.

00:30:19:00 TREY ELLIS:

I'd read that in those sort of battles he'd said, "I just want to go back to my little church at some point," where the patience broke and-

00:30:27:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Well, I'm sure his patience broke often and I'm sure he did want to go back to his little church, and that was a whole lot of stuff he had to go through. I mean, it was a very tough life. And we used to laugh a lot because I will go across the street before police dogs, right, but then- he could always see when I was afraid and going out to Georgia during the period where John Kennedy's, you know, made that right call- Daddy King- but boy, we could laugh about police dogs. I will cross over two blocks because of the first time they brought out police dogs in, in the south was in Greenwood, Mississippi in nineteen sixty-one. It was my first visit to Mississippi and Bob Moses is the bravest man I've ever seen. He didn't move as the dog ripped his pants down. But, but, but again he could laugh. He could be- and he was- he didn't hide his depression or hide his uncertainty, but he would always struggle to try to find the way through. And I really try to remember that a lot, 'cause I'm not a patient person.

TREY ELLIS:

And back to the Airlie House, tell us about the mood of when they weren't talking about politics, what are they eating, are there any sort of non-political, like is it-

00:31:41:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Do a lot of singing. We always sing. And when the music stopped the movement stopped. And music really was the glue that tied us together. It was the glue in all of our meetings and I always remember Hosea Williams in one of the worst incidents in periods in Grenada, Mississippi, and there was some feds down and my dearly beloved Carl Holden and others who had come down to Mississippi because the place was exploding around school desegregation, and there were two mobs that night. And one was the police mob- the cops mob- and the other was the white folks mob. And I just never remember- I chose to go with the, the white folks, the bad folks mob, but not with the police who I think were more dangerous- there are all these dances in the state, but Hosea jumped on top of a car and started singing "This Little Light of Mine." And I said, now, he could have been just mowed down on any- but that music was always the thing that would keep us going. And when the movement stopped- the music stopped, the movement stopped.

00:32:49:00 And whether you come in in the evenings and you debrief after they've been shot at- Stokely they used to all tell stories, "Well, I almost got shot on the plantation that day," or whatever, but we could sing and singing and preaching were the glue, and I just can't say enough about the importance of music and Miss Hamer's voice coming through in Parchman or other people singing. And, and just being, you know, connected in this. And when the music stopped, the movement stopped. And so I- but music and preaching- and I think if- I can't tell you a lot about the particular debates about Vietnam versus poor people, or where we should have jobs, whatever, but I remember Jesse's sermon, I don't know what it was, but boy it was good, *[laughing]* 'cause he sure can preach, and I remember singing a lot.

00:33:40:00 And I don't think we reached any formal conclusions out of that, but I did- I left there knowing that we were going to go ahead with the Poor People's Campaign in some ways, and they were a very complicated crew to kind of keep altogether. But I think that he uncertainly, without clarity, without knowing where the money was going to

come from, and with the country really not being very interested anymore, you know, he was moving ahead. And I, again, it may seem to me, it's the tolerance he had for so many different points of views. And Andy was kind of the mediator.

00:34:22:00 TREY ELLIS:

So, it brings us to the assassination and how terrible THAT was. Can you tell us about where you, how you heard about it and how that, you know, changed, what that changed for you and...?

00:34:40:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

It was awful. It was awful. And on some level, I think, it was inevitable. I wasn't surprised, but it was shocking. It was awful. And riots broke out, as you know, everywhere. And my first thought, including in the district, and my first thought was to go out and tell children not to loot and not to riot and get- and ruin their lives. And Robert Kennedy went to church that Sunday, we went to Walter Fauntroy's church, and then we went for a walk, and Marian Barry, my old SNCC friend, who's in- wanted to know what the hell he was doing here. That was- and but- I went down to the schools to try to tell kids, for goodness sakes don't, don't, don't loot and don't ruin your future, and this little boy about twelve looked me straight in the eye and said, "Lady, what future? I ain't got no future, I ain't got nothing to lose. "And I've been trying to answer that boy for the last forty-five years. And I think about him, telling the essential truth in this incredibly rich, powerful nation that has not the decency to assure every child a future.

00:36:03:00 But we were devastated. And we were- it was just absolutely devastating. Not surprising, but devastating, it was kind of inevitable. And he was very depressed back then in many ways, it was- but he would keep going, I mean, he would keep going. But I think that he saw- if you look at his last sermons, you could hear inevitability of his death in his voice. And- but even so, when the inevitable happens, you're not prepared for it. And the, the funeral was the funeral and the march was the march, and it was... but the first thought for me was you know, how do you get up tomorrow morning and keep it going? And that you honor him by what you do. And you know it was- nobody had enough time to mourn, we were depressed but you had to get up and sort of carry on that and, and so that just refocused us. I don't know how you carry forward without your leader. And with a very cantankerous, you know, depressed staff, but we did. And I'm glad we did because I'm of the view that it has led to things that will continue to lead to things, and this country is going to end poverty, and we're going to end child poverty. And there are millions of people who wouldn't be eating today, who have no income, who benefit, and if you look at the range of things that happened over the next ten years, despite the percept- the perceived disarray of Resurrection City, changed occurred. It doesn't occur overnight. Okay? You got to write and push and push and push and go back two steps and then move three steps forward. But transformation and the safety net and nutrition, child nutrition, family nutrition- all of these people that sort of think those people in that mud over to Resurrection City, you know, little step by little step.

00:38:10:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can you talk about the Resurrection City and your idea for the Bonus Army, bringing that to King and how you know, sort of modeling the, the, march...

00:38:18:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

I wasn't thinking about the Bonus Army a lot. We all looked at when it happened and people came forward, but we also knew that this was very different. It was different because it was really dealing with poor black folk and poor Latinos and Native Americans and poor Appalachian whites. And others for the first time getting together. They were convened in Atlanta at Paschal's in January and all of them began to come together and that was a big cross- that was a very big thing that happened- of getting- finding common ground among the poor. And that didn't make things easy, but it was, again, a big benchmark, and it was also a very big translation of the next ph- into the next stage of the civil rights movement, which had to do with economic rights. And- doesn't do any good to be able to sit at a lunch counter, which is what everybody says commonly, if you don't have the capacity to buy a hamburger, but you need to be able to feed your children. And you need to be able to educate them to be able to get a job. And so, big important thing, it was the right thing to do, the war was still going on, but half of Washington is really a result- and the public interest networks- is a result of that Poor People's Campaign. We have a massive you know, nutrition lobby, and lobby that relates to Head Start.

00:39:43:00

And whenever somebody- you try to build a path, and when it becomes a highway, you move on to the next thing to build a path. And so, I just say that if you go and look what happened between nineteen sixty-eight and today, it's extraordinary. Not a whole lot of fanfare, a lot of change that is grunt work. It's not just about marches. It's about, you know, policy and budget policy, and whoever controls the budget controls the policy and so I don't think the Poor People's Campaign was a failure. It was a stepping stone to the next phase of needed advocacy to deal with economic as well as political rights. Gotta finish it.

00:40:26:00 TREY ELLIS:

So, in terms of- so for Martin, you've written about it and I'd like you to talk about it- if, if he had lived, would the, would the Poor People's Campaign have been different? Would- where do you see the- where do you see the trajectory of the- of the struggle?

00:40:43:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

Well, gosh, we missed his eloquence, we missed his ability to kind of bring us together, to tie together the complications of our- other competing- the competition between competing interests, all of which, I mean how he could tie together Vietnam and the Vietnam Speech April fourth was terribly important, because it was the same groups that were going to be affected, it was the same kind of values that we still need to challenge. And I- and the warnings about excessive militarism. And, I mean, the greed and materialism. Boy are they as- look at today. So, he really was a prophet who spoke the truth about who we are and, and I site often his, his concern that we are going to integrate into a burning house riddled by excessive militarism and

materialism, and greed, and that when somebody who heard him that night, 'cause he was very depressed at the end, I mean, he got nobody- the country was going to hell. That when they asked him, you know, "Well what should we be doing?" And he said, we, we, we, we all had to kind of become- raise our voices and, and, and go to a different level of protest.

00:42:14:00 And at the end, you look at his speech at the National Cathedral, when he said why America may go to hell, that was his last Sunday sermon, his title that he sent his mama, what he had preached at the cathedral, the, you know- which was his last one before he went off to Memphis again about the Poor People's Campaign. And he kept warning America that, you know, the- and using Lazarus, the rich man Lazarus and the poor man- sorry the poor man Lazarus and the rich man. That he didn't go to hell because, you know, he was rich, he went to hell because he refused to see his brother and to respond to his brother. And that America was at risk of going to hell and nothing could be righter, and look at far toward hell we are in terms of where we're spending now on our military when people are still hungry, that we've had some great progress in that area, where people are still jobless, where children still don't have their basic housing needs met, where homelessness now- and I have no doubt that if he were here today and we had made- we have made a lot of progress, but we still have progress to make, he'd be sitting here leading a Poor People's Campaign.

00:43:21:00 But he was right, but he sort of told us that it was- we had a values crisis. And that- and I- at the end a lot of his friends abandoned him because somehow, we're not supposed to be caring about war, that's not our civil rights issue, and I looked at all the folk who spoke out against him and thought he had no right to speak out against the war, when the folk were who dying in that war were disproportionately black folk and poor folk and Latino folk. But the loneliness and the- and when- what it must have felt like when he was so abandoned by so many- and told to stay in your place. But I think that, you know, he laid a major foundation for all of us, and his speeches are as prescient today as they were then, we just have to- we can figure out how to listen to him and follow him rather than just applauding.

00:44:21:00 TREY ELLIS:
Can you go back to the loneliness- it was great- we just have some stuff you talked about and we had just a little sound issue.

00:44:29:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:
The loneliness, and I mean, it's, it's tough. I mean, the Poor People's Campaign was not popular, okay? His anti-war stance, none of your business. I mean, you're not supposed to talk on foreign policy, whether it's Ralph Bunche or other people you know- all the folk- I mean, who needs to have a segregated conscience? And it is- and to talk about excessive, you know, materialism, and militarism and racism, and that we all sort of had to become firemen and put out the fire in America's house. Boy, is that truer than ever today. We've made progress, but boy- when you look at who we are, and the continuation of poverty, you know, and letting your children be the poorest age group of poor people, and you look at gun violence and the violence that permeates everything that's here, and it affects everybody. And who put the

NRA in charge of our policies? My god, we have- I mean it is- it is- it is the need to- he is as relevant today, as- and he's the first person I go back to read when I'm discouraged. And it's just- you keep going. Because America is self- destructing in a way in which we are the biggest arms dealer, the biggest arms purveyor, I mean, and look at who's killing everybody now, we're killing ourselves. And we can't seem to get control over this violence.

00:45:52:14 And so he was absolutely prophetic in warning us about violence and about war and about the, the violence of poverty. And we'd better hear him and we'd better listen, because he was really speaking truth. But he took a lot of criticism and a lot of alienation from being who he was who was- he was a true prophet. And I'm just so grateful that our paths intersected, that I lived at a time of great social change and great social dislocation. But with great leaders we still had mentors, the Doctor Mays' who effected Doctor Kings, who kept saying move forward and there's a different set of values here. And I hope that we don't jump off the deepest end and can somehow begin to hear and listening- listen to him. And where do we go from here? We're going toward community, or we're going toward chaos, in a world sense, or in a national sense, and look at what we've got now, my goodness. How do you find some moral core here, and- that makes us different?

00:47:04:00 TREY ELLIS:
Do you miss him as a man, as a person?

00:47:06:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:
Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Only thing I never liked about him was his- the- he never did a good- I'm a firm hand- shaker [laughing]. He always looked like- I'd never call him a cold fish hand- shaker, but he- but again, he was just a good human being, okay? And he was always accessible, I don't think there was ever a time that I needed to see him that I couldn't see him or worry. And, and that, and he didn't feel that he had all the answers and so you could figure out it's okay for you to have to struggle and not to know everything, and to trust God, okay, that you're not alone. And I still- you listen to that sermon in the middle of the night- the time when he- [unclear] in his home, when he was sitting there saying, you know, where- but you could almost feel the presence of God saying, "March, stand up," and so he, he, he's a man who lived his faith, sacrificed for his faith, had an uncommon eloquence, an uncommon patience. And I just hope I can be one tenth as good and, and have the staying power that he had.

00:48:13:00 But he was a true prophet in our time, and to be able to have been part of that, and to have learned from him, and to have the privilege of carrying on in some small way, what he began. And to know that those people out in Resurrection City, I mean, you look at the nutrition safety net today, all those people on food stamps- better thank him. All those people on WIC and on school lunches and school breakfasts, I mean the- change does not come in big chunks, but within a year of the Poor People's Campaign, Mr. Nixon did a major speech on hunger, had a White House conference on hunger shortly thereafter. The McGovern committee got constituted with people who'd gone Mississippi in the Senate, it became a national issue, and in fact, I was going back through some of the boxes, I haven't had a chance to go through all of

them, and this watch- to look at the number of republicans that went out to Resurrection City- John Sherman Cooper, where are they today? My goodness, and John Sherman Cooper, and wrote pieces and talked about, you know, how moving it all was.

00:49:20:09 And thinking about the- my favorite incident in the Poor People's Campaign was that- you can't do it anymore- line people up along the Senate subway. And we were having a hearing, and it was a terrific hearing. Didn't get any press because the Indians in Supreme Court were whatever- but I had a senator come up to me and congratulate me on my people's costumes. And I said, "Costumes?" But it laid the groundwork for what has become a series of laws- we were- you know, hunger was between the McGovern Committee and what, what, followed in the congress. We began to get major changes. The Nixon administration- we had a follow-on campaign which nobody had known about, we came back in nineteen sixty-nine. And we met with, with no fanfare- and with President Nixon and the whole cabinet in the White House. They didn't want us to go back agency by agency, and they wanted to control it and Moynihan was kind of the coordinator of all of that. And I don't know. Sorry go ahead.

00:50:20:00 TREY ELLIS:
You were saying something, I did not know about the- that you had brought these women- you brought poor people to line the subway of the- if you could go back and sort of paint that picture so we-

00:50:30:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:
We didn't get any press for it. But when we were doing- there's a wonderful hearing, and there're hearings where we- I went out to Resurrection City and picked out all kinds of witnesses to come up and tell- to speak before the congress. And before the hearings, I had lined people up on the subways, either side, you can't do that anymore, you can't get good theater, it's very much harder to get good theater. And Ralph testified and a number of people testified, but the poor people's testimony was terrific. Nick Kotz catches a lot of that in his book. It was a great hearing. We got no press, totally overshadowed by what went on in the Supreme Court with the Native Americans, Roland Freeman has a wonderful photography book that captures a lot of the poor. But I just loved the senator coming up to congratulate me on the costumes of my people, "Your people have great costumes." "Costumes, Senator?"

00:51:26:00 And it's very hard to find ways to, to do good theater today. There's one- I have one of our colleagues, my colleagues, who was on death row for four or five years on maximum security in Tennessee for almost twenty-five years, something he didn't do, but he, he used art of his way of surviving. And he's got a- we're doing a twelfth stations of the cross here. He's up at the Methodist building and we're going to end up at the National Cathedral in a few weeks. But it's so hard to find in this jaded culture, new ways of making people think about problems. But I love that, you can't do any demonstrations anywhere in the Capitol anymore, but that was perfect.

00:52:10:15 TREY ELLIS:

What's your favorite memory, or sort of surprising memory about Martin Luther King?

12:10:27:08 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:
Favorite or surprising. Let me just think about that. Those are two different things.

TREY ELLIS:
Maybe just, sort of, something that makes you smile.

00:52:31:07 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:
The way he used to always say "well," *[laughing]* "well." One things I couldn't stand about him, I always thought he had a bad- a cold handshake, you know, a cold fish- I wanted to sort of teach him how to shake hands to be more whatever *[laughing]*. But... what is my favorite... it was- you know, he was always- I mean, I think that seeing him as a twenty-one year old, or twenty year old, having gone against your college presidents and we marched and the Klan was there, and to have him be thoughtful, to come there- and all of our college presidents were sitting on the front room but we didn't hear one- on the pulpit- welcoming their students that they had tried to keep from- but to see him come up just to be encouraging, to be there, is probably one of my best memories of, of him. I try to remember it when I'm impatient and don't want to take the time to see that kid or those ten kids. And it was- and it was the listening at- in Raleigh 'cause he sat there in all the sessions, almost all the sessions during the three days we were there. And Ella Baker was wonderful, but she was saying, you know she wanted us to have our separate- don't become a part of SCLC, do your own thing, and we flamed out in four years. But it was this- but you need this continuum.

00:53:48:00 And one of the things I think is so important and that we adults need to do a better job at is nurturing the seeds of leadership, of servant leadership. You know, I'm more excited about our Freedom Schools than about getting a new law passed. And to watch these children have role models and to teach them their history and let them understand who they are, and not to let the culture change them, that they've got to change the culture. And until we confront these birth defects of slavery and Native American genocide and exclusion of women from electoral process and the feeding of these white men taking- who are non-property and all they had was their skin and looking out on women and black folk. But we've got to change the textbooks, we've got to change the narrative about our history, the other side understands this, they- who controls the narrative controls the future.

00:54:41:00 And I think Doctor King educated us in many ways. He didn't have silos, he didn't want to be put in silos. And he knew how to laugh and to have a good time too. And- but- and the accessibility, and just the humanness. I mean, he didn't have any of the pomposity that we see too many leaders, I can't stand pompous leaders. And- but he, he was just kind of there. And I think that- I'm not a patient person and I'm, you know, listening is a very important thing. But, but he always came when you needed him. And, and I... I was so glad I was in Atlanta on September Eleventh where- we were- Luther Smith, who is wonderful, who's- Emory professor, emeritus now at Emory, but we were doing this interfaith children's day. And there was this wonderful

children's choir. And we were trying to bring children across all things together and it was wonderful and then Andy met me at the door to say, "You won't believe what just happened." But, you know, the first thing I wanted to do was to go talk to him, I mean, to go cross town and just to tell him what happened, and to walk around Morehouse and to say, "What would you do here?" I mean, "What would you say?"

00:56:04:00 And in many ways he is still my spiritual anchor, and the spiritual anchor I hope for many of us, because he really was our gifted prophet for this century and we need to finish what he says and we need to hear in the middle of this current national mess, hear him talking about why America may go to hell. And, and it's not because we are rich, it's because we don't see our poor brothers. And, and, and we violate the basic tenants of every great faith in the way we are conducting ourselves in our military arsenals and our disrespect for, for so many who are different. And so he is still a prophet for our time and I hope that we will hear him again, we will pick up where we left him, the children are the key, and that if we can- and they know Doctor King and they are learning their history, we must make sure that that happens in schools. And, and that we are going, despite this bad time, to remember who we are as folk, the suffering that we have gone through, the things that we've overcome. And I watch our kids now learning that they can change something, that I am strong inside I don't- you know, I know how to protest nonviolently, and so I think he's still a prophet for our time and that we need to hear him. And that we could ignore him at our peril. And when I think about what he would be saying today, my goodness. What would he be saying today? And we have got to reject the charlatans and, and the, the the false messengers, and the false values that he warned us against until- the April fourth celebration at Riverside is very important, I hope we will all reread that. I hope we'll all reread you know, "Where Do We Go from Here?"

00:58:06:17 TREY ELLIS:
You're talking about his legacy today. What, what's misunderstood most? What's the biggest misconception about the real Doctor King that you'd like to correct?

00:58:26:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:
The real misconception- J. Edgar Hoover tried to destroy, you know, his character, whatever, but he was a man of deep faith and deep courage who loved his country so much he was willing to die for it, but to die for it nonviolently and at the hands of violence. And if we can't and if- you know, if- what he talked about in terms of gun violence and the violence of war, and Bobby Kennedy after he was assassinated gave a great speech about violence. And we need to hear him. We need to hear him and not to deify him. Not to, to make him into something he wasn't, but his message was the message as Abraham Joshua Heschel said, he was a prophet for our time. And so we don't need to praise him and build statues to him, we need to follow him. Because he was not a perfect human being, didn't pretend to be a perfect human being. Was always struggling, was scared like the rest of us. But he was a man of god who had a message.

00:59:32:00 And if you listen to that speech in his home, about midnight and not knowing where to go, but that we can all keep going and keep struggling even when we don't know what that next step is, but we are people of faith and we will trust God and we will

keep trying to do God's work on earth. And we will let it go at our peril, and so the chore between us, particularly now in this time, is to move us back toward community and toward decency and toward service and toward equality of opportunity and, and to make sure that every child has a level playing field. And so that- the point of honoring him is to- is to don't have a Martin Luther King Say, you go out and do the work. And you make sure that every child has a chance to- to be who they are and to get a decent education and to be fed and you fight people who try to take away the basic safety net and you get out here- black folk and brown folk and everybody else, and don't just have a holiday, you, you do the work of saving your children and saving the values of your nation. And so the only way you can honor him, as far as I'm concerned is by carrying on what he started, and boy are we faced with extraordinary stuff today and so that the issue is what kind of movement will we do to end child poverty first and to end poverty in America.

01:00:58:00 TREY ELLIS:

I've been- we've been referring to this period, you know from sixty-five to the, to the end as sort of "Martin in the wilderness," as you talked about being besieged on, on all sides. Can you talk a little bit about that- him as a man in this period after this- the limelight, after the great successes of Selma and, you know, he really had to- he wasn't as glamorous as it felt- and sort of along with that I was thinking, when you're talking to him, and you sort of, you weren't surprised by the assassination, did it change how you- every interaction with him, did you feel that it might be your last?

01:01:38:01 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

No. That's a part of the job, okay? I mean, I lived through- we lived through- I mean, if you'd been through Mississippi, and you'd been through the south- and that's a part of, of what you might expect as a witness for justice. That didn't make you not scared. It just made it not paralyze you. I was so moved when I took my children- grandchildren- but Medgar's daughter was there, and I asked her, whom I love, and his stains- his blood stains are still on the driveway and my grandchildren are eleven and twelve and nine and I didn't want to hear the lady who runs the-, the- whoever the person is from the, you know, the service that covers these historical places. And I asked if, if we could just have Rena tell us what it was like being an eight or nine-year-old and how they survived and what happened that night. And it was really so profoundly moving and when you think-

01:02:48:00

And Medgar was the first person I ever met in Mississippi, picked me up, I mean- you look at the time that people spent with the young people. I mean, I was twenty-one, I couldn't figure out what in the world I was doing up at law school, which I hated with a- what in the world has this got to do with not- with the civil rights movement? And, and I went down to figure it out, because property and future interest wasn't doing it for me. And Medgar picked me up, took me to his house to have dinner, drove me ninety-five miles up to Greenwood to meet with my, my SNCC friends. Somebody had had a shooting that day. Next day, the first day that the dogs came out. And then they arrested everybody after the mob was there and they wouldn't let me up the front house court- court house. Three black lawyers were

down ninety-five miles away in Jackson. And you sort of- I knew I could go to law school and, and, and get through this. And I, you know, and, and, change is painful, but I don't think it's as painful when I thought about, every time I sort of think about- I'm having a bad day as Miss Hamer used to call me up at twelve o'clock at night and one o'clock at night and long after I'd moved to Washington- Ms. Mae Bertha Cater- when I look at the sacrifice and the courage of those people in rural Mississippi- *[sound of sirens]*

01:04:12:00 When I think of Doctor King and his- despite the depression, despite the spying, despite the chances to discredit him, despite the criticism and the abandonment of his friends, hanging in there because he knew he had a more important mission, that I think was a divine mission, and I think of the people who changed this nation who didn't really have anything, who weren't really well educated, always, but that didn't mean they weren't really smart, and wise, and when I used to get tired and Ms. Hamer always used to call me, "You better move here, you gotta go do this, and you gotta do that," and Ms. Mae Bertha Carter and my last case in Mississippi was for the Carter family, a sharecropper family, in Sunflower County, Mississippi. And they had eleven children, ten children? Eleven children? But they wanted the last nine children to get an education. And, and Sunflower County was a place I didn't- I tried to get out of before dark- I sent her to Eastland's County. But they came to me right before I was about to move to Washington to say, "I want you to file me a school desegregation case that my children go to that white school 'cause I want them to get an education." And I said, "Now, Mrs., Mrs., Mrs. Carter, y'all know what that means?" And they said, "Well, we know what it means." And I did. And- we won. But they lost it, they got pushed off their plantation, they got shot at, they don't have any jobs, which is why that Head Start program which was mighty imp- had become very important.

01:05:41:00 And they all- the last nine of those kids went- finished high school and she taught them not to hate. She would say, "I pray that school bus out, and I pray that school bus in with my children," but she taught them not to hate white folks. And they all became professionals, the ones who did end up going to college, they all did go to college. And about five, six, seven years ago, I lose time... Connie Curry, who was a stalwart of our- a white woman from Atlanta, called me up to say, "You got to help. Mrs. Carter's grandson is in Parchman Prison." And I said, "Not Mrs. May Bertha's- Mrs. May Bertha's grandson in Parchman Prison? How could that possibly be? And that's how I learned about the cradle to prison pipeline, about all these black boys and black men with an average education level of sixth grade in that- just filling up the jails in Mississippi. And that's our challenge today.

01:06:45:00 TREY ELLIS:
I wanted to ask you about Bobby Kennedy and did you know, I mean, when did you know that he had authorized the- wiretaps of...

01:06:59:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:
I knew it along with the other citizens and I didn't like Robert Kennedy because of that, okay? In fact, I was- I don't know, when Peter came to Mississippi, I didn't want to have dinner with him because I thought I'd see a, you know, an arrogant, you

know, Pierre Salinger. But the Robert Kennedy that I met was not the Robert Kennedy that had then- that was not the same Robert Kennedy, 'cause he had lost his brother and whatever- so, it was- people change. But that doesn't mean you don't sort of hold them accountable for what they have done.

01:07:31:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can we talk about nonviolence then and how is nonviolence misunderstood as a tactic?

01:07:40:00 MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN:

I don't know if it's misunderstood as opposed to it requires a lot of discipline. We- Jim- we have a council of elders who meet four times a year at Haley Farm with young people. And Jim Lawson, who was Doctor King's guru, is our chief guru, and we make sure that he speaks to all of our young leaders every year. And we've had all of the civil rights history, which has been wonderful, 'cause history, history, history. Whether from Andy, to John Lewis to Dave Dennis, we show documentaries, "Eyes on the Prize" and other documentaries, and then they step out of the documentary and they talk and say what it's like. And the generosity of, of them and talking about it, you know, I mean it's, it's, it's sacrificial, it is not easy. It requires courage, it requires incredible discipline. But how else do you try to train a, a violent society except by example? And I'm always just amazed at the courage and discipline of ordinary people of grace who wanted a better life for their children, and to say what in the world are we doing here today and letting our children be on a cradle to prison pipeline and filling up the prisons, it's time for another movement. And in order to focus in on our children, in order to focus on everybody else, but I think the children and prevention, but it is going to be our national undoing because you can't have a majority of all children in all racial groups and seventy-five percent of your Latino children and eighty percent of your black children, who are the majority of your population now, child population, are unable to read and compute at grade level. Who's going to be your army? I mean, who's going to be your future workers? I mean, how many drones and computers are you going to be able to have?

01:09:42:00

And so our biggest national military and economic security challenge and threat does not come from any external enemy, Even the North Koreans, or Chinese. It's become our failure to build a healthy group of children, educated group of children who are going to be the leaders going forward and so I think that if Doctor King were here today and if Robert Kennedy were here today, with Doctor King here today, we'd be calling for Poor Children's Campaign, that fortieth anniversary, we better pick up ourselves and finish that job, because if we don't save our children we're not going to be able to save ourselves. And I think that America ought to go to hell if we cannot take care of the weakest among us and not honor the legacy of our pretended, you know, equal playing field. And honor the legacy of all those who struggled before, and if they could do what they did during slavery and during lynchings and Jim Crows, we better get up here and do what we got to do today.

01:10:41:00

And so I hope that this fortieth anniversary- fiftieth anniversary, I hope that this fiftieth anniversary is going to be a new call to action to end child poverty in America and you can't end child poverty without helping families. And you got to

talk about jobs and food, there should be no hungry children in the richest nation on earth. There should be no children scared to walk down their streets and not mowed down by gun violence. There should be no children who are not educated, and who don't have a high quality of childhood education. The country is absolutely insane and wasting its future voices and leadership and so I think that the urgency of nineteen sixty-eight is the urgency of now. And I hope that we will move toward community and we may not like these poor children who are black and brown and disabled and all the other- and we've come a long way, but we're going to need them to work for us rather than to support them in dependent ways and have them take away the soul of what we propert to say what it means to be an American. So, and, you know, I, so I think that the great movement is ahead of us, and, and a world that is riddled with weapons of which we are the main weapon person- nation, it is the time to talk nonviolence. And it's nonviolence or- or chaos and death for all of us. And so, he is as prescient today, as relevant today and is issuing as much of a call to us today as he was calling to us in nineteen sixty-eight, and I hope we will honor that call and hear that call and finish the next phase of his movement.

01:12:26:00 END OF INTERVIEW