

**Interview with Sheriff Mel Bailey**[Table of contents](#) | [Add to bookbag](#)**Interview with Sheriff Mel Bailey**

Production Team: C

Interview Date: November 2, 1985

Interview Place: Birmingham, Alabama

Camera Rolls: 521-524

Sound Rolls: 1510-1511

Interview gathered as part of 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.

Editorial Notes:**Preferred citation:**

Interview with **Sheriff Mel Bailey**, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on November 2, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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*.

INTERVIEW

FILM PRODUCTION TEAM:

Camera Roll 521

FILM PRODUCTION TEAM:

Sound Roll 1510.

QUESTION 1

INTERVIEWER:

AGAIN WE'RE STILL IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

...don't plan to have to do this over and over again, do you?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

NO.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

That's what I run into locally, they're changing crews so often that they have to do it over and over and over again.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

OK...

QUESTION 2

INTERVIEWER:

OK, YOU ALL SET? OK JUST TO GET THINGS STARTED. I THINK IT'S VERY...

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

JUST A MINUTE ANDY, I LOVE THE WAY YOU'RE SITTING FORWARD THERE.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Oh I love that too.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

OK THAT LOOKS GREAT TO ME.

QUESTION 3

INTERVIEWER:

I'D JUST LIKE YOU TO EXPLAIN SOMETHING TO ME. THERE WAS YOU, THERE WAS JAMIE MOOREE AND THERE WAS BULL CONNOR. WHAT WAS THE JURISDICTION THERE, HOW DID YOU ALL WORK TOGETHER ON THIS?

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Is this a practice run?

QUESTION 4

INTERVIEWER:

NO THIS IS IT.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

OK. Well, you know the sheriff in his county the code makes him the chief law enforcement officer. I was asked in my earlier campaign before coming into office my first term, how will you handle Bull Connor, by a former mayor of Birmingham's Cooper Green. I said, we'll have to wait and see, and sure enough a confrontation came. Ironically it came in the office with Chief Moore, present was also the soon-to-be-mayor Albert Boutwell, former lieutenant governor, senator. Man of great background. He and Bull, the commissioner, my former boss have a heated dispute in the chief's office, I'm there for purposes obviously, the streets are boiling with all sorts of problems. People more than anything; black, white, so forth... showing no respect for anybody present: me, the chief, the staff officers, director of public safety also present, Lingo. After they had accused each other of usurping the other's authority, get the hell out of here, you're not mayor. You aren't either, you know, back and forth and I jerked 'em both up sort of as I was able to, both of them were not necessarily large of stature. Bull was even the shorter. I said, Gentlemen, I want to tell you something. And, it's regrettable and I have to say this to two men of such esteem. As sheriff, I'm gonna have to come over here and take over this matter of policing this city. We have a crisis on our hands. Do you know both of them apologized and immediately left the room? They had sensibility about the problem. They were switching from authoritative position to personal wants and desires and I have never had but one desire and that was to have law and order. Then, now and forever, hopefully.

QUESTION 5

INTERVIEWER:

WELL OBVIOUSLY IT DIDN'T END WITH BULL CONNOR THERE BECAUSE HE, HE CONTINUED TO TAKE CHARGE OF THINGS EVEN AFTER THAT.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

There was an ongoing situation, not unlike the governor, he was saying it louder. Segregation huh, eternally, this sort of thing. Um, it was a new thing that had to be adjusted in the minds of everybody. But I, I clearly knew my position and if I have one forte you might say it's I treat people fairly, equally, no preferential treatment.

QUESTION 6

INTERVIEWER:

I HEARD THAT THERE WAS ONE TIME VERY EARLY ON IN ALL THESE DEMONSTRATIONS WHEN YOU INVITED A NUMBER OF UH MINISTERS IN, AND YOU TALKED TO THEM AND ASKED THEM TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE. TELL ME ABOUT IT.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Well this, this I, I felt was a key. Coming off the streets and from within City Hall, I had a keen grasp of people and their influences. Um, basically, I told them that there was going to be a lot of pressure put on them...

QUESTION 7

INTERVIEWER:

LET ME JUST INTERRUPT YOU A MOMENT. NOBODY HEARS MY QUESTIONS SO WHEN YOU SAY I TOLD THEM, I WANT YOU TO TELL ME ABOUT HOW YOU CALLED WHO...

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

These were the ministers that made up the greater Birmingham ministry, the immediate Birmingham ministers, that were to have these demonstrations on their doorsteps and the streets and meetings where they were called to by the Chamber of Commerce, by their own peers, these ministers would have great influence, particularly the black ministers. As you now know and most knew then. They, they were holding the meetings, they were trying to ascertain what direction things were gonna go. This is where every minister that moved in here to assist, even Dr. Martin Luther King, various church host those meetings and uh, this was where the pulse of the community was felt, by everybody.

QUESTION 8

INTERVIEWER:

AND WHAT DID YOU SAY TO THEM?

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

You got a great responsibility and I'm depending on you to help keep order in this city. There wouldn't be enough police in all the South. There wouldn't be enough troops if, if this thing triggers to a point of uh, war, you might say. And mindful of that, constantly I was being asked, do you plan to call marshal law. I never said yes to that question. I believe we can hold it, and we held it.

QUESTION 9

INTERVIEWER:

OK WELL LET ME UH JUST ASK YOU [cough] EVERYBODY OK HERE? OK WE HAVE SEEN A LOT OF DEMONSTRATIONS WE'VE SEEN A LOT OF POLICEMEN INVOLVED IN VARIOUS THINGS. HOW DID POLICE OFFICERS GENERALLY FEEL ABOUT WHAT WAS GOING ON AT THAT TIME?

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Well, it would be grossly dishonest to say that uh, an all white police force, uh, as well as an all white sheriff's department, I had no black deputies at that time, we do now, many — male and female. Um, Birmingham, even more now, but they were highly prejudiced. They were easy to side with the general, thinking of the governor and the police commissioner. Uh, but that was not the issue as far as law enforcement was concerned. We were like a referee, no matter who it is, if he's safe, call it. If he's out, call it. It don't matter who he is or what color he is or she. And this is what we strived desperately, daily to do, and it went on seven days and nights around the clock for weeks and weeks here. I can still proudly say we never, we never truly had what was the case in other areas, the Watts, the Los Angeles, the New York, the Detroit, the Cambridge in those areas the utter destruction of blocks and blocks of cities.

QUESTION 10

INTERVIEWER:

NOW, ACTUALLY WE HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS ALL CONFINED TO A RELATIVELY SMALL AREA AND ONLY A SMALL PART OF THE POPULATION.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Absolutely, uh, and I credit it to the churches that we had a preponderance, a majority of black and white people who, who detest violence and under any conditions, whatever the issue, the attack and destruction of property and loss of life and injury. The churches had their influence, on the, at that time as I recall, uh, I did a canvas and survey and this immediate community of Birmingham, metropolitan area, we had over seven hundred churches. It's truly the bible belt and we are strong in that belt and I'm, I'm convinced uh that the ministers [overlap]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

WE HAVE ABOUT 100 FEET LEFT IN ROLL 521. AND MARK SPEED. OK, HANG ON A SECOND, LET ME GET SETTLED... THERE WE GO. OK.

QUESTION 11

INTERVIEWER:

OK, YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT THE UH, POLICE DEPARTMENT JUST A FEW MOMENTS AGO AND THAT UH, YOU THEY WERE PRETTY MUCH LAW AND ORDER PEOPLE BUT UH, WE HAVE HEARD THERE ARE A NUMBER OF UH, BULL CONNOR WAS CONNECTED TO THE KLAN IN SOME WAYS AND THAT THERE WERE UH, OTHER KLAN MEMBERS WHO WERE IN THE POLICE DEPARTMENT. WHAT KIND OF PRESSURE DID THAT CAUSE?

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Well, I doubt that Commissioner Connor was uh, any less than I was as sheriff. I had many identified Klansmen call me and say, Sheriff, you just give us the word, we'll take this thing and handle it if you want, you won't ever know what happened. Well, that incensed my uh, personal integrity that they thought that they could call and get that kind of sanction. Um, I'm sure those things happened in elected offices everywhere here. Um, you know the Klan did a sort of a switch over for identity's sake, and for respectability right in the midst of this thing, suddenly no reference made to Klansmen, it became "Citizen Council," and under a now umbrella they were somehow respectable. The robe as we know it, the uh, midnight ride, the non entity presence of people but nobody knew who, sort of had to be dropped for their own safety. And, and we were monitoring so many factions along with the civil rights situation. Um, counter-intelligence was our salvation in order to keep these people apart. Mindful that the triggering device was any one of these as the case of the commissioner, the mayor, the then mayor, myself, anybody in authority could have turned these people loose. And we were monitoring the very people that they hoped to get that go ahead with, you know. Uh, truly this is a story that may not can be in its fullest depth be told. But nevertheless, you can imagine that the influence was out there. Because the governor and the commissioner and others weren't just those two or three, that wanted to destroy and to in fact have war. I could clearly see it. When you get those, those numbers in the streets and opposing views and situation almost happened many times. Whites and blacks and those kind of devilish things that people entertain doing in the midst of civil strife.

QUESTION 12

INTERVIEWER:

OK WE'RE JUST GONNA STOP DOWN THERE AND WE'LL JUST CHANGE ROLLS AND THEN WE'LL

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

OK CAMERA ROLL 521 JUST ROLLED OUT. WE'RE GOING TO 522.

QUESTION 13

INTERVIEWER:

OK UM, LET'S JUST SORT OF PICK UP THE COMMENT YOU MADE WHEN WE WERE STOPPED, AND TELL ME WHAT YOUR OPINION OF UH, LAURIE PRITCHETT COMING IN TO OFFER ADVICE TO BULL CONNOR.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Well, I realize that the chief of police, Pritchett, had uh, from over in Albany, had uh, some successes with uh, similar situations and he took it on himself to come here in attempt to talk to Commissioner Connor. As I recall earlier, that was like putting gas on fire for that to happen, you know. Uh, I say again, if he had called me I could have saved him a trip. Uh, I had difficulty talking to Commissioner Connor. This uh, didn't serve up for any benefit to know that uh, here's the sheriff who can't necessarily communicate with the commissioner of police of the city wherein the problem lies. Realize, I was furnishing the manpower to augment the Birmingham police because all the agencies in law enforcement wanted to help. I was hopeful their motive was pure and clean. And so they passed through this office and I communicated over to Chief Moore and put these people in place where we could maintain order. Um, this, this is how I think that uh, law enforcement must work. Uh, the innocent passerby, who has a feeling about this but does not want to go into the turmoil and the mainstream of it, they're just as entitled to protection as those who have the issue in their, so-called bit in their teeth, running with it. And we had a multisided duty to perform. Manpower was a real important factor. I kept it moving. Kept...

QUESTION 14

INTERVIEWER:

LET ME JUST UH, SORT OF JUMP IN HERE FOR A MOMENT UM...

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

LET ME DO ONE THING, SIR, IF I COULD HAVE YOU ROTATE YOUR CHAIR A LITTLE BIT. THERE YOU GO, THAT'S GREAT, JUST LIKE THAT, THAT'S GREAT. THANK YOU SIR.

QUESTION 15

INTERVIEWER:

UM, SPEAKING OF MANPOWER, I'M BEGINNING TO THINK OF NUMBERS HERE AND THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WHO WERE ARRESTED; PARTICULARLY CHILDREN. TELL ME ABOUT ALL THAT AND WHAT HAPPENED.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

These uh, these matters of daily demonstrations even on into later becoming night demonstrations uh, required people. At times the numbers would diminish which uh, hurt the leaders in their efforts to get the attention of city hall and county government and state government, federal government. So it obviously became a matter of involving school children. All the time we're running the police into this problem daily, to somehow match the numbers and the spread, and it amounts to hundreds and thousands and several thousand at times, when a great majority at times were school children. Of course, this was clearly a violation of law and it gave the police a vehicle to arrest on. Here both our leaders using juveniles in a problem. Number one, endangering their lives, more than that, uh, drawing them out of public school where they ought to be. Arrests were made on adults for that purpose uh, then the mass number of school children were arrested that should have been in school. The court would immediately remand them to the sheriff, which is coming from the code of Alabama, and this mounted into hundreds and thousands just almost in hours. Required school buses to move them. Uh, they couldn't be confined in the then Birmingham city jail. Um, they were in the yard like cattle and being herded into buses, and moved to family court, and then remanded and bused back here to a county jail, to get them in shelter, get them in safe and secure places: boys and girls. *At one time I had here in this building on the eighth, seventh and eighth floor, we had over twelve hundred male*

*juveniles, black, on top of our regular complement of probably uh, near a thousand. I really laugh out loud even today since the problem is somewhat behind us on how the court has come down on crowded jails. Nobody said anything then about being crowded. Now, if I was still in this jail I couldn't have over three hundred and fifty, three hundred and fifty up there. Well, I had ten times that number almost. At the same time, I had six hundred female juveniles in the 4H dormitory¹ at the fairground. And I, being steeped in police methods and, and the dangers of trying to bring in volunteers, you don't use volunteers in a situation like this, nor in the streets, for that matter, as police go. Suffice to say we have them. We managed all of that over a period of about seven weeks without one added person who was not experienced in corrections and handling people, adult and juvenile. This presented no small problem. **There was no such thing as off days, everybody working seven days. Sleeping, cat napping, and just holding fire. We all had the confirmed belief that this couldn't go on for long because it was pressing the issue to the wall.**² And obviously so and purposefully. I was in a meeting with Chief Moore, again, we held it every morning to see just where we were the night before and what was planned for the day. Relating we'd move from sit-ins to kneel-ins that involved the churches in early stages, and then the wholesale street demonstrations almost daily and later nightly. All perfect set up for someone to do something terrible, and it was almost shoulder to shoulder police whenever there was a march or demonstration, a focal point. And city hall was basically that focal point every day in some way. Large scale or small. Had the whole delegation petitioning, for some kind of relief or having had a stand off there in multitude at the door steps. Here later on the mass voter registration.*

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO HOLD FOR JUST ONE SECOND HERE.
MY EYE PIECE IS GETTING FOGGED UP HERE.150 FEET
REMAINING ON ROLL 522.

QUESTION 16

INTERVIEWER:

I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU ABOUT THE DAY WHEN UM, BULL
CONNOR STARTED USING THE FIRE HOSES AND TO ASK YOU
WHY SOMETHING COULDN'T BE DONE TO STOP BULL
CONNOR?

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

These are, are regrettable situations to say the least. Uh, here is a man with a primary responsibility, that's uh, emotionally involved. Um, commanding a situation of the largest law enforcement in the area. Um, impetuous to say the least. These are those things that even today and I saw it on TV in South Africa...

QUESTION 17

INTERVIEWER:

OK WE CAN'T QUITE GET INTO WHAT HAPPENED...

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

ROLLING AND...

QUESTION 18

INTERVIEWER:

OK UM, [overlap] OK TRYING TO CONTROL BULL CONNOR. KEEP
IT IN THAT TIME.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

This uh, was not an easy task to do as, as is well known in history now. He'd get these ideas right off the top of his head and just impetuously run at the situation. The hoses, the dogs, the things that seem uh, outrageous when viewed by the distant public, how could this be, how could anybody, I've heard that so many times, uh. Um, fortunately the majority of law enforcement was not involved in those situations, or that would have

triggered the, our very action would have triggered what some wanted to happen from the other side. So it was a sort of an ongoing matter of my meeting with city hall, my meeting with, I said earlier, you couldn't necessarily communicate with Bull from like as Chief Pritchett tried and was run out of town so to speak, he got back home in a hurry, I, I kept going to city hall, he couldn't say I wasn't trying I never let that happen. And I think finally he drew into himself, almost like Hitler did when he saw he'd lost the war, he drew into himself, and these were studies in human behavior that we had seen happen. So we, we uh, we sort of polarized him and it worked.

QUESTION 19

INTERVIEWER:

WHAT ABOUT THE NIGHT THE GASTON MOTEL WAS BOMBED?

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

That was uh, another dark, to say the least uh, dark night. Um, I recall standing there. I had seen a cab turned over and on fire, as I approached where the motel bombing occurred, there were literally hundreds of black people in the courtyard of the motel, and uh, strangely enough the Director of Public Safety, Colonel Al Lingo was there and wouldn't allow these people to leave. They had boiled out of the uh, rooms of the motel, out of the lobby and from around and they were herded into this fenced area, and a friend of mine, uh, Shelly the Playboy, local disc jockey...

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

LET'S ACTUALLY, BEFORE YOU START THAT STORY I THINK WE'D BETTER RELOAD, BECAUSE WE'RE, WE'RE NOT GONNA MAKE IT. OK, THEN I'M GOING TO CHANGE ALSO CAMERA IS GOING TO ROLL 523. SOUND IS GONNA CHANGE ALSO.

FILM PRODUCTION TEAM:

Continuation of interview with Sheriff Mel Bailey

FILM PRODUCTION TEAM:

Birmingham, Alabama

FILM PRODUCTION TEAM:

Eyes on the Prize

FILM PRODUCTION TEAM:

Blackside

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

THIS IS SOUND ROLL 1511 CAMERA ROLL 523, I'M GONNA GIVE YOU A REFERENCE TONE... ONE MORE REFERENCE TONE... AND SPEED... OK, JIM IT'S ALL YOURS.

QUESTION 20

INTERVIEWER:

OK, I'D JUST LIKE YOU TO PICK UP THAT STORY, SORT OF WHERE YOU LEFT OFF THAT AL LINGO HAD ALL THESE PEOPLE ENCLOSED.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

The disc jockey, Shelly the Playboy, local disc jockey, says Sheriff, can't we get these people out of here, they're about to stampede and somebody's going to get walked on and hurt, probably smothered, killed. And uh, I had a little bit of trouble getting the state officers to appreciate the fact that uh, you were creating the crisis, you weren't solving it. And they didn't appreciate that but we moved them. Let those people go. This occurred many times, there was, I'd be again less than honest to tell you that law enforcement worked in complete harmony and concert. There was truly a difference between what had to be done and what the state Department of Public Safety was trying to do as a force coming from the governor's uh,

philosophy of segregation now and segregation forever. Likewise with Bull Connor, it was clearly understood, but these men were sworn officers and I was banking on that oath in their, deep in their metal, to carry out their responsibilities. And this I say again happened numerous times and it came a confrontation later with Colonel Lingo and myself. He made an arrest in a bombing case that clearly was an interference with the Birmingham police department investigation, and he wanted me to accept the arrest and I said no, that's a case the Birmingham police was investigating, you can't put these people in jail in the county. Go through the city and work this case. He didn't like it but they did it. And I predicted correctly that you going to lose the case because you just don't have anything to, no elements of prosecution.

QUESTION 21

INTERVIEWER:

LET ME MOVE FORWARD A LITTLE BIT UH, IF I MAY, TO SEPTEMBER, THE 16th STREET CHURCH BOMBING UM, DESCRIBE THAT TO ME.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Well that was chaotic to say the least uh, and this arrest I'm talking about led us uh, was led by that investigation and subsequently uh, the bungling of the case that basically delayed it til even six, eight years later that attorney Bill Baxly came in and we put together an investigation that brought that case to trial. Just this past week, you know, the prime suspect...

QUESTION 22

INTERVIEWER:

ALRIGHT THAT'S A LITTLE BIT OUT OF OUR TIME FRAME SO...

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

So you see it, that was the cause of the delay. You had interference by, strangely, law enforcement itself, trying to grab the ball and run with it. And that is always extremely detrimental and highly controversial. So we had our confrontation and uh, and he, the colonel realized later that he better get in step with local law enforcement. Anyway, we moved on though the, the time of the street demonstrations, the bombing. Not just that one but several. They were isolated. They were not the least of highly concerned situations, because many times death and destruction injury and loss of property and time. It's difficult to chronologically talk on each of these events. Uh, highlights I suppose is basically what we're talking about. Uh, the uh, difficulties that were at the level of administration from the mayor's office to the sheriff's office to the chief of police and fortunately we basically kept it in the city of Birmingham. We had nearly no instances outside the city, not even a distant perimeter.

QUESTION 23

INTERVIEWER:

YOU GOT A LITTLE PROBLEM HERE WITH SOUND[overlap] OK, WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE UM, YOU CAN'T HAVE A MORATORIUM ON CIVIL RIGHTS.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

This grew out of a Chamber of Commerce meeting presented a hypothetical situation of, what are you going to do sheriff if we fill the streets and we arrive at 19th and 6 North and there's an emotional um, crisis, um, rock throwing may happen, uh, breaking windows, looting. What are you going to do? I said, I, this is almost a moot question, but I want you to understand it. We can't have moratorium on law and order. We can't have a Halloween festivity here where trick or treat, because of, and the code of Alabama staring you in the face and I'm sworn to uphold the laws of the state of Alabama. You'll just be arrested now this ought to be very clear if you can be identified committing an act of violence, misdemeanor or felony. I'm saying don't do it.

QUESTION 24

INTERVIEWER:

OK TELL ME ABOUT MEDIA INVOLVEMENT HERE.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

We had beautiful, uh, factual reporting with the local media. Birmingham Post Herald, Birmingham News, Channel 6, 13, 42, these people were um, substantially um, factual in their reporting. We had trouble with freelance reporters, people who I suspected were capable of making a story, creating a story, hiring somebody to create a problem.

QUESTION 25

INTERVIEWER:

NOW WHEN YOU SAY FREELANCERS, ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT NATIONAL PRESS?

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

No, no, I'm not talking about such as uh, ABC, CBS, NBC, none of those, nor the major magazine reporters, Time, Life, uh, those. There were others who had no ties to anyone. They were ready to pick up something and sell it. And they gave us a real black eye, constantly.

QUESTION 26

INTERVIEWER:

WELL I THINK A LOT OF THE COVERAGE THAT WAS ON NATIONAL NEWS SORT OF GAVE THE CITY A BLACK EYE TOO.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Well, I can't argue with what they photographed. If they had it to photograph and got it by testimony from a witness that, that to me is factual reporting. But when these people twist and slant and uh, infer, innuendos, saying something that uh, leaves you to wonder if everybody in that situation has lost their mind, I wanted badly for the public to know and fortunately for me I had attended the FBI national academy, I had friends all over the world in law enforcement and here I am uh, under the gun and uh, and they know, and I want them to know, that I'm here, I'm well and I'm able and we're handling our responsibility. There were many like kind of officers in the Birmingham police department. Men I'd worked shoulder

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

THIS IS GONNA BE A CUT BECAUSE... [overlap] YEAH I'M STILL ROLLING. THIS IS NOT A CUT.

FILM PRODUCTION TEAM:

[New slate mark. Continuation of the interview.]

QUESTION 27

INTERVIEWER:

OK, WHAT DID YOU REALLY WANT PEOPLE OF AMERICA AND THE WORLD TO KNOW ABOUT BIRMINGHAM THAT MIGHT NOT SHOW UP IN THE FILM.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

I wanted them to know that there were those present in law enforcement that like myself had more than a vested interest here. This is our home, this is our sworn duty to maintain the peace and dignity of this community. And in spite of what you see and hear we are alive and working with people involved to resolve this situation. I almost uh, hurried to a meeting where I received a call at city hall again, in company with Chief Jamie Moore and Captain George Wall and numerous other staff people there and my chief and several others uh. The Attorney General, Kennedy called and asked for me, he said Sheriff, this is Attorney General Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, I'm advised by reliable people that you are a trusted person, they trust you. I've got to ask you a question. Yes Sir. The Howdy Doodies and all. He said, are you going to be able to hold it? Realizing that by now the

federal government has federalized the troops and in fact twelve thousand are at Fort McClellan, here's this monkey on my back again, you know, when do you want law, when do you want marshal law? I do not want marshal law. Marshal law seems like an easy way out but the problem with marshal law is you won't have a prerogative of pulling it off. Those who you call in will decide when they'll back out. And I think you've surrendered your responsibility, copped out on it. And I never was ready for that. I don't say that I wouldn't have done it had I seen impossible situation. He asked this question. Can you handle it? I said, if you get Dr. Martin Luther King out of Birmingham. Is that right, he said. I said, yes sir, we can handle it if you can do that. He left that night to Memphis. You see we had another problem. We had intelligence that he was a marked man. It was to either happen in Birmingham or Selma. I didn't want it to happen here.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

WE JUST RAN OUT. WE DID GET THAT LAST... OK, THAT WAS A CAMERA ROLLOUT. WE'RE GOING TO ROLL 524. THAT WAS A ROLLOUT ON 523. THE LAST STATEMENT WAS KING WAS A MARKED MAN, EITHER IN SELMA OR BIRMINGHAM. OK WE'RE STARTING CAMERA ROLL 524. AND...

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

OK JIM, IT'S ALL YOURS.

QUESTION 28

INTERVIEWER:

OK I'D JUST LIKE TO ASK YOU SORT OF A BASE QUESTION HERE, WHY WAS THERE SO MUCH RESISTANCE TO DESEGREGATION IN BIRMINGHAM?

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Total change. White and black restrooms. White and black drinking fountains or none for the black. Total change. Um, you, you put your finger right on the problem. It was a resistance, unnatural resistance. These uh, schools, separate schools, separate everything. Back of the bus so to speak. *It uh, wasn't funny then and it still isn't funny. But suddenly we have the fourteenth amendment that took a hundred years, brought on by the Civil War, suddenly must be complied with. Equal treatment under the law. And this was a resistance. They are not going to get equal treatment. What do you mean? Go to school with my little daughter. Now that is why resistance.*³ And, and it's still resisted. [overlap]

QUESTION 29

INTERVIEWER:

UM DO YOU UM... OK?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

YEAH, WE'RE SET IT'S ALL YOURS.

QUESTION 30

INTERVIEWER:

OK, DO YOU REMEMBER A GUY NAMED JIM BEVEL?

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

Jim Bevel?

QUESTION 31

INTERVIEWER:

MMMM...

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

It's not congressman Tom Bevel?

QUESTION 32

INTERVIEWER:

NO.

Sheriff Melvin Bailey:

No? I can't right off hand.

QUESTION 33

INTERVIEWER:

UM, ALRIGHT ANYTHING... ALRIGHT LET'S STOP DOWN HERE FOR A MINUTE, UH... ACTUALLY I

CAMERA CREW MEMBER:

OK, WE'RE GONNA START ROOM TONE AS OF NOW... OK THAT'S THE END OF ROOM TONE. OK THAT'S THE END OF THE INTERVIEW WITH SHERIFF BAILEY, IN OUR ROOM TONE HOPEFULLY YOU CAN YOU'LL NOTICE THERE'S A TICK-TOCK. THAT IS A CLOCK THAT WE ARE NOT ABLE TO GET AROUND.

