

TAPE LOG

INTERVIEWER: Melynn Glusman

TAPE NO: 4.26.95-RE

INTERVIEWEE: Rosanell Eaton

MONO (x) STEREO NO. OF SIDES: 2 NO OF TAPES 1 of 1

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/26/95

LOCATION: At the home of Armenta Eaton, Rosanell's daughter, in Bunn, NC.

TOPIC: An oral history of Rosanell Eaton, who has been active in voting rights for blacks in North Carolina and register voters for several decades. She was inducted into the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, Alabama in March, 1995. This tape covers her childhood, her marriage, her participation in a 1982 march to renew the 1965 Voting Rights Act, her husband's death, her nomination for the "Invisible Giant" award, and her membership in the Concerned Women for Justice.

COMMENTS: Only text in quotation marks is verbatim, all other text is summarized, including the interviewer's questions.

TAPE INDEX

Counter No.Topic

[Side A]

002 Opening Announcement

019 Life history information: date of birth, educational background, occupation, etc.

057 Childhood, family background: Father died when she was three-- 6 brothers and sisters, 4 boys and three girls. She is the youngest. Mother's name: Mamie Johnson, Father's name: Ed...? Johnson

078 Her and her mother's relationship-- like sisters

088 Story of how a landlord cheated her family-- they were sharecroppers

108 How she caught the landlord stealing money from them as he was counting it

134 Description of money "disappearing around the plates" as they sat at the table counting what they owed the landlord

- 145 How this experience prompted her to become an activist
- 146 "From then on I just made up my mind then I was gonna watch everything that went and try to get myself really in the action of trying to do the things that was right. "
- 154 Praying to God for courage to learn and act
- 161 School experiences
- 170 Marriage after high school, beginning to run farm (she still runs it now)
- 177 Husband's illness
- 180 Children-- Anne, married a man whose last name was Montague; Armenta, Jesse
- 189 Husband's illness and death
- 193 Children's ages when their father died
- 201 Anne Eaton taught her brother, Jesse, when he was in seventh grade
- 206 Her involvement with civic affairs after her husband's death
- 222 Director of youth department of NAACP--worked with children to give them self-esteem
- 233 Daughter (Armenta) was one of her students
- 242 SCLC involvement-- around the time MLK was assassinated. Conventions, rallies
- 252 Organization of SCLC in Franklin Co.-- She served as first vice president
- 265 1982-- support of renewal of 1965 Voting Rights Act
- 273 Pilgrimage (to push for renewal) from Lawrenceberg, NC to DC-- had begun in Tuskegee, AL
- 283 Rosanell and Armenta coordinated food, lodging for people on the Pilgrimage, sites for speakers and rallies
- 300 Pilgrimage was to assure the people in DC that they really wanted the act renewed
- 310 Marches occur because "There is a message that you're trying to get across."
- 320 Typical day of a march: Get a "lodging place" for the rally-- rally consists of speeches, songs ("We Shall Overcome"); have speakers: Dr. Lowry, Ralph Abernathy, etc.; when this big

group gets to Washington, then the president and Congress would see that people have traveled nine months over thousands of miles, so they would renew the act.

346 Order of counties through which the march would go, having rallies and picking up people along the way

356 Needed to reach DC by August 25, 1982

364 How she devoted so much time to organizing a march like this: vacation days, summers (teachers have summers off)

372 She was working in the school system at this time-- school at that time was only 8 months out of the year

379 How when they were traveling, sometimes she would run home for a day to do some canning or other household/farm work

385 Coordination of bus for people who couldn't go on the march but who wanted to go to DC for the last two days

397 August 25-- the day the march concluded: Bus arrived early, went to a park with blankets, food; waited for marchers to arrive

409 Registering voters on the way up to DC

412 Hardship of being on the march

425 Armenta was with her on the march, other folks had their entire families-- one woman got pregnant on the march and had her baby on the way back home.

438 Voting rights act will have to be renewed again in another 25 years (2007)

445 How speaking out at the landlord as a little girl took courage-- this was in 1929 or 1930

454 Story (again) of noticing how her family never had money, even though tobacco was selling well-- this led her to believe they were being cheated

458 How she didn't play as a child-- a waste of time

464 Pigeon toy she had when she was little-- also a rocking chair

469 Value of time, staying busy

472 Liked to sit around with adults when she was little

480 Love of being outside, gardening-- both when she was a child and now

485 How she hasn't dated very much since her husband died: "I just didn't see any time to lose dating. That's why I got involved in civic affairs more than I was when my husband... but I always thought you were just losing time sitting up talking to men and you know, talking to a boyfriend, and I wanted to do something, I wanted to advance people..." and I think Armenta did the same thing."

493 How she wanted to help humanity, never thought about being honored for this

499 How she didn't have any role models-- "Nobody was doing anything." A few church role models. Never really wanted to be like anyone but herself.

513 Why her mother didn't stand up to the landlord who was cheating them: she didn't have any idea what was happening: "My momma was a real nice person, but she was quiet, and she was timid, of course. My daddy was an outgoing man, they said." She was 2 or 3 when he died.

528 How she probably inherited her outgoing-ness from her dad

531 How the landlord never cheated them after she stood up to him.

535 She started running the farm when her husband got sick

539 What goes into running a tobacco farm: cultivate land, plant crops, till the land, prime the tobacco, put it in, get it ready for market, take it to market

553 Tobacco market in Oxford, NC-- 35 miles away from Franklin Co.

556 How she sold the tobacco: people who were auctioning would say, "Help this lady, help this lady." Tobacco then 13, 18 cents per pound.

577 Husband passed away in 1963 (married 1940), then she started renting the farm out.

584 Farm is rented by the pound, not the acre. Rent to "big farmers."

594 Taking her husband to Duke Hospital during his illness.

596 "What I was striving to do was to get things accomplished. You know, it really didn't bother me that much [her husband's illness]. I know I had to get up and get the mules fed, and the cows milked, and the hogs fed, and him fed, and cook and whatever, but it really... it should have bothered me a lot, I guess, but it really didn't. As long as I could get things done within the day, and the night, you know, until bedtime, I was fine. But of course it was a struggle. But I didn't let it be a struggle, you know, I just let it be-- that's life, that's the way I accepted it... I just thought it was a life job and I just had to get it done."

606 How the Lord has kept her going. She always prayed, went to Sunday School, went to church. "When you put him first, he'll look out for you. He'll protect you, and give you strength, and knowledge and courage and ambition, and he'll give you all of that, and you just go forward. As long as I could keep my health and strength and go, that's what I did."

613 How her children never stayed home from school to work on the farm

614 [End of Side A]

002 [Side B begins]

004 Need for children to get an education in order to establish themselves and make a decent living-- this is why she never kept them at home to work on the farm.

020 Anne's (her oldest daughter) graduation from college, getting a job, helping Rosanelle buy a home

038 Armenta going to college

043 Jesse (her daughter) going to NC A & T in Greensboro, NC. He got a scholarship, went through his master's degree

060 How she went to college after her children had gone; her promotion in the school system

075 Jobs in schools

078 Anne- Elizabeth City State Teacher's College; Armenta-- Durham Business College, Shaw University

085 Church involvement-- joined New Liberty Baptist when she was eight, "accepted Christ." President of Sunshine Band, involved with BTU (Baptist Training Union-- for church youth); secretary of Sunday School class when she was 14 until she was around 30; church secretary for around 30 years; choir member; Sunday School teacher for young adults until 1993; then became Sunday School teacher for the Senior class; president of missionary Society; member of pastor's aid society-- oldest active member in the church

152 What she is proud of in her life: relationship with Christ/church-- this always comes first

167 Second greatest accomplishment: Raising good Christian children

178 Third greatest accomplishment: Being inducted into the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, AL on March 4, 1995-- "Invisible Giant" award

189 Invisible giant award: nominated by Dollie Burwell of Warren Co, NC

214 How she put together a portfolio documenting her life for the award-- Dollie and Armenta helped-- pictures, videos, written documentation

225 How she served as a marshal on marches 1968-1992. Marshals walk on the outside of the line, on the sidewalk or side of the street; people march four abreast. Marshall is responsible for keeping people in lines. Usually they walk backwards. They are identified by a yellow or orange armband.

255 Getting together portfolio

260 Skit about convincing someone to register to vote-- she played herself, and her neighbor played the woman she was trying to register. It is on videotape.

267 Detailed description of skit. [Goes to Counter #337.]

282 How she convinced the woman to register (in the skit): told her it would be beneficial for future generations

294 Teaching the woman the word "Constitution," telling her what it means

325 Telling her about election process, offering her a ride to the polls

338 Preparing portfolio

348 Invisible Giant ceremonies. Fifty states represented; one woman nominated from each state, plus two extra from NC

368 Winning the award (with two other women: Marie Foster, Evelyn Turner, Rosanell Eaton)

384 Gave speech at reception in her honor back in NC

391 Her name is published along with other nominees for the award in a book put together by the National Voting Rights Museum: From Selma to Montgomery: The 30th Anniversary of the Right to Vote.

400 [Silence while the interviewer looks at documents given to her by Rosanell Eaton]

408 Unique ways in which women organize: Women initiate programs, often they are more persuasive-- especially, woman are good at convincing other women to do things

418 Some women are more patient than men

421 "If you are devoted, man or woman, and you stick to it, to the issue, and if you're devoted and you just stay at it..." Both men and women tend to give up on struggles sometimes.

427 Why people give up on causes: "They get tired and they get tired of spending their money."

433 "You've gotta have a lot of energy, or borrow it from somewhere or something, to keep going."

440 How she has always been a Democrat. This was the party that said "For the people and by the people." Always stayed emotionally involved in the party.

458 Concerned Women for Justice: Started with Joan Little, Armenta organized on state level, Rosanell organized Franklin County chapter, served as president for two years

469 CWJ interested in welfare, health, education, prison reform. Try to motivate people, help them with their self-esteem. Visit prisons, tutor students, work with the sick. Broad outreach.

479 Prison outreach: Four times per year: bring them reading materials, have services, speakers, singers. Been visiting the prisons for 18 years. Christmas-- collect gifts from merchants, buy in bulk from industries (socks, etc.), cook meals, homemade cakes

500 Difficulties in getting in and out of prisons for visits

505 Visit county jail at Christmas, bring magazines, cigarettes

511 CWJ dress code: Navy blue suits and pink blouses in spring, with pink corsages; gray suits and pink blouses in fall. Dress code identifies them as members of CWJ. Makes prisoners happy to see them dressed up, looking pretty.

519 Fundraising:-- November contest-- talent show, fashion show, Miss Justice contest. The one who raises the most money is crowned "Miss Justice," gets robe and crown for a year

527 Christmas-- dinner, banquet together-- Miss Justice is invited

532 Gives a scholarship to high school student (gives names of high schools). Must be affiliated with Miss Justice contest before you can get the scholarship.

544 [End of Side B]

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INTERVIEW DATE: 6/10/95

LOCATION: At the home of Armenta Eaton, Rosanell's daughter, in Bunn, N.C.

TOPIC: Women's leadership and grassroots activism. This tape covers her involvement in a protest march in Forsythe County, GA, a boycott of a grocery store in Warren County, NC, her religious faith and how it drives her work, the public involvement of her other family members, freedom songs sung in various marches and protests, and her involvement with the Concerned Women for Justice.

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TAPE INDEX

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[Side A]

002 Opening Announcement

006 Her position as director of Youth Department of NAACP; how meetings were organized; this committee tried to teach children to respect each other, leadership development

020 How she tried to teach children to grow up with self-esteem; activities the NAACP held for children

034 How they taught the children to "set morals high," serve the less fortunate

042 How they taught the children freedom songs, religious songs; meetings started and ended with prayer services

050 How they taught children manners: when you approach a person, it's your responsibility to speak first; when you wake up in the morning, say "good morning," when you go to bed, say "good night."

058 Freedom songs: "Oh, Freedom," "Come by here, good Lord, come by here," Hymns like "Down at the cross," "Blessed Assurance," "Pressing On the Upward Way,"

069 She sings, "Pressing on the Upward Way." This song sticks with her because it is about self-esteem. "If your self-esteem is high, then you can go places." If you ask the Lord to plant your feet higher, you will feel like you are just as good as anybody else.

097 How Christians like everybody, even if you don't like their ways. This is what keeps you peaceful.

103 How you can't live on your own, you have to lean on the Lord because he is the only one who can keep your temper down, keep you from getting into fights or getting violent

107 How she keeps the Lord in everything she does

120 How she tried to teach the children to ask the Lord to guide them in everything they do

123 How the Lord protects and guides her wherever she goes; how following your instincts is the same as following the Lord

133 How she prays every morning as soon as she wakes up

147 How she has always known the path the Lord wanted her to take. "We don't question God. You don't doubt him. You've just got to trust him and just go."

153 How her trust in God helps her to do risky things, like driving at night

165 How the Lord can protect you better than a man

176 When she and Armenta went to Forsythe County, GA to protest them not allowing black folks to live there. There was a march there in response to the townspeople driving out a black family (1981 or 82). Four people went: Dollie Burwell, Kathy Reavis, Armenta and Rosanell Eaton.

200 How she and Armenta found out about the problems in GA on T.V. and decided to go down to join the march. How buses were traveling all along the highway to join the protest.

225 In California, a grandmother got her grandchildren together and told them they were going to Forsythe County. They said no, but then she said she wouldn't cook for them anymore unless they went. So they went.

243 Over 20,000 people at the march. She wasn't afraid. They didn't tell her other daughter or her sister that they were going, because they knew they would be worried.

263 How they left a note inside the house telling where they were going in case the family got too worried and came looking for them.

272 The march: so many people, no one bothered them. The people in the town realized they had to let blacks move in, as a result of the protest

285 Description of the march: speeches (Dr. Lowry); someone held a sign saying "No niggers allowed"; freedom songs

310 Name of the town: Newbern?

322 Public involvement of other Eaton family members: her son stays busy preaching, family and church commitments keep him from going to civic affairs. He and Armenta were her students when she was director of youth council of NAACP. He went straight from school to work to marriage to starting a family, never had time to get involved.

354 Her sister (Louise Woods) is a missionary preacher. Goes to the women's prison with the Concerned Women for Justice, but isn't "civically inclined" because she always has to be at church services.

375 If she and Armenta miss church at home because they are out at a protest, they go to church wherever they are.

382 Older daughter has "never been inclined in civic affairs." Doesn't like "struggling," just likes "good life."

397 Children took after relatives. Son is like his uncle, Armenta just like one of her aunts, and the older daughter just like another aunt. (Rosanell's husband's brothers and sisters.)

415 Children have developed different lifestyles for some reason. Older daughter raised Armenta and her brother; got them up in the morning, dressed them, and brought them out to the field to see their mother (Rosanell)

433 Armenta is like her in her "civic mindset." Armenta says Rosanell is her role model in this. They have always held similar political views. Armenta listened to what Rosanell had to say when she was director of the youth council. Jesse did too, he just never had the opportunity to be involved because of his work.

453 Advice she gave Armenta: rely on your own ability, think about others

475 How it doesn't accomplish anything if you live life for pleasure and not for others. "You gain the whole world, but lose your soul." "If you're not going to be any good to humanity, what good is living?" A lot of people don't see this, they don't want to sacrifice their lives and time for others. "People sacrificed their time and life before us, and somebody needs to sacrifice now."

510 SCLC boycott against a white grocery store in Vance County (Kitrell?). The owner of the grocery store had a reputation for "pistol-whipping" blacks, which means he would point a gun at someone and tell them something cost more than it was supposed to. He tried to intimidate blacks who came in his store.

550 How one day a woman ordered some steaks, when they came to the house they cost 19.00 rather than the 11.00 they were supposed to; also, the meat was bad.

564 [End of Side A]

009 [Side B begins]

015 (Continuation of story about store boycott)

Woman protested the price increase and the quality of the meat, he said she had to pay; they argued, he shot at her feet and scared her away. This started the boycott.

030 Dollie Burwell called and asked if she and Armenta would participate in the boycott; they started it to keep people from shopping there.

045 How they stood outside to keep people from shopping there; a few people shopped there anyway.

053 One day the store owner had some guys try to drive by very close to them, almost like they were going to run over them, just to scare them.

063 Boycott took place in 1985

066 How she would get up every morning in the heat (104 degrees!) and stand out there until someone could relieve her

072 What people bought at the store: cheese, cigarettes, ham-- people traveling through on their way up north would purchase a lot of these items. These people quit stopping when they saw the boycott signs.

081 How the boycott hurt the business. People started shopping at the other store in town. People never went back to shopping at the store after the boycott

100 How they organized the boycott

120 How they tried to teach people to be non-violent when confronted

140 People stopped there when they were traveling because the goods were cheaper

145 How people called them names, harassed them during the boycott

- 157 How the store owner cheated one man by letting him buy groceries on credit, but overcharging him
- 165 How there were several boycotts during that time. Boycott at the Winn Dixie that same summer because they weren't hiring blacks
- 190 How you need a calm person to lead and participate in a successful boycott
- 195 (MG: "What do you think makes a good leader?") A Christian who will sacrifice their time, energy, and money and whatever it takes. A person who is going to teach people the right way to do things: non-violent. A person who feels like they need to do something for humanity.
- 219 Difference between men and women's leadership: They can play different roles, the roles combined make a good team. Women can sometimes get better responses than men, because men are more intimidating. People are afraid if a man approaches the house, but not when a woman does, so women can campaign better than men.
- 238 Women can do a better job with some things nowadays than men, such as insurance sales, because women are not as threatening. For this reason women should take leadership roles.
- 250 How women understand life better than men. Men are more violent. Men frighten people away more than women. But men are good to have to help coordinate rallies, put up signs, etc.
- 264 Difference between an all women's organization like Concerned Women (CW), and a co-ed organization like SCLC. Concerned Women sees the need for help; education, prison reform, welfare, etc. CW is concerned about health issues and taking care of sick people, especially people with terminal illnesses like cancer.
- 290 CW is also concerned about education, helps out by tutoring in schools. Visit prisons periodically, perform a program and take food and gifts.
- 305 CW wants to insure that the justice system treats women fairly, especially in prison.
- 318 CW is different from organizations involving both women and men-- co-ed ones like SCLC work for "bigger" issues, try to get bills passed.
- 328 Most co-ed organizations have a "department" for women. The women have their part and the men have the overall.
- 335 NAACP events for women: Mother of the Year, annual award. The NAACP is now trying to form a women's organization.
- 357 Willie Neal-- one man who belonged to the Concerned Women for Justice. He was helpful in lifting heavy pots of food when they went to the prisons.

375 "Women can always think of things to do, rather than just talking, making speeches. They
can always think about the welfare of humanity."

388 It takes both women and men to make a movement successful

391 Willie Neal joined the CW because his wife didn't drive and he would bring her.

428 How she worked with Dollie Burwell on the PCB landfill protest

441 [End of Side B]