ALICE WALKER INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Alice Walker
Author
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Interviewed by Chris Durrance
Total Running Time: 1 hour, 22 minutes and 44 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

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INTERVIEWER:

Let's start talking about your upbringing, and your parents. Describe them. Describe their life for us.

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ALICE WALKER:

My parents were farmers, and they also were dairy people. They milked cows and took care of a whole dairy for the woman who owned the land. They had a good sense of humor, and they also had a deep love for each other. And even when they argued, they did it with a great deal of humor. And I would always know that the argument was done when my father would come back into the

room and slyly pat my mother on the back of her body, on her hips. And then I knew that there was no argument left between them. So, I think I always took comfort in the fact that they deeply loved each other, and that there was never any sign that anybody was going to leave home. There's a wonderful rootedness that children feel when their parents are clearly married to each other, and to them, and are not going anywhere.

INTERVIEWER:
At what point... I mean, I imagine as a child, you had no sense of this, because this was your reality, this was your life. But at what point did it strike you that it was… I mean, it was a particular point in American history, isn't it? In terms of relations between whites and Blacks. Help us understand that. When did that come clear to you?

00:01:39:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, white people had the most unfortunate ability to cause other people, people of color, to just feel really lifeless. You could not be yourself around them, because they wouldn't tolerate it, for one thing. For instance, you had to always pretend that you thought they were superior. You had to always pretend that you thought they were right. And this had a real dampening effect on people of color, because we knew they were not superior, and we knew they weren't always right, but it was set up that way. It was a fascist state, and the laws were enforced by terrorism. By beatings, and lynchings, and disappearances, and rapes. And this had been going on for a few hundred years. So, it's really remarkable that people like my parents and my grandparents were able to be people of such grace. Even though sometimes they lost it, and they were mean to their children, or they kicked the dog. But overall, I think it's incredible that they held up as well as they did.

INTERVIEWER:

Were they indentured? Were they totally dependent on the whites around them?

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ALICE WALKER:

Well, yes. Because the sharecropping system was basically slavery with a new name, and with none of the benefits of slavery, such as trying to keep you healthy so you could work in the fields. Now you had to work in the fields and nobody cared if you were healthy. And so, they didn't offer any kind of medical attention. Also, the housing was just despicable, when there was any. And this was one of the ways they could punish you. If you didn't do exactly what they wanted, they could force you out of your shack. And then there you were, on the road and in the woods, until you could find some other shack to move into.

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ALICE WALKER:

So, this is one of my reasons for loving houses. As a child, I wanted books which we didn't have, and I wanted a decent house. And so, as an adult, I have thousands of books. In fact, I've been giving them away because who needs… After a while you've read them all. But I also have a lot of houses. Even on this land, I have little, tiny houses. One room, but it's a little house. And I understand that this comes out of a childhood of great deprivation.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me about your parents' house, then. What do you remember of it?

00:04:04:00

ALICE WALKER:

Well, there were many of them, you know, because they were forced out every year, practically. They would raise the food, and the crop, and the cotton.

Primarily cotton, for the landlord. Sometimes a man, sometimes a woman. And then if the landlord, whoever he or she was, decided that they didn't want to hold up their end of the bargain, which was to share what our parents and the family had created, then we could be tossed off the land. And this was a very stressful thing for all of us.

INTERVIEWER:
So, every year you'd be piling your things onto a wagon or-?

ALICE WALKER:
So, every year. Yes, every year.

INTERVIEWER:
I think I stepped on you there, sorry. Do you mind-

00:04:55:00

ALICE WALKER:
Yeah, but I'm glad you brought me back, because I was wandering. But yeah, every year you'd be… And I think now, I didn't understand this as a child, but my father was also politically active. As much as a poor Black man farmer, sharecropper, with eight children could be. He was the first Black man to vote in our county. Passing by three white men with shotguns who said they would kill any Black person who voted. Using, of course, the N word. And he did that. So, I think that part of the reason, maybe, that we were forced to move into more and more horrible shacks was that he was being punished, and his family was being punished because he was daring to speak up.

INTERVIEWER:
I want to come back to that. But tell me about the moves. Do you have vivid memories of those?

ALICE WALKER:
I have vivid memories of some of them.

INTERVIEWER:
Sorry, I stepped on you again.

ALICE WALKER:
Oh, I'm sorry.

INTERVIEWER:
I'm sorry. Because I'm going to be cut out of this.

00:05:55:00

ALICE WALKER:
Oh, okay. The most horrific move was the move in which my cat, Phoebe, could not be found. I must have been seven. And the move was very precipitous. We didn't know that we had to move so quickly. And so, they gathered the wagons. And I don't know if we borrowed a truck or something, but in any case, my cat could not be found. And we could not go back to look for her because we were not supposed to go back. That was one of the more memorable episodes.

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ALICE WALKER:
Also, the… moving into the last shack, which was the worst of all, was very difficult because it was so horrible. It was made out of rejects from the lumber mill, and it barely had floors. It barely had a roof. And my parents had to, basically, make it as watertight and airtight as they could. And I remember that my mother, who worked as a maid and who sometimes could earn as much as $17 a week, which was very little, she managed to wallpaper my

room with wallpaper. The cheapest wallpaper you could get. But she was determined that we would have wallpaper in the girls' room.

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ALICE WALKER:
But then in her room, she didn't have money to buy wallpaper, so she had cardboard boxes that she scavenged from somewhere and butcher paper. And she used that to cover her own walls in her bedroom. And this was so much like my mother. This kind of thoughtfulness and more concerned for her girls than for herself. And this is also part of how she beautified everything. She was a woman of great artistic talent in the way that she made quilts, and she made gardens, and she planted so many flowers around this shack that it disappeared as a shack, and it became, in the summertime, just an amazing place.

INTERVIEWER:
The petunias.

00:08:18:00

ALICE WALKER:
Yes. She would find flowers that had been abandoned at other houses, and she would bring them home, and she would plant them and they would flourish. So, my sense of poverty was always seen through this screen of incredible ingenuity and artistic power that she exhibited in every facet of her life.

INTERVIEWER:
Did you identify with one of your parents more than the other?

00:08:48:00

ALICE WALKER:

I identified more with my mother because I was with my mother a lot. And also, she was the one who knew a lot of the secrets of the forest, and knew that you could get medicines from the plants. And this was part of her Cherokee heritage. I was also close to my father, though, because he was more the mathematician and the scientific one, if you could say that about someone who had only gone through fifth grade. He loved numbers. He loved writing. He loved anything to do with learning. So, he was something of a scholar. If he had been permitted, he would've been a wonderful scholar. And I love to think of him that way.

INTERVIEWER:
And were stories, then, a big part of your upbringing?

00:09:38:00

ALICE WALKER:
They both told stories. My parents loved telling stories. They flowed, and they just came out of nowhere. My mother, for instance, would be talking about… I don't know what, but out of that would come, "And do you know that we were down at this funeral, and lo and behold, the tree limb had fallen on this twin. There were twins, and the tree limb fell on one of them, fell on the little girl. And then at her funeral, the little boy came, and when they opened the coffin, she woke up."

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ALICE WALKER:
So, it just…I don't know. They just spun these tales. We were also inheritors of the Uncle Remus, what became known as Uncle Remus Fables, about Br'er Rabbit and Mr. Fox. So, we had a childhood that was pretty full of people always telling stories and making stories, and also calling people interesting names. There was a name for everyone that was not their birth name. You

were named after a characteristic that you exhibited. So, you might be called, "Smiles A Lot," "Hears Nothing," things like that.

INTERVIEWER:
What was yours?

ALICE WALKER:
Well, actually mine was only Kitten, because my mother thought that I was like a kitten, in my love of snuggling and cuddling and affection.

INTERVIEWER:
And what was your mother's?

00:11:22:00

ALICE WALKER:
And independence, actually. My mother's… I think she had many. I think she had Sugar, Sweetness. But because she was so formidable in the community, most people knew that they had to call her Ms. Mini Lou or Mrs. Walker. She was, you know, she was a strong woman and she demanded a certain degree of respect.

INTERVIEWER:
And your father's? Did he have one?

00:11:59:00

ALICE WALKER:
My father's nickname was Biryee. I don't think people used it very much. I don't remember that. I don't remember them calling him Biryee very much. His father called him Biryee.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me about his activism. Is that where you get this-

ALICE WALKER:
My activism?

INTERVIEWER:
Yeah. From, in some sense?

ALICE WALKER:
Well, of course.

INTERVIEWER:
And tell me about him, first.

00:12:29:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, my father truly understood the injustice of segregation. And he had an inkling, if not full knowledge, because they kept the awful tragedy of slavery out of our awareness as much as possible. Because if we knew all of it, what would happen? I mean, we'd be very angry and very grief stricken. So, there was a real effort not to educate people of color to know anything. Well, of course, white people didn't know that much either, they just knew that somehow God had given them dominion over Black people. That was really how they saw it. But my father was quite clear that it was unjust. And once he asked for a raise, for instance, from, I think it was… I don't know, $9 to $10, or something. And he was roundly abused for asking for a raise, even though he was working for this… At this point, the land person was a woman, so our landlady.

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ALICE WALKER:

He was working for her. My mother was working for her, and about five of his children were all working for this woman. And she was incensed that he would ask for a raise of a couple of dollars. So, it would be difficult not to understand that you were being cheated and abused under a system like that. And also that if you objected, even to the extent of rolling your eyes, you could be visited by the Klan in the night, and your shack could be burned, and your children could be killed, and you too. So, that's the America that many of us remember. We remember that. We remember it through our parents. And this is why in the sixties, why so many of us joined the movement. It was to stand with our parents and our grandparents, whom we knew to be just amazing people.

INTERVIEWER:
Do you remember, then, flashes of fear? Even if they shielded you from all of this horror around you, do you remember flashes of fear? Stories of the Klan or boogeyman from when you were young?

00:14:54:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, yes. But it was very subtle, because when you grow up under a system of oppression that is just everywhere you look. I mean every single thing, every single thing is oppressive. It's delineated. It's not just the white drinking fountain and the Black drinking fountain, the white toilet and the Black toilet. You can't eat here, you can't go there. It's more this sense that you feel around the people who are doing this to you, that they have this deep evil. This deep, troubled spirit that is very damaging to everything it touches. And we felt that, because it was touching us every day. And this, too, was something that had to be confronted in the movement, because there we found ourselves actually with a few white allies, who didn't seem to be like the ones that we've grown up with. Well, what to do about them?

INTERVIEWER:
I want to get to that. But before, I'm very interested in how, in your first experiences of writing, and reading, and stories… I remember reading about the Sears catalog. Is that a story that still resonates with you?

00:16:14:00

ALICE WALKER:
What about the Sears—

INTERVIEWER:
Looking as a tiny girl, looking at the Sears catalog and pretending to write with twigs.

ALICE WALKER:
Oh no, I wasn't pretending, I was writing.

INTERVIEWER:
So, tell me. Tell me.

00:16:23:00

ALICE WALKER:
Yeah, My mother tells this story about me as a writer before I knew what a writer was. She said that she would miss me, and I would have crawled all around to the back of the house, and I would be sitting there with the Sears Roebuck catalog, and I would be writing in the margins of it with a twig. And I don't really remember that. I mean, I more or less remember actually having some paper that I got from my teacher. But my writing goes back very far. And I think part of it was just the magic of it. I mean, if you are told stories your whole life, from the time you were—before you were even given birth. Before you were born, you hear them telling stories. And you understand later on that, actually, a story is something that can be written.

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ALICE WALKER:
So, I had this sister who'd gone off to college. And when she came home, she would tell us stories and then she would read them. These were other stories. By then she'd moved on to, you know, other people. And she would read these stories, and so it was very clear that actually, the magic of this could be written down. And I think that really attracted me.

INTERVIEWER:
So, through your sister?

ALICE WALKER:
She was very important. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
And at school? Do you remember the first story you wrote?

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ALICE WALKER:
No. No. Actually, there's some ducks that came before that. When I was four years old, my mother had to put me in school because she worked three or four jobs, one of which was in the fields. And if she took me with her to the fields, she would have to leave me at the edge of the field. And that was a very dangerous place to be because we had snakes and other creatures who probably liked to snack on little babies. But anyway, so she enrolled me in school when I was four. And my teacher there, this wonderful woman, taught me, among other things, before I started to actually read and write, she taught me to shape little ducks made out of ivory soap, and to make drawings of all kinds of creatures. And this introduced me to my love of art. And I've just recently started painting again, and it's just so wonderful.

INTERVIEWER:
And was it scraps of paper, then? Your first actual writing? In the Sears Roebuck catalog–

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ALICE WALKER:
Well, I think it was probably school lined paper. I had brothers and sisters. I'm the last of eight children. They all went off to school. And I'm sure they brought home bits of paper.

ON SCREEN TEXT:
Alice Walker & Her Brothers
Eatonton, Georgia

ALICE WALKER:
Because I had very rambunctious brothers, to put it really kindly, I learned that it was best to compose in my head. And so, I did a lot of that as well. And I kept that up for decades, really. I don't generally do the scratching out and tossing of paper.

INTERVIEWER:
And writing up draft after the draft?

ALICE WALKER:
No, no it's better. And it works well for me because I also meditate. And as you know, if you meditate, there's a way in which things do line up. It's a wonderful way to put yourself in order. And especially as a creative person, if you're creating something, you put that in order by meditating.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there a meaningful book or a meaningful story that you remember, that really just cut through your imagination? Just grabbed you from these early years?

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ALICE WALKER:

I remember that there was always poetry that pointed a way to be. In fact, my sweetheart and I were just talking yesterday about one of the little poems. It went, "I have to live with myself, and so. I want to be fit for myself to know." This was one of the poems that shaped our lives. It's very simple, but the message is that you have to live with yourself, you know, no matter who else has to live with you. And if you have to live with yourself, you better be fit to be lived with. The other major poem was Invictus, which I can't remember right now, but it's the one that is in the Nelson Mandela movie. That was very big in our house. Later on, Emily Dickinson was very key.

INTERVIEWER:

When did books first start coming into your life, then? I mean, I can imagine that they weren't really around when you were young.

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ALICE WALKER:

No, but people threw away books. People threw books out. And my father, who was this scholar thwarted, would collect them and bring them home. So, we had Shakespeare, we had Thomas Hardy, we had— whoever was thrown out, we had. And then my teachers loved that I loved to read. And so, for my birthday, one of my birthday gifts was *Gulliver's Travels*, which I recently listened to on audio. And it doesn't hold up that well. I mean, the first part is okay, but I was surprised that it wasn't as spell binding as it had been when I was little. That's what I was reading when I was 11.

INTERVIEWER:

So, this alternate world. This travel, this sense of possibility.

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ALICE WALKER:

That was great. I think it was from *Gulliver's Travels* that I realized that the world out there was just unimaginably amazing. And it had talking horses, and it had really tiny people, and it had really big people. And that was wonderful to think about. So, when I did get into the world and I saw it, I think I was well prepared.

INTERVIEWER:

And how much did the accident with your eye have to do with this composing in your head? It sounds like, the way you've described yourself, it's partly your character. I mean, kitten and the solitude, but it seems like it's all of a piece, as well.

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ALICE WALKER:

When I was wounded when I was eight, it did, it set me apart, because people were prone to staring, which was really annoying. And the children were given to teasing, which was really just so gross. And in fact, one of the first fights, maybe the only fight I had in school, was when this young boy had been teasing me for a while and I got really fed up and I just— I didn't plan it, but I just turned around and I beat him up, little me. So it was very tricky there for many years. And one of my older brothers helped me. I went to Boston and he took me to Boston General and I had surgery and met this wonderful doctor who, you know, I thought he said his name was O. Henry because I loved O. Henry's stories, but he really wasn't O. Henry. And he did what he could. I don't have vision in it, but I love it because it's like a crystal

ball and I feel that I see everything that's hidden with this eye that doesn't see.

INTERVIEWER:
And so we have that whole story, can you tell us what happened?

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ALICE WALKER:
Oh, just my brother, we were playing Cowboys and Indians, he had… The problem with this episode was that my parents had bought guns for the children, for the boys. And this is surely at the root of my understanding that you don't buy weapons for children. So I think in their imagination, my brother would just be shooting birds, which is still not good or shoot, I don't know, tin cans or something, but of course, what would he shoot? He'd shoot his sister. And I feel for him. I really feel for him because I think the suffering that I endured was in some way shared by him having done it as a boy, he was only 10. So he went off into a rather rough gangster-like role in life and I have great sorrow for his life. I'm not sure this had a lot to do with it, but I think it must be difficult to wound anyone and to then grow up to understand the suffering that was caused by it.

INTERVIEWER:
So he carried a lot with him.

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ALICE WALKER:
I think so. I think so. And toward the end of his life, he was very much into drugs. He was very misogynistic, which I think may have some kind of tangle root down in this terrorism that he practiced as a boy because he had a lot of anger. And the other part of his story, and when my family said, there's a lot of mental suffering, you know, just a lot of mental suffering. And there are

mental sufferings that are inherited through DNA, but then there's mental suffering that occurs after 200 and 300 years of brutal oppression, you just go a little crazy and nobody should be surprised.

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ALICE WALKER:
So a lot of what has to happen with people under oppression is a great deal of discipline. That's why, again, some kind of practice. You know, if it's not meditation, it can be dancing, it can be painting, it can be writing, but there has to be some way to keep a healthy soul, to keep a real centered part of yourself that is not touched. Or if it is touched, it's not overrun by the oppression that you encounter on a daily basis.

INTERVIEWER:
There's a story of your daughter, very young, just staring at your eye and saying, "I can see the whole world in it."

00:27:16:00

ALICE WALKER:
Mm-hmm, yes. That's a beautiful thought that my daughter had. And I dedicated a book to her with that as a sort of epigram, that what some people earlier in my life had considered a scar, she saw as the planet. And, you know, I thought that was great on her part.

INTERVIEWER:
Were your parents traditional? Were the gender roles in your family traditional?

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ALICE WALKER:
You know, I was the last. So according to my mother, until her fifth child, they didn't have gender roles. He was just as happy to be taking care of the

children, bathing, he loved to cook. Actually, he always loved to cook, but at some point the bitterness of oppression crept into his heart and he became someone who wanted to enforce gender roles because he couldn't do anything about racism. And so he became someone who said, "Well, the boys can't sweep. Don't ask them to sweep the floor. Don't ask them to pick up their own clothes. Don't ask them to do washing. Don't ask them to wash dishes. It's all for women and girls." And this was a real problem, because it was not fair. And I, for whatever reason, have always really loved fairness. So I felt well, they're eating the food, they're wearing the clothes, why can't they wash the dishes, wash the clothing, makes sense to me. So we had our little battles.

INTERVIEWER:
And your mother, how did she respond?

ON SCREEN TEXT:
Alice Walker & Her Mother

00:29:02:00

ALICE WALKER:
My mother was in some ways, such an Amazon. When I think of her, I just think of someone who is in a way non-gender. She just did everything. For working in the fields and in the dairy, my mother wore overalls, just like my dad, same kind of shoes, boots, just like my dad. But then on Sunday she tossed all of that aside and she put on usually some pink outfit or some very pastely thing. Earrings, she had her hair done, and she wore a little bit of lipstick, she never wore finger nail polish, but she just transformed herself into what we think of as the feminine. But as a child, it was just very clear to me that you could be a woman and you could do everything, that there was no reason why you couldn't milk a cow.

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ALICE WALKER:
In fact, my mother was helping my father round up the cows and one of them hooked her in the side so she was sick for a long time with that. But it wasn't as if she was upset because it happened to her because she was a woman, it was just that it had happened and it could have happened to anyone. I liked that very much. I liked the way that they were not, especially her, hung up every minute about roles, because life was pretty desperate. They had to make a living, they had to take care of eight children. And if the landlord was going to be tossing them off the land every year or so, they didn't have a lot of time to indulge in whimsy.

INTERVIEWER:
I'm going to move forward to civil rights. Was there a moment for you when you realized you just had to stand up and do something?

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ALICE WALKER:
Well, I was…I had a job at the 4-H club, the white 4- H club as a salad girl, and we would drive there and work. And I remember feeling the injustice of how we did all the work there on this place that was actually… had been taken over from Native Americans. Our whole town, all of Georgia was heavily Native American, and the colonizers had wiped them out. But where I lived, there was a huge eagle, it's called Rock Eagle, and it's a mound that you can only tell is an eagle if you climb up a tower and look down and you can see this beautiful eagle, so we always felt connected to that.

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ALICE WALKER:
And so this place where I was working as a salad girl was actually built on what had been a Native place. So I argued with my boyfriend, who had a car,

about the injustice, not only of the wiping out of the Indians, but also that we had to walk when the white children could ride to school. And he said, "Well, we just have to accept it." And I said, "No," and I got out of the car and I walked rather than ride with him, and that was one of my earliest stances, I think. But by the time I was going off to college, Martin Luther King had been arrested probably several times. We had gotten a television set, I had seen his face, I had loved his composure and his determination.

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ALICE WALKER:
We never expected him to live very long, but we loved him very deeply. And when I went off to college, it was natural that I would join the movement, partly because on the day that I left home, my father took me to the bus stop, we didn't even have a station. It was a tiny, tiny town. And he stood there and I looked at this man, and he was by then really old and sick and tired. And I was going away to make myself useful in the world, which is really what we think of education as being, it's a way to make yourself useful in the world.

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ALICE WALKER:
And I sat down in the front of the bus and there was a white woman who just went into a fit because I was sitting in the front of the bus and she complained to the driver, and he got up and he forced me to sit in the back. And this was so traumatic because, you know, on the one hand I thought, "Okay, I can refuse and sit in the front and I can be arrested in this little town. And they will completely squash my father, who's already squashed, or I can stay on the bus, get to Atlanta, check into my college and immediately join the movement for civil rights, human rights." And that's what I did. So we did sit-ins and marches.

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ALICE WALKER:

Voter registration. In the summers, I went to a little place called Liberty County, Georgia, and was active there until one night we were sitting in at a police station and the mob started throwing broken bottles. And I realized that I had other things I wanted to do before they harmed me badly. So, I went off to Africa, but then later, of course, I moved to Mississippi and rejoined the movement there.

INTERVIEWER:
Tell me about Africa. What was your idea? What was the aim? What were you trying to learn?

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ALICE WALKER:
Well, I was trying to learn who I was because African Americans basically had to struggle to understand where they came from. If you don't have any history books that tell any kind of truth, there's no way you'd know anything, hardly. So going to Africa was to see for myself were these people savages? Were they all running around in grass skirts and with a spear, and what were they doing? So I went there and I lived with a beautiful family in a beautiful house on a hill in Uganda and then in Kenya. And in Kenya, I started helping to build a school because the children had no school. The colonizers, same colonizers, had come and they had taken over all the land in this part of Kenya and they had planted in it pineapples. All just pineapples, as far as you could see, just like in Hawaii.

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ALICE WALKER:
And then the people whose land had been, they had forced into little shacks, little mud huts that took up just a tiny, tiny spot of land and they were not permitted to eat the pineapple. They were not permitted to eat any of the pineapples, and they didn't have enough land left, actually, to grow whatever

their traditional food had been, so their health was dreadful. Their teeth were terrible, their skin was bad, they were in rags, and they had no school so we started building the school. And the only thing we could build it out of was sisal stalks, and that's just these long poles, when you split them in half and you nail them up, but it was very good for me. I loved my classmate, my schoolmate at school back in Atlanta, was from Uganda, Constance and she was a wonderful woman. And it was very good for me to see where she had come from. And of course today, it is dreadful to see how her country was absolutely trashed, you know. I mean, just destroyed. Many years of Idi Amin, for instance, and then now this whole anti-gay movement, which is dreadful. And when I was there, it was a very peaceful, green and beautiful land.

INTERVIEWER:
And did it help you find answers or find a path or a journey?

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ALICE WALKER:
Oh yes. I started writing my first book in Africa, in Kenya looking at Mount Kenya, and I felt the groundedness of knowing that these people, the African people who had been so maligned and who had been done so badly were just human beings. They were good, they were bad, they were indifferent, but they were just human beings and this was lovely because all the stories, almost all the stories, had been dreadful.

INTERVIEWER:
And then Mississippi, I guess, is the next major phase.

00:38:23:00

ALICE WALKER:
I went off to Mississippi in 1966 alone. I had been given $2,000 as a grant to write and to live and the option was that I could go and live in Paris because

the person who sponsored this grant… I had refused it before, but it came around again and the option was that I could go to Paris and imbibe French culture and write and everything, but-

INTERVIEWER:
And there's a long tradition of that, the sort of jazz age and...

00:39:03:00

ALICE WALKER:
Yes, but the jazz age was before, you know, all hell was breaking loose politically in the United States, and who would want to miss that? I wouldn't. But I was tempted to go to Senegal because I love French. I love the French language and I lived in a French house and I translated poetry into French… but I decided at the last minute to go to Mississippi. And so I went to Mississippi and I joined the movement there and I took depositions from sharecroppers who were identical to my parents and were being thrown off the plantations for the same reasons, you know, speaking up, speaking out about still being serfs, basically. Even though slavery had ended 100 years before, people were still-

INTERVIEWER:
Their stories. Sorry to interrupt. I mean, you're taking down their stories.

00:40:03:00

ALICE WALKER:
I was taking down their stories, yes. Depositions about what happened? Who did it? When? Where? How? And these stories could be used in court because we had by then attracted a lot of really good lawyers and law students. My future husband was a law student and we did a lot of this work together.

INTERVIEWER:

And when you got married and lived there again, put us in that time. There can't have been many mixed marriages in Mississippi at that point, can there?

ALICE WALKER:
There were none.

INTERVIEWER:
So, put us there.

00:40:46:00

ALICE WALKER:
There were no mixed marriages in Mississippi at the time and ours was the first and only for a long time. Although after us many people married each other, many interracial marriages happened. Until now, Mississippi leads the nation in the number of mixed marriages. So I feel very good about that. I feel that people should marry whoever they like. And we were illegal and we waited for them to make an issue of it.

INTERVIEWER:
Put me on the streets in the 1967. What was next to you? What were you experiencing?

00:41:29:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, of course, the racists were very annoyed and hateful. They detested seeing us together. And, of course, we went around together and we desegregated quite a number of places just by our presence. I like to say to my former husband that actually I desegregated them because he looked more like them, you know. We shopped at night because people stared at us and it wasn't very safe often. The Klan used to leave their calling card on our doorstep. But, you know, we were incredibly happy. We were so happy, it was

amazing. And so we would often just look at these people, they would be frowning and upset and furious and angry and hostile and we thought, "My goodness, what a waste of life, when you could be happy too. You could be happy. You don't really have to live like this."

00:42:47:00

ALICE WALKER:
And that was part of how we understood our union, that it demonstrated that people are really, basically just people. They fall in love, there's no reason, you just fall in love and you have a right to do that, and you have a right to live your life. Now when our daughter was born, on her birth certificate— they were so unused to seeing an interracial couple that acknowledged themselves as a couple that they put a question mark after whether she's Black, white, other, what? And that was typical of our time there. He was a movement lawyer and the movement car had a bullet hole right through the front windshield because somebody had taken a shot, not at him, but at whoever was in the car at that time. But we just lived, we lived fully.

INTERVIEWER:
Did you have moments of fear? Talk about what— the Klan's calling card. What is that?

00:44:04:00

ALICE WALKER:
All of my stuff, most of it over the last many decades, is at Emory University in the archives…my own archive kind of, and there is a card that you can actually see, and it has a Klansman with his eyes, you know, the eyes of the Klan are on you, and this turned up on our porch several times. The feeling of fear comes and goes under pressure, but the feeling of love is constant. It doesn't come and go, it's always there. And my love of Black people in the South, my parents, grandparents, and the people in the movement who were

just astonishing, they were just amazing people. So it would've been an honor to just, whatever happened, to be there with them. And I think we both felt it very much and that took away a lot of what might have been uneasiness.

00:45:04:00

ALICE WALKER:
I wrote a poem about how fate would find us receiving, at home, and that was our attitude, that we'd just as soon be here as anywhere and you can't really determine when your end will come, and you might as well be doing something that you love and standing with people that you admire. And so we were very joyful. I mean, he would come home every night and we would laugh just to think that we had gotten through another day.

INTERVIEWER:
And were you writing?

00:45:43:00

ALICE WALKER:
Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh yeah, I was writing, I was writing. Oh, well, I was teaching in two universities. I was teaching at Tougaloo, which was the more radical Black college, and then at Jackson State. And I was also teaching grown-up women, Black women, about their history, because of course they had no idea. I said to them, "Well, when did slavery end?" And they said, "Well, 1942?" And actually, in their lives, it hadn't ended. So that was part of what I was doing. And I was writing, let's see… Three days before my daughter was born, I finished my first novel. And then about a year after she was born, I started *Meridian*, which was my second novel. Is that my second novel? Yeah, I think so. Anyway, and I, you know, life was full. It was just absolutely full of teaching and writing and learning to drive. And when I was trying to learn to drive, the state troopers harassed me by not letting me pass the test for about six times. And then finally I took my lawyer husband with

me and we said, "You know what? If she doesn't pass, we'll sue you." So that's how I got my driver's license finally.

INTERVIEWER:
And can we move forward? I mean, clearly, for most people *The Color Purple* is the iconic book in your life. Can we talk about that? Its genesis, how it came about. I mean, I know in your literary career. It's what, your 10th, I think? Is it your 10th book?

ALICE WALKER:
It's my 10th book. *The Color Purple* is my 10th book.

INTERVIEWER:
And so can you tell me about the genesis of how… Had it been bubbling for a long time?

00:47:27:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, I think it's just that I really wanted to spend more time with my grandparents, because when I was injured I went to live with them for a while. And I got to see these amazing elderly people who seemed so mild and so sedate, and all of that. They were elderly, and yet the stories that I heard about them, about their younger years, were riveting. My grandfather had once shot someone in the back. My step-grandmother had had two children that nobody knew what happened to them or how she got them. She was the least sensual person you could imagine. She was a hard-shelled Baptist churchgoer. I don't think those people did much more than wash each other's feet.

00:48:26:00

ALICE WALKER:

So who were they? Who were these amazing people? And I wanted to spend time with them. And so I started writing this novel, longing to hear their voices, longing to hear their speech. I was so determined to give them a voice that they had, that they'd actually had. And I was also determined that I would help people to understand that voice, if I had to. I don't know how I would've done that, but I was determined because if you deny people a voice, their own voice, there's no way you'll ever know who they were and so they are erased. And to erase these beautiful people that I loved and who loved me so dearly. My step-grandmother, for instance, as if to prepare me not to be daunted by white racism and how white racists would always try to make me smaller, she always called me Miss Alice, always. And that was her very subtle way of making me understand that in our culture where only white girls and women were called miss, that I would be called miss.

INTERVIEWER:
And is she the lady? I mean, is the pink panties story true? Is she the lady?

00:49:54:00

ALICE WALKER:
Yes, she is. The pink panties story is true. Yeah, but this is a story told to me by my sister, the other sister. Both sisters were good storytellers, but this one with the pink panties, she always knew the real secret stuff. So apparently at some point, miss— the girlfriend, let us call her Miss Shug, she became Miss Shug, who felt sympathy and empathy for the wife who was just this plain-Jane of a woman, hardly anything sexy. So the wife, whose panties were probably made out of burlap, sees these beautiful silky pink undergarments, and they must have just looked like heaven. And she just wanted a pair, and so Ms. Shug just said, "Well, here. Take them."

00:51:00:00

ALICE WALKER:

And I love this story because it shows how the women were able to bond at a level that I don't think, you know, my grandfather would have understood. That there is something in even the most homely, burlap wearing woman who was ground down by working. You know, her shoes were always, you know, kind of slopping over. I mean, her feet were always kind of slopping over her shoes because she didn't get new shoes. She wore whatever there was. But in her heart, she longed for something silky and beautiful. So actually years and years into her long life, all of her grandchildren delighted in giving her silky, soft, shiny, gorgeous shawls and slips. And she never wore them, but she had them.

INTERVIEWER:
So this is your step-grandmother?

ALICE WALKER:
My step-grandmother, Rachel.

INTERVIEWER:
And then your grandfather's mistress?

ALICE WALKER:
Yes.

INTERVIEWER:
And they come together in this crazy moment.

ALICE WALKER:
Yes, and…

INTERVIEWER:
Because I'm not going to be in it, do you mind just sort clarifying who they were?

00:52:22:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, my step-grandmother, Rachel, would be Celie, but transformed because I was eight when all of this was… I was hearing this story and that story, and my goodness, this happened and that happened, and how could that be? These people are so different now. What happened to them? And my grandfather, who was a heavy drinker… Actually, one of the more amusing things of my ancestry, in that way, is that one grandfather was a drunkard and the other one sold whiskey. But anyway, so yes, that's who they were. My grandfather, his mistress, who was this beautiful, Black, tall, elegant woman. And so unlike his wife, who was just kind of dull and overburdened and patient, but with a heart that was so loving.

INTERVIEWER:
I mean, the first page of *The Color Purple*, –

ON SCREEN TEXT:
The Color Purple
First Page

INTERVIEWER:
–the first page is just…I mean, it just grabs you. It's so intense and so immediate. Was that the first thing you wrote?

00:53:35:00

ALICE WALKER:

Oh God. I went through so much to get to writing that. I was living in New York City. I was an editor at *Ms. Magazine*. I had bought a house in Park Slope. I thought I was set and then, uh-oh, not at all. I had to quit the job, sell the house, move here, try to find Booneville, which was more like the South. And I just started writing, and I pretty much wrote it straight through. In fact, I have notebooks where it's pretty much the way it is in the book.

INTERVIEWER:
You just had to find a place and the space to write it?

00:54:19:00

ALICE WALKER:
It was actually a bit like needing to lay an egg. Where is the nest? We went from Yosemite all the way up to Covelo looking for the perfect place, because it matters where you do your work. I mean, for me, it matters a lot, partly because of the way I never felt safe in the South. It's important for me to have spaces that feel safe.

INTERVIEWER:
And the taboo. I mean, you just take head on these taboos as well. Was that important? Did you feel something had been missing in other books you were reading and what was going on around you?

00:55:03:00

ALICE WALKER:
I knew that in most literature that we read, the lives of many of the people that I knew did not exist. My mother, for instance, was nowhere in the literature. And she was all over my heart, so why shouldn't she be in literature? I didn't care to just forever read about people that I didn't know. I wanted to read about people I did know, and it was easy to do because I just

felt such an amazing amount of love for them. And they led me. I mean, they were as active in being created as I was in creating them.

INTERVIEWER:
You had this wonderful line, I think it was in an interview somewhere, where you were saying that the stories chase you. I mean, you can run from them, you can try and turn your back on them, but they chase you and they'll find you. Is that right?

00:55:56:00

ALICE WALKER:
They will. Yeah. And because some stories are your responsibility. They come to you because you're the only person who can tell them. I mean, who else could tell this story, really? And with the fidelity to the speech, which was really important to me, because I really know that if you don't know what someone sounds like, how can you really know them?

INTERVIEWER:
And at the end of the book, I don't know if it's in the first edition, you call yourself writer and medium.

00:56:29:00

ALICE WALKER:
In all additions. That didn't change, and I said that I was the writer and medium because that's how it felt. That I was actually doing the writing, but I was also bringing in– back into the world lost voices and lost beings. I mean, they're not identical, of course, to my ancestors, but they are of that fabric.

INTERVIEWER:
Did you expect it to resonate in the way it did?

00:57:00:00

ALICE WALKER:
I had no expectations. And in fact, generally speaking, I live in the moment that I have. I don't really tend to look forward or back much. I mean, I do a little historical research, but I am content to let life unfold because I found that it's just so much more enjoyable being surprised, and just being delighted.

INTERVIEWER:
And then when you hear about the Pulitzer, I mean, I think the first thing you think it's a prank, don't you?

00:57:30:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, I thought it was a prank. I thought hearing… When someone called to tell me about the Pulitzer, I thought it was a prank because I had just won the National Book Award and I was… People always think I know a lot of people. I don't because I don't really live in that way. I live a much more private life. I have a few really good friends. I have a few really good comrades, you know, across the planet, and I know them well and I stand by them and they stand by me. But the other part of it, I mean, I didn't know there was a prize for fiction from the Pulitzer, so it was really… a surprise.

INTERVIEWER:
That changed your life?

00:58:25:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, it made it more public. It made it more public, and it made it a more… I think I sold, probably, many more copies of the book. I think it may have led partly to the movie. In fact, my sister, who just tickled me so much by saying,

as if she knew all along that the movie would be made, she said, "Oh, they always make movies out of the novels that are given the Pulitzer."

INTERVIEWER:
The 70s, for women's rights, for the women's movement, that's a hugely important time.

ON SCREEN TEXT:
Miami Book Fair International, 1989

INTERVIEWER:
What did that period mean to you? I mean, what did feminism mean to you? Was that something you got as engaged in as you had with civil rights? Or was it kind of irrelevant the early white middle-class-

00:59:15:00

ALICE WALKER:
No, no, no, but they're inseparable. Women's rights are inseparable from human rights. That's what you get if you're a woman, you really get that. So, it wasn't much of a stretch. I intended to live fully and freely as a human being and as an American citizen, so anything that would deny me that, I was not going to have. So this actually led to meeting up with Gloria Steinem at some point and becoming friends, working at *Ms. Magazine*, which I really enjoyed. And I was able to bring a lot of women's voices to the magazine and to the world, into the literary world. On some level, it's hard to understand that issue that some people have of assuming that it's somehow different. But if you're a woman and you're a woman of color, it's easy to see that you want to be a full human being. You want to have all your rights as a human being, more or less period.

INTERVIEWER:

It seemed so much of the genesis of the women's movement or the feminist movement, that second wave in the US, was predominantly white, predominantly suburban. I mean, just a totally different set of concerns.

01:00:45:00

ALICE WALKER:

Betty Friedan, I still have not read her seminal or her ovarial work, which started out, I think, saying something like she did not know any women growing up who actually worked. I didn't know any women who didn't work. So you're right. I mean, there's a great divide there. But that doesn't mean that, you know, America is the only place where feminism works or needs to be. All over the world women are a subjugated class. Gender is real. And even in the movement, in the Black movement, there was a period where the women were doing two thirds of the work and also going to jail and also doing all the things.

01:01:36:00

ALICE WALKER:

And one of the men, I think it was Stokely Carmichael, said, well, in his opinion, the place for women in the movement was prone, meaning that he saw them as sexual beings. This was so insulting, but it just proves how misogyny is everywhere. I mean, it's in all of the various movements. That's true today as it was then. So that when we are talking about, for instance, freeing Palestine, we understand that yes, freeing Palestine, but also standing with the women in Palestine who need to be freed from the misogyny and the oppression that they feel as women in that culture.

INTERVIEWER:

And how did you get involved then? I mean, in civil rights, you've talked us through SNCC and the voter registration and so on. How did you get involved in...

ALICE WALKER:
In civil rights?

INTERVIEWER:
In women's rights?

ALICE WALKER:
In women's rights?

INTERVIEWER:
I mean, were you involved in equal pay or the ERA, any things like that?

01:02:39:00

ALICE WALKER:
No, I think as a writer and as an editor at the magazine, my interest was in exposing misogyny and the domination that women endure in the world wherever they are. So for instance, I managed to publish many stories from African women, because there we could really examine the misogyny and the rules by which many women lived that they were trying to change. They were trying to change them by exposing what was going on. For instance, that is what led me into female genital mutilation as a problem, a severe problem for African women, but also women in other cultures where this cutting is done as a means of control of women.

01:03:34:00

ALICE WALKER:

There's just… I think once you understand how people are oppressed, whether they're men or women or children or whatever, it's seamless. I mean, there really is no… In a way, for me… In one of my novels, I talk about how someone says to the father… Or the father says to the son, "What is the major question that the world must ask itself?" And the answer is, "Why is the child crying?" Why is the child crying? And if you try to answer that, you uncover so many evils that are occurring based on gender, based on race, based on color, race, whatever. But you discover a lot of the ways in which all oppression is intertwined.

INTERVIEWER:
When you look back at your childhood and look back today, I mean, can you see…

ON SCREEN TEXT:
Women's Strike For Peace And Equality
New York, August 26th, 1970

INTERVIEWER:
…what has the women's movement achieved? I mean, do you see great progress?

01:04:40:00

ALICE WALKER:
I think women are more capable, that they are more like my mother was, just assume that they can do whatever anybody can do and they go ahead and do it without trying to figure out whether their slippers are going to slip or something. This is very good. This is very healthy. But I think where I am concerned is that there is still a real fear of being feminine. And I don't mean feminine in the sense of wearing pink or earrings, but I mean being female,

there's a real fear. And you can see it most easily in the way that women refer to themselves and other women as guys.

01:05:21:00

ALICE WALKER:
This is very dangerous, but I've noticed that most women can even see the danger of it. It's like erasing yourself daily, minute by minute. You're just not going to be female, you're going to be a guy. But even seeing this and understanding how language shapes us, most women cannot stop themselves, and you will notice this. I mean, you can have a conversation with a woman who's doing this, and you say, "How about not saying guy, referring to a woman as a woman? What's wrong with being a woman?" And she'll say, "Oh, you're right. I'm going to change this." She won't be able to because the programming of erasing what is feminine, what is female, is very strong. And women have not gathered themselves together to really fight it.

INTERVIEWER:
What to you is essence, then, of female? When you think of that, when you say that word, what to you is the core?

01:06:21:00

ALICE WALKER:
The female is capable of giving birth, of mothering out of her body. I mean, a man can be a mother, too. Fathering is mothering in a way. But I think that the ability to recreate the world out of her body, that's who you are as a female. I mean, you have that power. And to give that away in favor of being a guy, I think is just not worth it, really.

INTERVIEWER:
Have your views on that changed?

ALICE WALKER:
Have my views on it changed?

INTERVIEWER:
Yeah.

ALICE WALKER:
In what way?

INTERVIEWER:
Well, I've read old interviews where you've talked about... It seemed like you've thought of yourself as, there's more of an essence, and that your body... you had this line about your body encasing your...

ALICE WALKER:
Yeah, that's true too.

INTERVIEWER:
And in some sense that, I don't know if it was because of what your mother went through. I mean, there's a downside to motherhood as well. Enslavement and entrapment.

01:07:23:00

ALICE WALKER:
And I'm not saying every woman has to be a mother, that's not my point. My point is that this is the ability, this is the ability. This is the ability of the female to actually people the earth, is huge. This is a huge thing that the female is capable of doing. Why deny it? Why run from it? Even if you never have a child, it's like… it's that connection to the fecundity of the Earth. It's that way that we can do something that the Earth does and it's very special.

And we shouldn't have to fight to have it, to keep it. It should be something that we prize. I mean, I will never have another child, and yet I'm very happy to be a woman.

INTERVIEWER:
But don't necessarily want to be limited as a mother, be defined as being a mother.

01:08:30:00

ALICE WALKER:
Oh, of course not. But why would you do that? What I'm saying is that you shouldn't take away from yourself the last vestige of this connection to the Earth that you have. I mean, why would you do that? That's a kind of mutilation.

ON SCREEN TEXT:
The Color Purple
First Edition Cover

INTERVIEWER:
The Color Purple. Let's pick up the inspiration for it, but using the title of the book.

01:08:55:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, in *The Color Purple*, I was very interested in spending time with my grandparents. I had spent six months with them when I was eight years old, and they were fascinating. And so, you know, decades later I wanted to write a book so that I could spend a year or two with them. And I spent a year writing it and at the end of the year, I missed them so much as I got to the finish that I burst into tears.

INTERVIEWER:
And so how do you describe it? I mean, to a friend who hadn't read it, how would you describe it?

01:09:34:00

ALICE WALKER:
When I was in Hawaii one time, I went to the Leper Colony, Kalaupapa, and I bought a book there showing some of the lepers. They now call this Hansen's disease. But there was a face in there, a man who had lost most of his nose and his ears and his chin, and he just had this beautiful… What was left of his face was radiant. And under his photograph, he said, "What I've learned living with lepers and being afflicted with this disease is that the worst things in the world can happen to you in this life, and you can still be happy." And that is what I would like people to understand when they read *The Color Purple*. That there are all these terrible things that can actually happen to us, and yet life is so incredibly magical and abundant and present that we can still be very happy. Takes a lot of work, but you can actually be happy.

INTERVIEWER:
And to me, one of the most telling things is at the very end, what you do is, even more than happiness, you talk about Stevie feeling young and just that energy there.

01:11:04:00

ALICE WALKER:
Yeah, well that's true, that is a part of her happiness. To understand that she may have missed her childhood because she was living in a very abusive situation. But that we can always have a childhood, we can always have that feeling of being young again, because the wellspring of that feeling is love. And she has that in abundance, she's very well loved.

INTERVIEWER:
Do you consider yourself a feminist?

ALICE WALKER:
I consider myself a womanist, and that is a feminist of color. So yes.

INTERVIEWER:
And so define that. What does it mean?

01:11:48:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, it means that to be a womanist, you come from a different culture than the regular white feminists, who never call themselves white feminists. They always just say, "Well, I'm a feminist." They don't say I'm a white feminist or anything. But yeah, I mean, I'm just someone from a different culture. And so my take on feminism would be very different because where white feminists often think of themselves as being oppressed by white men. Feminists of color know that they're oppressed by white men, Black men, and often white women. So there is that.

INTERVIEWER:
And do you think young women today understand those issues and understand what people like you have been through?

01:12:43:00

ALICE WALKER:
I think young people, probably some of them do, but they don't have the educational structures that would mean a real deep understanding of their history. Not just feminist history, any history. One of my best friends was Howard Zinn, who wrote *A People's History of the United States*. And what's so

great about that book is that it helps the average American have some chance of understanding America. I mean, just for starters, just knowing where you are. Most Americans have no idea where they are, and it's a failure of our educational system coupled with a need for many Americans to live in fantasy about how they got here, who their parents were. Who was living here before they got here, what did they do to them? How did they treat them? How is it that a white family could have 200 acres given to them as a homestead, gift basically, from the government. And Black families who have worked for 300 years, promised 40 acres and a mule, but never got anything. So the inequity of what America really is has never been all that clear.

INTERVIEWER:
And fought over, sixties and seventies and never resolved then and now forgotten, ignored?

01:14:19:00

ALICE WALKER:
It can't be ignored forever because our country is falling apart. And part of the reason it's falling apart is that it's based on a lot of lies that have to be recognized and dealt with in order for us to have any kind of real stability. Even psychological, maybe especially psychological stability. I mean, we need to know who we are, who are we? Who are Americans? In fact, I just read a book called *The Kitchen House*, and for the first time in my life, I think I read a novel, this novel by an Irish woman, maybe an Irish American woman who takes on the reality that her ancestors were indentured people.

01:15:14:00

ALICE WALKER:
I mean, they were not enslaved exactly, but they were treated very much like slaves, at least for a number of years. And what does that mean? It really matters that you can see your ancestry in that way rather than always

assuming that you came over on the Mayflower, or you came over wealthy and you never had to suffer in the ways that people of color suffer. So it's really crucial that we do, and one of the reasons I do write is to share what I understand about who we actually are as opposed to this image that gets us into so much trouble around the world. Because then people around the world assume that all Americans just have it made, life is easy, life is good. They never had to do anything.

INTERVIEWER:
And where has the woman's movement left men? I mean, what has it meant for the role of men?

01:16:18:00

ALICE WALKER:
The women's movement has been really good for men, I think. It has certainly been good for the men in my life and I'm so grateful. I'm grateful for the way that the men in my life, I don't know about the men in your life, but they have really stepped up to the plate. They have wanted to learn, they've wanted to grow. They've wanted to see the places where they have been behaving toward women in the same way that maybe white people behave toward Black people, or white people behave toward Chinese people or toward the Indians. They wanted to see that and to really take it to the mat and wrestle with it, and emerge as people who can be truly equal with women and respectful of what women endure and who women are. So I think it's been great for men. I think that some of the strongest feminists that I know are men who really get it.

INTERVIEWER:
And where do you stand on body image? Is it empowering? Should it be used as empowerment?

01:17:21:00

ALICE WALKER:
Sexiness, sensuality, all of this should be enjoyed. I mean, we have bodies and they're wonderful and they should be enjoyed. They should not be exploited. They should not be used to frighten anybody, but they should be enjoyed of course. But unfortunately, in a capitalist society where you can sell anything and make a profit, the degradation that happens with sexuality is really large.

INTERVIEWER:
And still rampant. What are your views on prostitution then? I mean, should that be legalized? Should it be?

01:18:07:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, I think you would have to talk to prostitutes and if they said, "This is my job, this is the way I can make a living, make it legal so I can go out and work." Then of course, yes. You know, there's… the other…But backing back a little, I would prefer that nobody have to sell themselves in order to make a living. On the other hand, many people sell themselves daily, you sell your mind, you sell your brawn. But I think that this is one of those areas where it would be very helpful to the world to actually canvas prostitutes, you know, working women and ask them, "What would you like to be done with this?" They're the persons to ask, because after all, I get to sit here and I don't have to prostitute myself, so I'm not really the one to ask. They are.

INTERVIEWER:
Your first paying job. Do you remember your first paying job?

01:19:13:00

ALICE WALKER:

Yes. My first paying job was, I was picking daffodils for this old woman who had lots of daffodils, and she paid us five cents a bunch and she took them to town and she sold them for, I think, 20 cents a bunch. I loved picking daffodils.

INTERVIEWER:
And what did you want to be? When you were growing up, did you have an overarching dream? Did you have a sense of what you wanted to be?

01:19:43:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, in my community we thought in terms of being teachers mostly, maybe a doctor, but I wasn't that keen on that. Maybe a teacher.

INTERVIEWER:
And what are you most proud of? What accomplishment in your life are you most proud of?

ALICE WALKER:
I am most proud of being very present to my fate, whatever it is. And a good example is recently on the boat, there was a lot of tension at times and a lot of fear, and this is very similar also to going to Mississippi the first time. And there's always a moment when you think, "Well, how can I get out of this, having put myself here, and it's dangerous?" But I'm most proud of so far, always staying where I wish my best self to show up.

INTERVIEWER:
And what three adjectives would best describe you?

ALICE WALKER:

I think thoughtful, solitary, and amazed.

INTERVIEWER:
What person you've never met was the biggest influence.

01:21:08:00

ALICE WALKER:
You know, I think it had to be Jesus. And I was thinking about that and how funny that is. Because it sounds kind of odd, but I grew up in this very Christian family, in a very Christian community, and the teachings of Jesus had a very strong impact on our entire community. So I think it would have to be Jesus.

INTERVIEWER:
What's the most useful, meaningful piece of advice you've ever received?

ALICE WALKER:
I think the most meaningful advice was to... I don't know who told me this, probably everybody, but just to be myself, and that was completely ample. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:
And what advice would you give a young woman?

01:21:59:00

ALICE WALKER:
Well, I think I would say to any young person that happiness is important. And so not to sell yourself to a job or to a dream or to an idea without much consideration, scrutiny, talking it over with all of your friends who know you well. Because one of the sad realities is how people get locked into the dream

or the job or the career or whatever it is. And it's not them at all, it's not what the soul is trying to find.

END TC:01:22:44:00