

# ASCA 2010 Opening - Panel with Gray, Dixon, & McFadden

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, happened, demonstrations, involved, alabama, hear, day, terms, students, question, north carolina, years

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St. John Dixon

0:00

First of all I'm St. John Dixon.

[Laughter and applause]

0:12

We was there all the time. As I sit here, and I've used up just about a box of tissue up here; I'm gon give Karen the other part. I must say that I'm humble beyond what you could ever believe. You haven't gone through what you've gone through to get me here. Everybody's looking at me like, I'm a hero; you're a hero. And I remember Dr. King very well; we were very close friends, I lived down the street from him. So naturally, he was one of my mentors. And I could hear his voice resonating from time to time in terms of his speeches and how he would actually teach us to be nonviolent, teach us to love those who misused us. I can hear him tonight. We got some difficult days ahead. But we gonna get there. And when this- Attorney Gray start talking about all the things that have happened over the last 55 years, he's teaching me something tonight 'cause part of that I didn't even know. When he read- when he stated, "be in a cell" (???). Are you talking about me?

1:47

But I'm here to tell you- but it was a rough time during those days. I don't know whether they want me to go into everything that happened, what we demonstrated in Montgomery. But we were convinced that we were doing the right thing. We all know that it started someplace else: Greenville, North Carolina. But what happened is that we felt that 'we got to take part in this, too' because... everybody, they needed help. And we were convince by all circumstances, that what we were doing was the right thing to do at that time. And we practiced nonviolence and all, and that was one thing Dr. King really preached. And I even went out and bought a book about Mahatma Ghandi in terms of how he did it. But I'm here to tell you tonight: I'm not afraid of any man 'cause I got 600 people or so out here that got my back.

James McFadden

2:57

Like my best friend for a long period of time and my colleague, to see what was taking place not only in Montgomery, Alabama, but what was taking place around the world. We would want to know what happened in other cities, in other places. Not about the activities that was going on,

but just to know what was going on in the world. So we were students that not only, in the sports and the activities that was taking place on campus, but we also raised questions about how would our education help to solve these problems. It was difficult to think about solving problems and I say difficult because all of you know about Emmett Till. Emmett Till was assassinated less than 100 miles from where I grew up... around the same time. But it was- I mentioned Emmett Till because I want you to understand that what was taking place was important, but how difficult- there were a lot of people that knew how important it was to try and change things, but to take the courage and have the character and the conviction to stand up or the walk or to sit someplace to change something that was incorrect was scary but most importantly, it was the right thing to do.

4:42

I just believe that that all of us, and I've been sharing with different people for the last day, that our plates are still full and we've been taking things off of this plate for over 50 years and the plate is still full. That should tell you something. But what is important: this is not about us. And that sounds like something that our president of the United States at this particular time would say, and I think it is true. It's the responsibility. And this is what the sit in movement taught me; this is what we learned in March, 50 years ago: how important it is, for human beings to come together, regardless to their circumstances and regardless to the road that they have traveled in order to get there, but it's their responsibility, to stand, to walk, to sit, but to take responsibility, from changing things from the way they are to the way they should be. And that was the spirit and we got that spirit from a number of places- and all of the names have been mentioned and when you go last, you get a chance to say, as my attorney has said, "that this was said and that was said." But they're all- but there are few things that we all must share, that are very special to each one of us. And in- what happens when you take what seems to be a bad situation, and turn it into a good situation. And although our rights were violated – our employment, our degrees have been affected in so many ways – but we have empowered all of you, and all of the people that you have touched, to say that what human beings do make a difference. And that difference starts with each one of us taking the responsibility of righting something that we know is wrong. We had a great spirit, at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in March of 1960 when all of our colleagues from Greensboro, from Nashville, Tennessee, from Montgomery, Alabama, and from Florida and from Mississippi, when all of us were able to get together- and there's something important about sitting down together. This is not about one individual or one person sharing the limelight, it's a collective experience that we share that motivates us and encourage us to stand. It encourage us to decide to get up and 'I'm going to go and I believe that somebody else is going to come to'. So with that spirit in mind, we were able to have a vision that SNCC should be an organization. You know, it started out as a coordinating committee, because it was so many of us that had so many ideas and SNCC stands for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And it became an organization that networked and knitted all of us together collectively, so that we were able to share our stories. And this is what's so important about your organization, this association, because we need these vehicles to network with other vehicles and to make sure that you understand that there are not only the demonstrations that were able to take place, but there's a legal way, which is the principles to guide our country; that they are legal documents that you can see.

8:35

And you now, have had one of the most fortunate experiences to meet those people who shaped those documents, which will eventually become the guiding principles that guide many, many people. And we honor you and we thank you for having that kind of vision of assuming that kind of responsibility to make sure that these things are highlighted and known in many, many places. And I would just like to say that the challenge in front of all of us is to make sure

that if we can empower someone – first ourselves – to begin to work with somebody else, to share with someone else, how we move from point A to point B and collectively. And my trademark is saying that collectively, that together, we can change the way things are to the way they should be. And we'll entertain your questions and we want to tell you what it is you want to know from us and how our experiences have made it possible for us to be here today. And we think it's a blessing, just to be here. Thank you.

[Applause]

St. John Dixon

10:05

Well, you know, back in the day, we didn't have a lot of school grants that we could go to college that I knew about. My parents didn't go to college. They used to watch my father at night to make sure that he wasn't sneaking me back into my little hometown. Bu if I had known about grants that were probably available, I probably would have been on a scholarship. But when I started to college, I guess I was one of the poorest students there. But due to just the fact that well I didn't have a meal ticket; he let me use he is in the morning. I didn't have rooming; he would sleep on the floor one night and hit the bed the next night. Now that's a friend. And I call him a diamond. Because I- but I was the valedictorian of my class. And still had to struggle and try to work in order to continue my schooling. Now he eventually graduated from Alabama State but because I was taking less units, he was ahead of me in terms where he was in school. But I could never forget what he's done for me. And we are the only two that I know that are still around out of the nine. I went back to Philly and spent a week with him once and we had a marvelous time. Now, we talked about a lot of things that had happened since that time. Fortunately, I went to San Jose State. Didn't get a degree. I had, like, maybe 10 units for graduating. Met this young lady.... And I don't have to go into the rest of the story.

[Laughter and applause]

12:33

But I was fortunate enough to land a decent job where I retired when I was 49 years old. I hooked up with the labor movement. I told the guy, I say, "I could probably bring you in 3000 votes, but I can't do that unless I'm on the payroll." [Laughter] So he said, "Let me think about it." The next day around he called me and said, "How soon can you come to work?" But I was fortunate enough to get that and when I left, I was the lead representative for the upgrade program where we upgraded LVNs to RNs. And my first class I was 39 students. And we use some of their working hours along with their hours in class to actually accomplish this. So I say to you, we had a vision, we had a dream. And I still have that dream and there's no one any place can take that away from me. I remember being in a situation where my life was threatened. I said, "You can take my life but you can't take my dreams." I'm just happy that I can be here tonight, to be a part of this. I told him if I had a problem with the plane tickets and all, I'd probably walk.

[Laughter]

14:09

But that's how much I wanted to be here, thanks to Karen Boyd. But as we get ready for whatever questions that you may have – and there probably are some – I'm sure that we will be

able to give you our assessment of it. And one thing I'll do, I won't pull no punches with you; I call it like it is. And whether you like it or not, that's just the way I am. And when Dr. Trenholm told me what he did, I didn't take offense to him. But I will never forget those statements: 'due to the fact that you're not obeying the rules and regulations of the... I have no other alternative but to do this'. Now, I found out later that it was the Board of Education. Isn't that the government? Well, I don't know.....(???) But anyway, the crux of the matter.....

James McFadden

15:11

I just want to talk about two things that I think is really important about bringing about this change. One of the questions that our attorney raised with us, because this is the first time – fresh data – we've been together in 50 years, is what has happened as a result....

Fred Gray

15:33

This country has never really undertaken to come up with the plan to do away with racism. Once you have to have a plan, you have to execute it. And the finally, you have to be involved yourself. We want somebody else to solve these problems. I tell people now, "I'm a senior citizen and all I have to do is point out to you young people what the problem are, and with all- and if we could do what we could do with the little we had – the little resources – with all of your knowledge and technology, you ought to be able to do it but it's going to take each one of us." Racism is so embedded in this country is going to take all the governments at all levels of it and all the institutions you learn in and lower learning and everything else, and it's going to take us individually to do it. My daughter told me when I was preparing to go to talk to a group of people some years ago, she said, "Daddy, one thing-"and she's the one that really has been the moving force behind getting this museum off the ground and running. She said, "What's wrong is that we don't know each other racially." She said, "If everybody would decide that I'm gonna have my best friend a person of another race, you get a chance to really know them, to understand them, to know their likes and their dislikes." Now if you try to do that and the first one does not work out, don't worry about it because you probably didn't work out with your own race. But you didn't stop. So it's up to you. We've done what we could now the responsibility is up to you.