Interview with George Brown

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Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
Birmingham (Ala.)

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Ortiz: Mr. Brown, could you tell me where you were born and a little bit about the area that you grew up in.

Brown: I was born in Dallas County. That's down below Selma, Alabama. I was born near and around Street Manual Training School area.

Ortiz: What kind of work did your parents do?

Brown: Well, my parents worked farm work, and they didn't have anything else to do. Later on my dad got a job working for his brother, which was my Uncle Owen [phonetic], in the Street Manual Training School. Those jobs couldn't pay anything, because they weren't getting any money themselves, but anyway he
made a living out of it.

**Ortiz:** Did your parents own their farm?

**Brown:** We bought a little land, but we didn't own anything. Not very much land was owned. It was all just about gobbled up by whites.

**Ortiz:** So you were sharecroppers growing up?

**Brown:** Well, they would always sharecrop, but in this particular area you could get land if you would farm on halves. It's like you owned a farm, you say, "I'd like to farm on half with you."

"Yes, sir, I'll take you up on that."

That's just the beginning of it. You think you are farming on halves, he give you corn, sweet potatoes, melon, sugar cane, everything that he gives you is going to be on the record. You farm and if you raise ten bales of cotton, five bales of cotton belongs to the owner. Then when he come around, he asks to see how much corn you made. If you made four wagon loads of corn, two belongs to him. Sweet potatoes, if you made fifty bushels, twenty-five bushels belongs to him. Whatever it might be, everything that you got. When you give him his half, you got to pay him out of your half, and when you pay out of your half,
you'd be just like you were when you first started, because you always owe out.

**Ortiz:** What kind of relationship did your parents have with the landowner?

**Brown:** Well, you had a relation, but you had to hide it, because you couldn't tell him you're angry because you didn't have anything. You're living on his land. If he run you away, you had nowhere to go. So far as they knew each other. They called you niggers. They didn't mind that at all. We didn't care anything about that. If he come out and wanted you to do something, he wanted you to do it. If he was going to give you something, he'd tell you. If he didn't, he'd tell you, "Thank you, you boys." That was all there was to it. That's how that part run.

We suffered. We suffered with the lack of education. We suffered with the lack of food. We had no way of getting it. And I always said, if I ever got big enough, I wanted to get out in the world and see could I do something to help my parents. My parents, [unclear] passed. Then I had some sisters and brothers. I got a little job at Selma, Alabama, making $4.00 a week. I was sending them $2.00 or $3.00, and they could buy food out of it. Things was real cheap back in those days.
Ortiz: How old were you when you got that first job?

Brown: When I got that job, I was about eighteen years old.

Ortiz: What were you doing?

Brown: Well, you work around grocery stores, work at farmers' markets, anything, cut grass, anything was necessary, and once you get your job set up, you'd have something to do each day, see. But so far as making a whole lot of money, we didn't get that.

I worked there a while, and finally I saved me a few dollars, and I left there and caught a freight train and went to Montgomery, Alabama. I got to Montgomery. We caught a milk truck out of there and rode a milk truck. We worked all week from Montgomery to Birmingham. We'd pick up milk for the man, and he'd say, "Well, boys, I ain't got nothing to give you. I'll give you a big bucket of milk." He gave us a big bucket of milk and that was our pay to get from Montgomery to Birmingham.

I got here and [unclear] find a little job. I never will forget it. I was making $4.00 a week, and that was big money. You walked everywhere you went. If you wanted to ride the streetcar, it didn't cost you but a nickel to ride it. You could afford it.

Then later on I got another little job. Then I got a job
at Sloss-Sheffield with all that heat. You go by a blast furnace when they was flushing or casting, it light up the whole elements. Sloss it would have two blast furnaces in north Birmingham. We had two on 1st Avenue and 31st Street. Then in the city of Birmingham, along with Sloss we had Republic Steel. They had two or three blast furnaces. Right below Republic Steel you had the Tennessee Coal and Iron Railroad, which had about fifteen or twenty blast furnaces. Those furnaces would cast when they let the slag out of them. It would light up the city of Birmingham.

We were working, but later on the people said it was pollution. We got clean air and no furnaces, nothing to do. Sometimes you cut off your nose to spite your face. That's what happened in some of these cases here.

**Ortiz:** When you were growing up, do you remember your grandparents?

**Brown:** Yes. My grandfather was African. He was a full-blooded African. He was brought into this country and sold. He couldn't speak American language very much. It was quite a few here [unclear] that were here. They were brought from Africa.

The way what they tell me, they put them, when they get them off the boat, they put them on the block, and the white man that had the money to bid on him, he'd buy him for $5.00 or
$10.00. You was his slave, see. He had charge of you.

Ortiz: Did your grandfather used to tell stories about those days?

Brown: Oh, yes.

Ortiz: What were some of the stories that he told?

Brown: They would tell you how they were being whipped, abused, treated like dogs. They couldn't help themselves. They couldn't tell it. He says there was a gang of them was killed. If they'd get mad, they'd kill you. Mistreat you and do a other few things they'd make you do. But you was under bondage. You had no one to tell. And so that was a hard pill to swallow.

But by the help of the good Lord, the black man held his head up. We worked. That's why you hear these plantation melodies, these songs that they sang. It was the way the slave would communicate to each other, warn them about trouble. That's why you sing those songs. They would sing a song, "Down By The Riverside" and all like that, and that's the way they would contact. They never would know what was going on. We'd warn the other one, they say, and we looked out for each other.

I believe my granddaddy said that--he was pretty stout.
They took him and he would breed women to get more men children working. They called them nigger children, but they [unclear] farm to do work. It was kind of awful the way they gave it to you, but it was true, it was true. And that happened even during my boyhood. But you had to hold your head up, use the word "Yes, sir; no, sir," keep a smile on your face, go out to where they help people. That's how we got through.

Ortiz: Did your grandfather ever talk about Africa?

Brown: Well, he said he was quite young when they brought him over here. He did say the way they were caught, in a boat with long 2 x 12s sticking up, and they had a way where they couldn't get out.

While you're down Tuskegee Institute, I think you can find a record for George Washington Carver, and you will be there. See if you can find that record showing you where he got lost from his mother on a boat, and when the boat landed up in the Carolinas, up there where we're talking about, and a white man could see some good in him, and he was a genius on anything that he went to do. The white man set him down and made a recommendation that they send him down to Tuskegee Institute. That's why he'd gotten in there, and I think he went to school and somewhat educated and helped them out, Booker T. Washington, that bunch, all that. If I'm not putting it together, but it's
based upon the same thing. You can find that out.

And he was so smart, he came to be a scientist, and he could analyze anything. He was just that smart. He was born with it. He took sweet potato vines and made ink, took the sweet potato and made gold. He took up medicine. There's a cow that, when you get down there, I hope when you get in there— you haven't seen that, have you? They've got the skeleton of a cow been there about sixty years. That cow's still down there. You'll see it. He worked on that cow. The cow's leg was broken. He went and took the skeleton and put it together when the cow died. They've got it in the museum down there now.

Ortiz: You talked about your grandfather. Do you remember your grandmother?

Brown: Estella [phonetic], Estella Brown. What was that name? Broon [phonetic]. We changed it from Broon to Brown, see.

Ortiz: Did she used to tell you stories?

Brown: No, they weren't educated. We just would go to school, see each other, farm, talk.

Ortiz: Did they live with you?
Brown: No. We lived in a little house, a little one-room house my dad built. I believe we had about five or six brothers and sisters. We all stayed in that one room. Had nowhere else to stay. That was it.

Ortiz: Did your grandparents own land?

Brown: We bought land, but during my time. They didn't have nothing to buy with. They wouldn't sell it to you.

Ortiz: Did things improve once you were able to buy, your parents were able to buy land?

Brown: Let me hear that last statement.

Ortiz: Did your living conditions improve once your parents bought the land?

Brown: Well, the only way they improved, you still had to have help. The land and the house, if you ain't got no money to buy no corn with, you're not getting very far. It was a problem. The man that had it, he had you by both legs. You couldn't hardly get anything done. Just every now and then you would see a black man as a blacksmith, if he could farm and raise enough to make a living.
If you got good land, you could farm that land without buying too much fertilizer and getting in debt. Back in those days, you had good land, farming land. You could take a place and raise food, it was so cheap. Once you get caught up and if you had sense enough to hold on to it, you could advance fast by raising cows, hogs, chickens. Wasn't anything else, nothing else that I know. But I don't see how we made it, but we made it.

Ortiz: Do you remember, where there a lot of black blacksmiths?

Brown: Oh, yes. Now, blacksmiths was really needed, because you didn't have any—I remember when you didn't have no automobiles. We had horse and buggy. That's why you'd see blacksmiths. Blacksmiths make horseshoes for your horses, wagons, and things of that type. No bulldozers, no tractors, no anything like that.

Ortiz: Did you go to school while you were in Dallas County?

Brown: I did. I went to school there, and I worked. I stayed busy doing something, because we had to gotten in to what we had. He had a boarding school in part of it there, and he operated that school off the public. The people, the Jews and all nationality people would help him, because it was a black
institution, a black school. The white man would help you. If you wanted to conduct yourself and went about it right, he'd help you. And the Jews would help the black people. I don't know how the relationship broke off like it did, but the Jews was the one, if you were nice to Jews, a Jew would help you. That's who I worked for in Selma, Jews. He ain't going to give you no money, but he'll give you a job, see.

Ortiz: Do you remember the name of that school?


Ortiz: His last name was Street?

Brown: Street, that's right.

Ortiz: What was his first name?

Brown: Emmanuel McDuffy Brown [phonetic].

Ortiz: Street Manual School?

Brown: That's right.

Ortiz: Was that in a town?
Brown: No, rural area, just a small place out. But it had buildings. I've got that picture. The industrial building's still there, the dormitories. I made a film of that. They're having hot food lunches in some part of the buildings. And the domestic science building is still there. But the trees grew up around it. But I made a picture of it.

Ortiz: You did?

Brown: Oh, yeah. I've got a picture of it. I'm going to try to get that ready. I want to make a connection with you. Wherever you go at, I want to get you a copy.

Ortiz: We have a copying machine right here. We can take pictures and copy it.

Brown: I could have got that film and rerun it off here.

Ortiz: I'll be here until next Friday.

Brown: I'm going to see if I can get that. I'd like to let you see that. You can take that film and rerun it.

Ortiz: Yes. If it's a picture, we have a copy scanner. It's
about this big. You just put it down, and we just take a picture of it. That would be real valuable for our collection.

So how many months out of the year would you go to school?

**Brown:** Well, in the country—let me see. We went the regular—
I don't think we went eight months. We didn't go quite—see, you had farming come in. You couldn't stay in school. Right after Christmas, not long after Christmas you had to get ready to go plowing up land, planting corn. You couldn't get a full education. You had to go to work.

**Ortiz:** Did you ever work for other families?

**Brown:** Oh, yes. If they wanted to pick cotton, you'd help them, or plant corn or help them do something or harvest corn. We always helped each other, see.

**Ortiz:** You'd help the other black families?

**Brown:** Oh, yeah. And the white man, you'd pick cotton for him, but he didn't pay you nothing. He didn't pay you nothing. But you couldn't grumble, because you didn't have nothing.

**Ortiz:** What was the community like, the African-American community like?
Brown: Well, let me see now. To tell you, actually, until I came to Birmingham, you got nothing but country wherever I came from. You'd get around, you had to get around on a wagon or ride a mule or ride a steer. We used to plow steer. You ever seen a steer?

Ortiz: Yes.

Brown: We used to plow them. That's the way we had to get around.

Ortiz: Was there any time or any occasion when people would come together?

Brown: Oh, yes. Now, we would have big meetings. What do you mean by a big meeting? At Camel Chapel [phonetic], which was a AME church, Camel Chapel, where I was born and bred, they would pick their Sunday, all right. Hopewell Baptist would have theirs. In another part was Carolina. I remember that church. They had their celebration. It would usually be on the fourth Sunday in September, something like that. But they had a date from each month. That's in order for to have a big showing. And then wagons would bring food. There'd be cooking, and they would have a big eat at the church, a big celebration. It was
something to see that. But anyway, we lived through it.

**Ortiz:** Would those occasions be where churches would combine, people from different churches --

**Brown:** Oh, yeah, that's the way they would do that. We'd have whites would come. We'd celebrate and have eating and have fun. White would come over. He wouldn't come in your church, but he'd stand up at the church window and look in there, so he was enjoying himself, too, see. We didn't care. We didn't have hate in our heart against anyone. We would think about it when you're abused, some of us. The people that their character was so low, the average white man would get ashamed of that. He wouldn't fool with them. He'd let them go. They quit fooling with them. All that was in it to make a living.

**Ortiz:** Did you ever hear about people stealing away?

**Brown:** Do what now?

**Ortiz:** Did you hear people use the term "stealing away"?

**Brown:** Stealing away?

**Ortiz:** Yes.
Brown: Talking about dying?

Ortiz: No.

Brown: Stealing away from what now?

Ortiz: Like leaving plantations.

Brown: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They'd run off. There's plenty of people would run off overnight and leave a plantation, hide in the woods. And he ever caught a train, maybe got some connection, they'll leave the country. They go to town. See, when I was down in the woods there, we was in hopes of leaving. Everybody you see, you see somebody leave and come back.

They called coming to Birmingham going north. You'd come up here and get you a job. Then that got to be a regular thing. People went to leaving the farms, coming to the city and getting jobs, like I did. We had the plants and the factories, and we needed people to work in. The country people were willing to work. We'd be working when the city bunch was walking the street. We were trained to work. We knew how to do it. All that's in there.

Ortiz: Do you remember times when plantation owners would come
to Birmingham and try to take people back who had left their plantation?

**Brown:** Well, they would try to do it, but you couldn't persuade him, you couldn't make him come back. You could [unclear], but they tried it. But see, when they were leaving their farm, they weren't able to sit down on that water creek and sit down and watch the niggers picking cotton or chopping cotton. Now, he would sit there all day long on that water creek and watch you work, and you knew you was black as [unclear] out there in that hot sun.

But all that's true. God knows every word of it is true. We lived through it, though. That's like I told you. My plan was just like the way some of the rest. That's why I left the country and went to Selma, Alabama. I left Selma, Alabama, and went to the capital of Alabama, Montgomery, and from Montgomery to Birmingham. That's when I came here and got a job.

**Ortiz:** You went to Selma when you were eighteen years old?

**Brown:** Yeah.

**Ortiz:** How old were you when you went to Montgomery?

**Brown:** I was in Selma about a year, I guess, or something like
that. Maybe nineteen, something of that type. Then I came to
Birmingham, looked at that fire burning, didn't know where to
go. I stayed with someone. The other guy was named George. He
was in the army World War I. He and I took up. We were
together. I think I got a job first and I took care of George.
Then George got a job. We was good friends down through the
years. He had a family and I had a family. He passed and I'm
still living.

**Ortiz:** Could you tell me one more time how you got to
Montgomery and then how you got to Birmingham from Montgomery.

**Brown:** Oh, yeah. I left Selma, Alabama. I think I caught a
truck, a old truck, and he brought me to Selma and across the
Alabama River bridge and he put me out. I had a uncle working
for the [unclear] Railroad. I stayed with him two or three
days. He said, "Well, I ain't got nowhere for you to stay."

Well, I didn't have nothing, didn't have any choice. I
talked with a black man. I said my uncle wouldn't let me stay
with him and I was just out of the country. He said, "Boy, I
got a little outhouse."

I said, "That would be just fine."

He gave me food and he helped me. He gave me 50 cents.
That was huge. Fifty cents last you a week.
Ortiz: This was in Montgomery?

Brown: That was in Selma. Later on I got this little old job, see. But what my point is, I didn't have nothing to begin with. I had an uncle. He was working for the [unclear] Railroad Company in Selma. So he turned his back on me, but I went to God over it, because I knew I could help myself. That just goes to show you how God will help you. If I treat you right and do right by you, I'll receive a message from on high and a blessing. That's true. You do right by people, regardless of what, God will help you. He's been good to me for eighty-four years, and I'll tell you, I feel very grateful about it, too.

Ortiz: How did you get the job that took you to Montgomery?

Brown: To Montgomery? I didn't have a job. I caught the Western Railroad. It went out of Selma to Montgomery. I was going to catch a train, but I caught this milk truck that I told you about, and we rode it to Birmingham, 10th Avenue and 28th Street. That's where that man paid us for picking up the five gallons of milk everywhere you stopped, because we were getting to Birmingham free, and he gave us a big bucket of milk. That was our pay. We drank that milk, though. But you don't know what you can do. We drank that milk. I was used to being home in the country. It didn't go bad. And by the help of God, I
Brown stayed in here and worked.

Ortiz: What year did you move to Birmingham?

Brown: Into Birmingham? Let me see. I believe it was in 1929, I believe. The nearest I can come to it, 1928 or '29, but it was in the '20 years.

Ortiz: What was Birmingham like for black people in 1929?

Brown: Well, it weren't. It was a living. It was rough. You see, you had so many nationalities of people. Then you had a whole lot of good white people. You had what made—it wasn't as bad as you say it was. Give the devil credit. But we had this on both ways. We had some nice people; then we had some lowdown people. And then we had bad city commissioners, like Jimmy Jones. He was a city commissioner. Later on we had Bull Connor. You've been hearing them talk about him, I know. I knew him personally.

Ortiz: Oh, really?

Brown: Oh, yeah. But he was racist as hell. He was racist. But he wanted to be seen, and he had the votes. That's how he would get votes. See, I couldn't vote. I couldn't go to no
poll. The black man couldn't vote.

Ortiz: Do you know anybody that tried?

Brown: Oh, yeah, one man tried, a friend of mine.

Ortiz: What was his name?

Brown: William H. Hatchet [phonetic].

Ortiz: Hatchet?

Brown: Hatchet. He went to the courthouse, and he had an education. That shows you the value of education. But he went down to answer the question. The man that had charge of the polls couldn't even read. He said, "Nigger, [unclear]."

He said, "Now, this is what this question means. I've given you the answer to this question. I've given you the answer to this question. I've put it on." He said, "This is what you should do." He stayed right there until he got qualified. William H. Hatchett was the first black man that became a voter.

Ortiz: What year was that?
Brown: That was 1931, I believe, or '2. I can't give you the correct figure. It's been a long time. But he was qualified. Now, we had well-educated black people here, but they couldn't help theirself.

I'm on the board at the fraternal order of Masons in Birmingham. We got our building down there. I'm a Shriner. We can wear our fez out in the streets. You couldn't put your fez on and wear it out in the street. We had a big lawsuit about it. They got together, the big lawsuit. The white Shriners tried to make take our tail from us.

Prince Hall Masonry. The Jews took Prince Hall out of Boston, Massachusetts, carried this black man to England, Prince Hall, and carried him into King Solomon's Temple over there, and he joined the Royal Arch. See, the King Solomon's Temple is blocks and blocks and blocks long, you know. That's when the black man, when he came back, they had the charter. How are you going to get out of the foreign country with a charter? You carry nothing in and you bring nothing out. The Jews had him take a walking cane and hollow it out inside and brought that charter from the King Solomon's Temple and put it in there.

He was the black man to charter the right to Masonry. We just don't push it. You don't push it because you make your living off of the white man. You got to look at this thing both ways. You make your living off of them. I mean, if you make your living off of him, they'll try to fry you. But when he
found out that the black man had the charter rights, which we could have came in, just like you see all of them with the fezes and all that stuff on, we could have blocked them out. We didn't do that. We had to live. We done better by it. You be good to people, and good things will come to you.

**Ortiz:** So you had the charter, but they didn't want you to--

**Brown:** They didn't have the charter rights, because the Jews gave it, it belonged to Prince Hall.

**Ortiz:** What year was the lawsuit that you filed?

**Brown:** Beg your pardon?

**Ortiz:** You said you filed a lawsuit.

**Brown:** Well, they filed a lawsuit in 1923, 1923 and we couldn't wear our fez in the streets. But we went to the Supreme Court. It's in the records in the Supreme Court now where we have the charter right to the Shriners Masonry and your Blue Lodge. See, you've got your Blue Lodge, your Royal Arch, [unclear], and your Shriners, all that stuff. But we had to live, and we done better by just backing out of the way, see. That just gives you an idea about those things what actually happened, because
you've got to work both ways. They had the advantage of us down through the years. We were treated like dogs. We lived through it. But God, we didn't die. So there's a gang of us living that survived from it. We let them alone. We didn't have no more trouble out of them, see.

Ortiz: What was your first job and how did you get it?

Brown: You're talking about my job here in Birmingham?

Ortiz: In Birmingham.

Brown: Now, let me tell you. We had them downtown. The Tutwiler [phonetic] Hotel was on 5th Avenue and 20th Street North. That was a white hotel there. Joe Limbs [phonetic] was the chef cook's name at that hotel. He came out and said, "Do someone want be a pot washer?"

I said, "Yes, sir. I would like to have a pot washer."

See, a pot washer, his job is to wash pots for your first cook. [Unclear] I get them pots cleaned up and I'll give you a job.

"What do you got?"

"A dollar a day." A dollar a day [unclear].

But the rich people was using these hotels and places, the owner of them. They were segregated, but they let you work. We
wanted to eat. I'm just giving you the highlights of the whole thing.

I worked at that hotel for years and years. I'd walk over the dry dock back to the post. I was living about six, seven miles from town. I'd walk.

**Ortiz:** You'd walk?

**Brown:** Walk. Oh, hell, yeah. Sure, you walked. You walked everywhere. You could do it. Walk back. Yeah, I used to get off at ten o'clock at night, walk back, walk back. The streetcar, we wouldn't ride the streetcar. We got a place we'd walk to work to. In the streets, you didn't have all these lights. Every now and then you'd get to a light. But didn't nobody bother anyone. No one bother you but the policeman. That was his job, meddle with you. He just had to do it. They'd beat you.

**Ortiz:** What were the police like?

**Brown:** Policemen, they were lowdown. They were awful. There were some policemen didn't like that stuff. They were nice people, well-raised. But a policeman would beat your brains out if you give him a lot of hassle.
Ortiz: Do you remember cases where you knew people who were beat up?

Brown: Oh, yeah. They were beat up. We had Patterson. They caught him and put him in jail, accused him of raping a white woman. He died in jail. The man didn't do nothing. A gang of them was picked up. You had no choice. It wasn't nothing you could do. They had the upper on you. But we prayed hard and we worked hard. Oh, yeah.

Ortiz: Where did you go to church in Birmingham? Did you start going to church right away?

Brown: Yeah. Our churches was in black neighborhoods. Back in those days, people had respect for churches, religion, and each other. We served God. They're away from it now. They're not doing it.

Ortiz: What church did you go to?

Brown: I'm a member of Tabernacle Methodist Church. The church is on 8th Avenue and 1st Street North now. But then my daughter was a member of 16th Street right across the street here. This is a long story, but I've got to tell you about it.

My daughter would have been dead the time that they bombed
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16th Street Baptist Church. Christian McNair [phonetic], I guess you've heard those names. He's on that board of records around there. Sally Anderson's daughter, Debbie Wesley's daughter, Debbie Armstrong's daughter, those four girls came to church together, 16th Street. They rigged this church right over here at the back door, and those kids went in the basement and it blowed them up and killed every one of them.

They knew about it. The people knew who done it. They didn't do nothing about it. Then what we had to do as a human being, the black man got together, "Let's don't fight." That was Martin Luther King's password. He wanted to win battles by non-violence. We were taught that. We were beaten. We were kicked with a water hose right up the street here, blown all upside the buildings, beat with sticks. What we did do, we took it. We wouldn't fight back. I seen a lady with her brassiere off and nothing but a skirt. Water hose right up the street right there. Just to tell you and think about it, we suffered.

We suffered a whole lot. This was white area in here, all in here. They didn't go to church over there, though. This had been something.

Ortiz: So you were working at the Tutwiler Hotel.

Brown: Tutwiler Hotel, yeah. I worked there quite a while. I walked over [unclear] and saw a bunch of men over there. I
said, "I'll make more money over here." The job at Sloss. I wasn't making but a dollar a day at Tutwiler.

When I went to Slosses, they were tearing out one of the furnaces. That means had about 200,000 or 300,000 bricks you had to tear them out and reline it. I got in there and got a job. The men took care of me, showed me how to do it.

**Ortiz:** This was in 1929?

**Brown:** Yeah, '29, '30. Once you go in and get the experience of a blast furnace—what they do is learn the safety part about it—you can do pretty good. You can always be able to help someone else, too. And I learned it. I took it, as long as they had work. I worked during this particular time, during that year, we worked one two shifts a month. You could go to the commissary down there. They'd let you have something to eat. You'd go back to work, you'd pay for it. Slosses got one or two big orders, started the furnaces up, and we went back to work.

**Ortiz:** In the thirties.

**Brown:** That's right.

**Ortiz:** Do you remember the convict release program?
**Brown:** What kind of program was that now? Convict?

**Ortiz:** Yes. I heard that there were prisoners who would be put in jail and then companies like, I guess, TCI and--

**Brown:** Oh, yeah, Slosses done that. I've got one man that's living. I'd like for you to get hold of him, too. He worked in the mines, and he knew all about that. Grumley [phonetic]. I think I got a card. Grumley worked at the mine doing this, and he used to [unclear]. He and I are a member of the same church. And he can tell you some more about the mines, too.

Let me see if I got Grumley's card in here. I didn't bring that book. I've got a list of names of the employees that are living. Yeah. See that card right there? I want you to call him.

**Ortiz:** So he started working at the mines.

**Brown:** He worked at the mines and he worked at the furnaces and he worked at the old mines and he worked at the coal mines, so he's a Sloss' man.

**Ortiz:** So do you remember working with convicts who would come to Sloss?
Brown: No, I didn't. To tell you the truth, I didn't work--when you had the convicts, they would get them out here. You know I ain't never been in jail. I ain't never been in jail in my life.

Ortiz: But you knew about that system?

Brown: Oh, yeah, I know about it. I know some of the people. The company would take them and work them in the mine. I believe the state would pay them a dollar day. The mines would pay them a dollar a day, see. Hugh Marks [phonetic], who was the president of the Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron, he used to work prisoners in the mine. He got to be the president of the company. See, when you do great things of that type, they make it pay off if you're going to make money for them, and that was actually true. And Grumley, I want you to call him and tell him you talked with--

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

Ortiz: We were talking about the convicts who worked for Sloss.

Brown: Yeah, the convicts. They worked at TCI [unclear], and I think they were paid a dollar a day for their labor.
Ortiz: Did you talk with any of those people?

Brown: Well, I did know a few, but it was way back. They would tell you how they would be [unclear] and scorned. I might be able to get you--no. I hope I can. I believe that old man passed. I made a picture of him and I taped some information, and he was ninety-four. I'll look that up. It's Ron Bates, and I want you to call me and let me see if I can get it. He worked in the mines, see. But I never did like the mines.

Ortiz: Did you ever work there?

Brown: Oh, yeah. I had to work, but I didn't like it. I always was afraid. I didn't like it. That's one thing I never refused to do, but I never liked working in the mine. It's too dangerous.

See, working in the mine, you don't work by no telephone, you don't work by no radio. You work by signals. If they were getting ready to pull coal out of the mine, he'd beat on a brass rod wire run from down in the mine. He may be six, seven miles down. When he gets ready for that man to start that motor up and pull that car, he had a signal he'd hit on that brass line and he'd pick it up out of the mine. It was something else.
Ortiz: When you began working at Sloss in 1929, 1939, you mentioned that workers would help you out.

Brown: Oh, yeah.

Ortiz: Who would help you out?

Brown: Well, here's what it is. When you go into a blast furnace, there were so many things. There's whistles blowing. You couldn't hear your ears. There's so many things to do, the safety part about it, and if you supposed to be courteous to the employees and work with them, do what they said to do, they'll always help you. That's the way it was.

Ortiz: Black workers?

Brown: Black, sure. Well now, see, the black man has always had the dirty work. So far as the machinist, millwright, boilermaker, no. But he would take me and I'd take his tools. I'd take his pipe wrench, I'd take his stilting [phonetic] wrench. I would tote his tools, and he'd walk along and you'd follow him. And when you get ready to take a pipe loose, you'd take it loose. He was getting paid for it.

Ortiz: The white?
Brown: Yeah.

Ortiz: So you were like a helper.

Brown: Helper. You weren't no helper. We done the work.

Ortiz: You were doing the real work.

Brown: Yeah, but you couldn't help it. We would take care of them and by being nice to them, they change their attitude and their spirit. The thing actually worked both ways to a certain extent.

Ortiz: What were race relations like between black and white workers?

Brown: Well, it weren't so good. They still had that yellow streak in his back. But it was a poor class town of people. See, you're dealing with a poor class of people. A whole lot of them couldn't read, they couldn't write. And he'd call you "boy" or he'd call you "nigger" when you get around them. "Better go over yonder and get them niggers to do so-and-so." Well, we would organize, too. When he'd sling mud at us, we had a better way of slinging mud at them.
Ortiz: How?

Brown: We'd sit down on the work. "I don't know." You can't get nothing out of the word "I don't know." "I don't know what to do." He knew what to do. I've seen a guy roll a fellow off a job way down. Said he killed a fellow one time, he worked him to death, simply because he took a job only which you had to be qualified. He didn't want to accept the idea of being told by a black man.

But most of those people were taught matters in hate, and they don't know the reason why. [Unclear.] A white fellow's wife died. He didn't have a dime. I told him I'd let him borrow some money. I had the money. I let him have enough money to bury his wife [unclear] funeral, about $225. I said I want my money back. He paid me back. He said I was a good nigger.

Ortiz: He said that?

Brown: Yeah, "He's a good nigger."

Ortiz: Did that make you angry when he said that?

Brown: Well, I was used to it. I didn't like it. I never
Brown would use those type of insinuations against nobody because it ain't in my heart. I love people. I was born and raised like that. If I couldn't do you no good, I wouldn't do you no harm. I wouldn't fight back. You take fire. Fighting fire ain't no good. Somebody's got to have some sense. I was taught that.

**Ortiz:** Can you tell me about labor union organizing at Sloss?

**Brown:** Yeah, I helped organize it.

**Ortiz:** You did?

**Brown:** Oh, yeah. Labor union back there at Sloss. Helped put the first strike on. It's a sad story, but I'll tell it to you.

We organized at Sloss the United Mine Workers of America District 50. N. B. Wright [phonetic] was the original director. Carl Waddell [phonetic] was a committeeman. Charlie Fangem [phonetic] was a committee.

**Ortiz:** Can I get those names again?

**Brown:** Carl Waddell, Charlie Fangem.

**Ortiz:** How do you spell his last name?
Brown: Just spell it the way you can understand it, Fangem. And then N. B. Wright. He's still living. Then we had Willie Joe Pupil [phonetic]. He's living. He was one of our union officials. Joe's living. I wish you could talk to Shorty. I didn't bring my book. There's quite a few more, but those union officials, we organized and set it up. Went in that local union hall, we sat over here and they sat over there.

Ortiz: Where was that hall at?

Brown: The building is in North Birmingham on 27th Avenue. But when Jim Walters bought that company and cut the furnaces down, the union [unclear]. Oh, yeah, got away with it. Cut the union's vote. That's what Ronald Reagan does.

Ortiz: How did you organize at Sloss?

Brown: A union? I'm going to tell you. When we started organizing, we started at City Furnaces, where you went the other day. [Unclear.] You negotiate with the companies and you come up with grievances. You had your working conditions threwed out, your raises and whatnot. If the company don't agree, they'll strike on you. Then when we strike, if you go in to work, we'll be there [unclear]. White men didn't want nobody to whoop his behind, but yet he wanted us to help him them
behind. So we got to getting a little behind together.

[Unclear.] See, then we had a competition between us about organizing the union.

**Ortiz:** What was the competition?

**Brown:** Well, the competition was that you pay $2.50 union dues or $3.50 or whatever it is, he pays $3.50. I'm paying the same thing you're paying. He's getting twice as much money. He's a machinist. I can't get no machinist job. I couldn't bid on a millwright job. I couldn't bid on an electrician job. See, you got to have an apprenticeship. He'd hire people out of the street. There ain't no apprenticeship coming over for me. And so I've got you just where I want you. [Unclear.] That's why a whole lot of strikes would come in. The younger generation came on with education, and that made the thing kind of show up. They could read, too, and they wanted to come in. They done that for a long time, but we put up with it. Some of those white fellows' wives, they used to come home before they would bathe in the bathhouse. They'd run them back. They wouldn't let them get in the car. "You're going to bathe before you get in my car." They did that. But we wouldn't rejoice, we wouldn't say anything. But those women stood by them and made them go out there and bathe, respected each other.
Ortiz: You mean when the bathhouse was integrated?

Brown: Integrated, yeah.

Ortiz: What year was that bathhouse at Sloss--

Brown: That bathhouse was integrated, let's see. It's been going on.

Ortiz: 1965, '66?

Brown: It was in the sixties.

Ortiz: After the Civil Rights Act.

Brown: But they didn't start it to near about '63, I think. I'd say '63, because that was rough times then during the sixties.

Ortiz: The white workers' wives would come--

Brown: Yeah, and pick them up.

Ortiz: The white workers didn't want to bathe in the same bathhouse.
Brown: They wouldn't bathe. He'd change clothes. We didn't want to do it. We had one white fellow came in there. His name was Hills. I believe he was a millwright, something like that. They tried to beat him up. We guarded him. We didn't bother the man.

Ortiz: Why did they want to beat him up?

Brown: Because he bathed in the bathhouse. That's right. A whole lot of this stuff come up unnecessarily, but if the other guy got the pressure on you, you got to go with it. He'd die and go to heaven before he'd do it. I hated to see those things happen.

When one would get sick, we'd pass lists. I was on the doctor hospital committee. If any of them would die, I'd be the first one to get that list and go around and raise for it. We didn't [unclear].

Ortiz: Did a lot of people get injured working there?


Ortiz: Do you remember any accidents that happened?
Brown: Oh, I've seen a guy got burned up, fell in the ladle of there once, fell in the iron, a whole lot of that. I've seen hot water steam line blow in the engine room. I could have showed you those things if I had went over. They were down there working on the pipe. It blew up and killed two people, killed three people. Electrician, I've seen it electrocuted them. And the pipe spraying paint, condensers [unclear]. A whole lot of people were killed like that. But you just got to watch yourself back in them steel plants and things like that. If you want to get drunk, you better wait till you leave there, because if you get drunk, you'll get killed.

Ortiz: Do you remember in the thirties Communist Party organizers?

Brown: Well, I don't know. The Communist Party within itself, I never did follow that up, to tell you the truth. All parties are good, as long as you don't make them bad. The Communist Party, I know people that came in and asked for information a whole lot of times. You'd answer the questions and you'd talk with him, but if you don't follow them up, somebody will kill you. If you get involved, you will get killed.

Ortiz: Do you remember people handling out pamphlets?
Brown: They didn't hardly ever do that.

Ortiz: What did they do?

Brown: They didn't have handing out a pamphlet or a booklet or anything of that type. They might talk to you and tell you, if they could feel their way, and see what the situation is or if you agree with them or something like that. Other than that, they wouldn't just come out and tell you that. It'd be in a secret meeting or something like that.

Ortiz: Do you remember other black workers that became involved in that?

Brown: Let me see. No, they didn't. We were interested in something like this thing here, civil rights, something for the benefit of the people. They called it Communist, but it ain't Communist.

But the Civil Rights Movement within itself done good and it done harm. It worked both ways. They made mistakes. We had Arthur Sholl [phonetic], an attorney, Arthur Sholl. He's retired. A whole lot of them worked and made millions of dollars and forgot about the black man. You represent me while you ain't got nothing. When you get it, you don't put me down.
Forgot the black people.

I had some attorney, like Oscar Adams, the chief justice of Alabama. They were law officers right there in the Masonic Temple building on the 17th floor. When they got up in the world, they forgot about the people. We got U. W. Clemon, the federal judge over there. He was a member of this stuff here along with me. He ain't got time now. I remember the time he needed help, he come down. He's a big somebody now.

God don't intend for you to do that. If he puts you up in the world, you thank him and keep doing and help other people. That's my motto. I love everybody. I never hate nobody, never. Never been in a fight. I don't bother nobody. I raised four children.

**Ortiz:** When did you first meet your wife?

**Brown:** My wife? We were living in another section of town, about seven miles from here. She was going to school. I was working at Sloss. Let me see, I might have her picture somewhere. We've been married fifty-two years, fifty-two years, and I never [unclear]. I'd work and make the money. She tended to the businesses.

Sloss [unclear]. I was on the board of [unclear] at Sloss, a bunch of us, served as vice president. But I made the people [unclear]. I told them white people they done a good job.
You know where we left off. We branched off there a bit.

Ortiz: Yeah. I asked you how you came to meet your wife.

Brown: I met her, she was going to school. I stayed single. She's a nice person. That's her right there. We've been married fifty-two years.

Ortiz: So she was going to school when you first met her?

Brown: She was going to school, and she graduated. She was going to Catholic school, Immaculate Conception, and she graduated. After she graduated, I said, "I'm going to see if I can get that lady." We were living there, and it was a mixed-up family, see.

Ortiz: A mixed-up family?

Brown: Yeah. Most of her people is white. They're mixed up. But her mother was a black woman. That's the problem that you got. People should separate. How in the hell you going to separate something that you already--you don't say nothing about it. I've been talked about a lot. Even the black men will say where I came from down in Tuskegee, down where I came from. The races [unclear].
Ortiz: Like a mixed race.


I could see some good in her, and I married her, bought a home, bought a place, raised those children. I never had no trouble. I moved out. I tried to get out after this thing got so bad here. When they put the dope in here and ruined the cities, that's a disgrace. You say you want freedom. You got your freedom right there move on and kill each other. You're supposed to love people. You don't do that.

Ortiz: When you would get off of work at the end of the day, what kind of things would you do?

Brown: Me?

Ortiz: Yes.

Brown: I'm going to tell you. When I got off my work, there was a nightclub and a big dance hall. I was the head waiter at the Cascade Plunge. It's still out there on 683 1st Avenue North. If there were picnics, parties, anything that was booked, when I got off my job, I was going.
Ortiz: Cascade Plunge?

Brown: Cascade Plunge, that's it. It's at 683 2nd Avenue South Birmingham now. The Fraternal Order of Elks bought that thing. The people died out. I waited tables, I ran picnics, I ran parties.

When I'd make that money, I'd go give it to my wife. She took care of it. Educated four children. I got one won't do nothing. He don't want to be nothing. Now mind, he's got a master's degree. I said, "You're nothing but a plumb nut. You've got a master's degree. You're going to fool around here with a [unclear] job. You need to be shot in the behind." I didn't have that opportunity. I didn't have it. But you see a whole lot of that going on now. It cost you something to get what you got. Ain't nobody give you nothing.

Ortiz: Did you and your family go to the movies or was there any kind of nightlife?

Brown: Well, when you had that. Downtown we just remodeled the Carver Theater. We had theaters all over Birmingham, Avondale, all sections of Birmingham, and you had somewhere to go and there was always something to do. But you ain't got nowhere to go now. See, the dope dealers destroyed all like that.
Ortiz: You'd go to the Avondale Theater?

Brown: No, I'd always come downtown and usually the Carver Theater up there or we had two or three more. If I didn't, I could go to Avondale, all parts of Birmingham. Now, these are the only two. If you went to the white theater, they had them downtown, you'd go upstairs. You couldn't go down there with the whites, but you could go up and see the picture.

Ortiz: So did you spend a lot of time around the black business section?

Brown: Well, I knew them. Now, I'd be down at the Masonic Temple building over there, because I was involved with the Blue Lodge, the Royal Arch, all the houses of Masonry. I'm a Past Master, past poll taker [phonetic] brother for the Shriners in the state of Alabama, I used to be. Well, I didn't call myself famous. I just loved it here, that's all, and I could satisfy the people. I done it for a long, long time. Masonry teaches people to be courteous, respectable, you'll lead a life without a worry. It was always something good in it. I just loved it and lived it and done it. I had a good time.

Ortiz: Did you ever go to places like Bob Savoy [phonetic]?
Brown: Bob Savoy?

Ortiz: Yes.

Brown: Bob Williams used to be the poll taker of the Shriners. Now, he had a big cafeteria. Bob Williams, that was his name.

Ortiz: Did you ever go there?

Brown: I'd go in sometimes, because by him being the poll taker of the Shriners, we'd always go down and patronize the other Shriners, see.

Ortiz: He was black?

Brown: That's right, he's black.

Ortiz: What other shops did you patronize that were owned by Shriners?

Brown: Well, we had the Shriners Club. That's where we raised money for charity or organizations, something like that. We had a nonprofit stamp set up and all that. We done a whole lot of good things.
Ortiz: What other businesses?

Brown: In here, in Birmingham, black people had a whole lot of grocery stores. They had a whole lot of businesses, small businesses. Downtown we had 18th Street and 4th Avenue, all back in this area. Part of this property here, there were black people were living in here. White people used to live here. They moved out and the black moved in, see. But back in here, when I came there was white people living all in this area.

Birmingham had servants. Nearly every house had a house in the back. Servants clean up the yard and take care of them. They paid the rent, and you couldn't get the police to go up here and bother them people. That's the kind of protection we had in Birmingham. The type they had over [unclear] and the surrounding areas, this town was covered with electric cars operated by batteries. They used to have chauffeurs. I used to be a chauffeur. You'd go downtown and get a job chauffeuring. I think it might have paid 50 cents. White folks, you get them old women, you wait on them. Some of them was contrary as hell, but they paid you. Them Jews, I used to love them Jews. He ain't going to give you too much money, but the Jews were pretty good people. If you needed something, if you paid him, he--all these buildings, empty buildings around here, Jews own these buildings now.
Ortiz: So you raised four children here. Did any of those children go to Industrial High School?

Brown: No, they went to Parker High School. We were living right near Parker High School. Three of them graduated Parker High School, Parker High School, I believe Tennessee State, and my daughter went to Fisk [University] in Nashville there. Then my baby daughter, she went two years--where did she go? I've forgotten right now. Anyway, she took two years of college. Then she married. But they all had an opportunity if they wanted to make something out of theirself. The reason why, I always wanted to do that. I didn't have that opportunity to get an education. I had to work. But I wanted them to make some out of their lives. You trust God and do what's right, you'll get what you want.

Ortiz: You talked earlier about accidents that would happen at Sloss. What would happen when people would get injured? Do you remember the kinds of medical care that were available?

Brown: If you got hurt at Slosses, we had an ambulance way back there. If you get hurt, they'd load you up in a truck and carry you to the hospital.
Ortiz: Which hospital?

Brown: St. Vincent Hospital. When you go there, the black man, we had to go in the basement. We couldn't go in the other part of the hospital. That's where we went, but it was in the basement. And you'd ride streetcars, you got two people, conductor and the motorman. The streetcar open in the middle, you go to your left, the whites go to your right. But you couldn't move. They'd board it up if there weren't but one white on it. I guess we got where we wanted to go.

Ortiz: Did anybody that you knew back in those days, do you know of black workers or black people who were challenged or kind of pushed back against that system?

Brown: Oh, yeah, was plenty that didn't care for that system. Oh, yeah, we fought it, but we were fighting a losing battle.

Ortiz: Like in the thirties?

Brown: Yeah.

Ortiz: What would people do?

Brown: Well, a whole lot of time we had a problem down here
about water fountains right here. You couldn't drink out of that water fountain. You couldn't do that. You'd get on the elevator, you had to take off your hat or they'd knock it off. You couldn't do nothing about it. They'd catch you before you get out in the street and beat your brains out, beat you to death almost. But that was the law of the land, what they called the law of the land.

Ortiz: How would black people fight against that?

Brown: How is that now?

Ortiz: You mentioned earlier that there were some black people who would fight that.

Brown: Oh, some of them--well, we done a whole lot of demonstrating. We got organized through churches and organizations, and we would fill this town full up here, so many of them that you couldn't do nothing, see. Like we covered city hall. It was Bull Connor. We worried him to death, like [unclear]. Then he got ashamed. The water hose, and the policemen stomped on him. Did you ever heard that? The policemen and the fire department said, "Hell, if you want to put some more water on them folks, you did it your damn self with the water." That was right up here. The white people got
sick of it. You can do things so bad that you'll just take over and see it. We were always told to be non-violent, but when a man gets to beating on me, there's going to be some violence if he don't watch it.

**Ortiz:** So you felt like non-violence sometimes was--

**Brown:** But not if you--I never liked it too much [unclear]. Let me tell you something. We had here in the sixties, we had every school got out at nine o'clock all over Jefferson County. Every one of them came right downtown. You couldn't see nothing but black folks. All in the department stores, everywhere. They were just in them stores going and coming [unclear]. But we wanted help. They will bomb you, like they bombed this church. They turned that man loose. That was bad business. Then they bombed up on Smithfield, up there where I built up there, bombing up there and messed up a whole lot of people.

**Ortiz:** Is that like Dynamite Hill?

**Brown:** Dynamite Hill. That's what they called it, Dynamite Hill. That's the name of it.

**Ortiz:** Can you tell me a little bit about that area.
Brown: Yeah. The white people were living in one or two houses up there by some politician that owned some land. [Unclear] president of Slosses, had some property up there. Lawrence Humphrey [phonetic] worked at Slosses, a black man. He let him have the money to pay down on a house. [Unclear] fighting. They found out [unclear] necessary, and they were bombing up the wrong people's houses. The white people got behind them themselves. It's a whole lot you can do too wrong. And so they took it up, and it wasn't long before we [unclear] and everybody got interested. Quite naturally, you want to build up on the hill. I built up there.

Ortiz: That's the area that's now Midfield?

Brown: No, Smithfield.

Ortiz: When did those homes start getting bombed?

Brown: Those homes started about--let me see. It was in the forties down into the fifties. I can't give you the correct date. I can't pick it up, but you'll find that it that [unclear]. It was a continuous thing. Then we built and we had to--got organized on the hill. I worked sometime all day, stay up all night watching my family. We patrolled the community,
the streets, had so many of them assigned everywhere.

_Ortiz:_ You were living up there?

_Brown:_ Oh, yeah, I was there. I built up there. I bought a lot and built a place up there. But it was better than what I had. And Arthur Sholl, I know you remember talking about him, I bought the lot. I think I paid him $1,500 for that lot and built that house.

It's a funny thing. I'd have been in that house right today, but my kids are very superstitious. My wife had two aunts and they died in that house and scared them to death. The children wouldn't live in that house. I had to move and sell it. I told the oldest one that's grown now, "You get your own house. That way you won't be running me around here trying to buy a house." We laugh about that thing right now.

But I've been lucky in Birmingham. To a certain extent, the black man got a whole lot of support from the whites, whether they admit it or told it. You didn't get much help out of the Italians, but the Jews put money down. A whole lot of these business people would help these people. If you want help and a person's willing to help you, they can help you, get him to do it. That's my song.

Some of these white people didn't hate us. A whole lot of these women were against being abused and doing wrong, but they
stayed in their race of people. The white women, they're raised better than men, huh. We ain't going to tell that. You know that. That's life. Yes, sir.

Now, we did we left off a while ago?

Ortiz: I asked you about Dynamite Hill, or Smithfield, which was Dynamite Hill.

Brown: Dynamite Hill, right. Center Street Hill.

Ortiz: You built a house up there?

Brown: Yeah. I built on 1st Street North, 1148 1st Street North. The house is there right now.

Ortiz: That was also part of the area that--

Brown: The bombing area.

Ortiz: Which was Dynamite Hill.

Brown: A fellow cursed me out one night. I had a pretty long little old house. It had a garage door. You raise the door up and go and put your car in the garage and then go up some steps and go up the terrace and go on into the house. This fellow
came down and knocked on the door and said, "You got your damn car in the street." It was a ditch in there about forty feet deep. He said, "Boy, get your car."

I said, "Okay. Buddy, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to block you."

Go down there, they put a hole. I went in there and got my damn rifle, laid it there by the door. He cranked that car up and plumb went right over in that ditch.

That guy said, "I'm going to go back up there and whoop that nigger's ass."

"Well, white man," I told him, "you better let that nigger alone. You're liable to get the hell beat out of you."

Ortiz: So you got your rifle?

Brown: Yeah. I didn't know what he was going to do. But all of us carried guns up here on that hill. They had to carry them.

Ortiz: Really?

Brown: Yeah, we had to carry guns.

Ortiz: Basically for self-defense?
Brown: Yeah. See, the police department was always on the black man. He would just ride you. That was when you had your Bull Connor and the city commissioner and that bunch. They were on black people, too. We came through all that stuff. Ignored them to a certain extent and took a whole lot. We got the job done. We did a pretty good job, too.

The only thing that's hurting me now is what's happening now. It's a heartbreaker. Like what you used to gain the whole world and lose your soul. That's what happened. Look at the black people. What are they doing for us? You don't like that. Nobody gots any sense. You see babies having babies, syphilis, gonorrhea, disease to death. Dope's doing it. They haul it in here with submarines, trailer trucks, airplanes, dropping it down for the money. Someone don't wake up and do something it's going to be too late. Disease to death. It's pitiful.

I used to stay in my house and didn't lock a door, didn't worry about locking no doors. Nobody didn't break in your house. Boys didn't rape no women. You think about your family. You don't know what happened to them. As along as stuff is coming out of Brazil and Peru, them folks is making money over there. America ain't going to have no money if they keep on. Look at this racket they got down there in Mexico. Got a place in no-man's-land. They come in and sit it down. There's a guy over here load it up and haul it home. It's something to think about. You leave home, you don't know whether you're going to
get back. You ain't done a damn thing.

    Let's get to it. I won't give you no more of that. What were we talking about?

**Ortiz:** We were talking about Dynamite Hill. I wanted to ask you one more question. I don't want to take up too much of your time.

**Brown:** Well, I don't mind it. Get what you want now.

**Ortiz:** I have some paperwork that I would like for you to fill out for the file. One more question that I have regarding your work at Sloss. Did you see changes in Sloss over time from beginning to the end, and were you there when it shut down?

**Brown:** I was there when they shut down in '71, I believe. I was at the City Furnaces. I had moved to Number Five, which is North Birmingham, where the big blast furnaces were, Bugle City [phonetic]. That little furnace over here and that blast furnace is [unclear]. I went because this was a part time, the furnaces here, and it was having all this pollution problems. Anyway, I just went on to the blast furnace where they were making good money.

    They made big money over there, all that overtime. I'd do sixteen hours and I'd have eight hours to rest, but you had to
know how to do it. My foreman was out of the way, I'd know what
to do. Something needed to be done, I didn't wait on him. He'd
be somewhere asleep. As long as the job was going on,
[unclear]. We got to the place where the white man would look
at and say to me, "I'm going home to get some sleep." He'd go
home and go to sleep. I'd sit right there and run that engine,
whatever we had to do. There wasn't anything ever said about
it. But when you got organized, you'd get help.

Ortiz: When you get organized?

Brown: Oh, yeah. When you get organized on a job like that,
the company wanted this eight-hour job done, taken care of. You
didn't see nobody unless he wanted something extra to do. We
knew what to do, and we got our work caught up. We'd go sit out
in the scalehouse, sit there until they come.

Ortiz: And rest.

Brown: That's the way we had to operate. Now, we didn't finish
that last question, did we?

[End of Recording]
[transcribed by TechniType]