Interview with Elizabeth Pitts

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Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
Greenwood (Miss.)

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Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South
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Scales: Where were you born, Mrs. Pitts?

Pitts: Right here in LeFlore County out on, you know where 49 and 82, the bypass that you came by?

Scales: Yes.

Pitts: Do you remember before you got there do you remember seeing a little tin building sitting?

Scales: I think I know, right there in an intersection.

Pitts: Yeah. But before you got there you see a little old house where they sell firecrackers and it’s a tin building what people use now for a little old, the whites use it for a café or a store or something. Did you see that?

Scales: I don’t remember seeing it. I’m going to look for it on my way back.

Pitts: All right, well, I was raised up right back down in that corner behind that store, behind that tin building. There was a store setting there then but the store burnt down. I was raised up back there.

Scales: And did your family have land over there?

Pitts: No.

Scales: Oh, okay.

Pitts: No, sharecropping, farming.

Scales: Sharecropping?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: And what are your earliest memories from growing up?

Pitts: I went to school right there at Pillars Chapel right there. Did you see that church sitting there?
Scales: Yes ma’am.

Pitts: That’s where I went to school. I was born on that same plantation. I was raised up on that same plantation, Wades, L.W. Wades plantation. All my kids, I got ten kids, they all was born there.

Scales: And you say you went to school at Pillars?

Pitts: Uh-huh, Pillars Chapel.

Scales: Okay, Pillars Chapel. And was that for all black children?

Pitts: Right, it was a Rosenwald. At the time it was a Rosenwald school.

Scales: Oh, okay.

Pitts: And the storm came in ’42 and blew it down, blew it away. So they built that back and that’s where we went to school at the church, at the church there.

Scales: Where did ya’ll have school after that building got blown down?

Pitts: After the building got blown away it was an old house, they had a house down on the side of that road, they had classes in there for awhile, uh-huh.

Scales: Do you remember your teachers?

Pitts: Yes, before the school blowed away it was Mrs. Ida Simpson and Mrs. Larry and Mrs. Mary Hinson.

Scales: And what type of lessons would you learn?

Pitts: We had reading. We had math. We had spelling. We had history. And we had, that’s basic, we had science, uh-huh.

Scales: Did they ever talk about black history or black pride?
Pitts: Well, yes. She was able to talk about how Abraham Lincoln freed the
slaves back then because all this other stuff wasn’t happening then you
know. Like civil rights and stuff, that wasn’t yet. That hadn’t existed yet.
So we didn’t talk too much about.

Scales: The other stuff?

Pitts: Right because basically you couldn’t talk too much about things like that.

Scales: Being raised on that place how was the system of work, sharecropping
system?

Pitts: Okay, you come the first of the year, come March they would give you
something called (). They would give you money to buy food to work the
crop with, to work. And they had a store, which was called a commissary
store and you would get your clothes from that store on the place there.
And you’d buy your food at a store that you buy your food on the place.
That’s what you call, it was called a commissary store. And you’ve got if
you run out of food you went there and got it but you paid for it at the end
of the year out of your crop see. And you chopped, we chopped.

Scales: How much did you get paid?

Pitts: Well, we wasn’t getting, if when you, when I started to working by the
day getting paid they was giving us three dollars a day. But when you was
working in your own field you didn’t get no pay see, not right then. You
worked your crop and like I told you they’d give you a little money to buy
food with, called it () they would call it and you’d get that every two
weeks. And then when you chopped the cotton and you’d lay it by then
when time come to pick the cotton you picked your cotton. You picked your cotton and they’d take it to the gin and they would gin it. So you didn’t get much out of that right then. You might get five dollars out of a bale or seeds or six dollars but you didn’t get very much out of that. At the end of the year then when he’d sell the cotton then you would either get something or you wouldn’t. Because I remember one year we picked our thirty-four bales of cotton and come out in the hole, come out behind which means that you didn’t get nothing.

**Scales:** Picked thirty-four bales of cotton and didn’t get nothing?

**Pitts:** Uh-huh, we picked our thirty-four bales of cotton, nothing. Then he would lend you money. The boss man would lend you money then to carry you through the winter see and then the next year when you farmed the next year you paid that money back out of the next crop.

**Scales:** And your parents went through that process?

**Pitts:** Uh-huh, my parents went through that.

**Scales:** Did they ever get suspicious of that, the way that worked?

**Pitts:** Well, if they got suspicious it wasn’t very much they could do unless you left, unless you moved. You know you could move, you could always move but you didn’t have anything. You raised your food. We raised, we had hogs, cows, chickens, ducks, turkeys. We raised most of our food, uh-huh and then you would have a big garden then you’d can your food. Wasn’t deep freezers, we didn’t have deep freezers because, you know, you couldn’t afford it. And you didn’t have at the time back then you
didn’t have refrigerators either. You had something called an icebox.

You could buy twenty-five pounds of ice or you could buy fifty pounds of ice and put it in, it would have a top like a refrigerator. You would just put the ice up in there.

Scales: How long would it keep cold?

Pitts: It would keep sometimes two days, uh-huh. It would keep sometimes two days and you put your food around that and that’s what you had, sure did.

Scales: And did anybody decide to leave that place?

Pitts: Well, people would move all the time, you know, but more would move in. They would move and move to the next plantation and somebody else would take their house. When they moved somebody else would take their house.

Scales: Did anybody ever stand up to those bosses?

Pitts: No, no.

Scales: What would happen if they did?

Pitts: No telling what would happen, you know. You didn’t have no freedom. You didn’t have no freedom, no. You did as you were told. You did what you was told to do and nobody, at that time nobody said nothing, just took what went on and went on.

Scales: Did your mother and father ever talk about it amongst themselves?

Pitts: Well, I don’t know. If they didn’t I didn’t hear because at that time, you know, older people didn’t talk around children.

Scales: Did you have to leave school to pick cotton?
Pitts: No, uh-uh, I didn’t have to but some of the guys, some of the bigger boys did. They had to leave school to go to work but I was fortunate enough I didn’t have to leave to go to work.

Scales: So did they treat the girls different than they treated the boys?

Pitts: At school? Where?

Scales: Deciding about education and work?

Pitts: Well, the boys lived on plantations too so if there was something to do they had to stop and go do it, you know, like plow or haul, whatever the boss had for them to do, uh-huh, they had to leave and go do that. But we never did, the girls never did leave school.

Scales: Did people, did your neighbors like get together and try to help each other?

Pitts: Oh yeah, they would help each other. If you had cows or something you would give your neighbors, I mean if they didn’t have you’d give them milk and butter. Or if you had a garden and they didn’t have one you’d share your garden with them, you know. Yeah, they would help each other. And on Sundays, we were glad when Sundays come so we could go somewhere to church. If you wasn’t going to school or church you was at home. We didn’t do a lot of visiting.

Scales: No in between, huh?

Pitts: No, we didn’t do a lot of visiting. We stayed home.

Scales: So was there anything to do for fun when you were growing up?
Pitts: Well, no, we had like record players, Graphophone we called it, wind it. That’s what we had. And my aunt, they was older, they was teenagers at the time so I was younger so that’s what they did for, you know, for fun, uh-huh.

Scales: Were your grandparents on that land too?

Pitts: Yeah. My grandparents was on that. My grandparents, my daddy, his brother, and three sisters, was a big family of us.

Scales: Did you ever talk to your grandparents about their times when they were coming along?

Pitts: Yes, uh-huh, they would just talk about basic, you know, they had to work just like we were working then. They had to work too but only they didn’t get as much when they were working as we got when we were working, when I was coming along see. Because they had said they worked for twenty-five cents a day. They had said they worked for twenty-five cents a day.

Scales: Did they talk about stories in slavery times?

Pitts: Well, no, they wasn’t here at slavery times but their parents were.

Scales: Did they ever used to sit around and talk about that?

Pitts: Well, if they did I don’t remember, you know, too much about them talking about the slavery, uh-huh, because they wasn’t here in slavery.

Scales: How did your parents make it through a tough time?
Pitts: They would can. We would kill hogs when it get cold. You couldn’t kill hogs til it get cold because your meat would ruin. When it would get cold we would kill hogs and salted the meat down.

Scales: Oh, yeah. How did they kill those hogs?

Pitts: They would either they had rifles they would shoot them in the head, shoot them through the head and then stab them, put them in hot water and clean them and make a, they had something like that to.

Scales: Like a triangle to hang them up?

Pitts: Yeah, hang them up and gut them. Cut the meat up. There’s a certain bone in the ham you had to take out that would ruin the meat. They would take that out and split the ham and put salt all down in it and salt it, pack it down somewhere in the smokehouse or something. Let it stay there for three weeks and take it up and wash it. Hang it up in a smokehouse. You hang it up and make a smoke under it and smoke it and dry it out and then you put it in a bag to keep flies and stuff off it and then you hang it up in your smokehouse.

Scales: And then it would be shared with everyone?

Pitts: Uh-huh. We’d cook it just like your parents now cook. The parents cooked just like we cook now but you just didn’t have no lot of money and no nice things.

Scales: Did people use the plants and herbs when people got sick, like different plants and roots?
Pitts: It was, yes, it was a weed called gypsum weed, it stunk. And if you had fever they’d take that and put it to your head. If you had a sprain or something they’d take that and beat it and put it in a poultice and lay it on it.

Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: So it was multi-purgative?

Pitts: Yeah but like roots and herbs there, they didn’t fool with that, my parents didn’t, uh-uh. No, my parents didn’t fool with that.

Scales: Who delivered the babies?

Pitts: It was a lady, the women then they called midwives. They would deliver the babies. There was a lady called Miss Cynthia Reed, she was a midwife and Miss Irene Lynns, which is around here now I think somewhere around on Star Street now, she delivered babies.

Scales: How did they learn how to do that?

Pitts: Now I don’t know, that I don’t know. I don’t know how they learned but they learned.

Scales: Were there black doctors back then?

Pitts: Yes a few because I remember back in the ‘60’s there was a black doctor here, Dr. Lane. He was black, right here in Greenwood, uh-huh, sure was.

Scales: Did that storm that took place in 1942, did that ruin the crops?
It was in March. The crops wasn’t planted yet. The crops wasn’t planted yet. It was the sixteenth day of March 1942. The crops wasn’t planted yet.

And what happened on that day that stands out in memory to you?

We had to walk to school. We didn’t have transportation. We didn’t have buses. And the teacher she had to walk too. So it just kept, the sun would come out, it was thundering back in the west off and on all day. And the sun would come out and stay out a few minutes then it would go under and then two or three drops of rain, you know, little shower of rain. Then a few minutes the sun would come out again. So the teacher said well, the cloud just kept hanging back in the west. She said well, the cloud looks so bad I’m going to let ya’ll go so we can get home before it rains because we don’t want to get wet. So she let us out early and she went on home and we went home. And we’d gotten home and by the time we got home and we ate and my granddaddy, he was from Gloster, Mississippi from down around below Jackson, he had saw storms before. We hadn’t ever saw them. We hadn’t ever witnessed no tornado. And it just kept thundering and so about four o’clock we heard a roaring, sound like a train coming. He was out there. He always stood, I don’t know if you ever heard tell of people used to split clouds with an ax to make them go around. They’ll split.

Split them with what?
Pitts: With an ax, take an ax if a dark cloud is back this way you stick an ax in the ground. It’s a certain way you stick that ax and that cloud will part, uh-huh. He said ooh, this cloud is bad now, it’s bad, this cloud is bad out here and he said ya’ll better come on out of there it’s a tornado coming. So I was small, about twelve, and he told me to come on and we had a big peach orchard into a garden, you know, it was a garden out there and then a big peach orchard out there. And so he called them out and some of us come out the house and some of them didn’t. So my daddy and my mom, they stayed on in the house and my auntie. And he called me out and he caught me by the hand and said come on and took me to the garden and laid down. He laid me down and told me to hold the tree and then he laid over me and held the tree like this. And it got so dark that you couldn’t even see. I couldn’t see him right there side of me. And it was so dark and then everything was just gone.

Scales: So why did he take you outside?

Pitts: To keep me from getting blowed away.

Scales: In the house?

Pitts: Right. See he called all of us out, me and my grandmother, she was out. She was laying holding another tree. And my aunt, she was holding a tree. All of us, he said ya’ll stretch out and hold them trees. And we laid out and held the trees and by me being a child he just laid over me see. It didn’t last but seconds, they don’t last but seconds and you could just see, you know how sparkles look the children play with now?
Scales: Yeah.

Pitts: That’s the way the fire was in that storm, just like sparks.

Scales: It was a fire in the storm?

Pitts: It was just like sparkles in that storm. And I asked my granddaddy I said Papa, is it judgment day because he had been teaching, you know, he was preacher and he had been teaching us about what would happen, you know. I said is it judgment day. He said no, it’s just a storm.

Scales: Did the house get ruined?

Pitts: Gone, they found the house up there, part of the, they found the safe up there by that church I was telling you about.

Scales: Right and how far was that from the house?

Pitts: Up there by that tin building I was telling you about, about a half a mile, about a half a mile or a mile from there, uh-huh.

Scales: And so he knew that?

Pitts: He knew because he had been in them before and he knew it was a storm. But we hadn’t, we hadn’t been in there because when he come up here they wasn’t bad up here you know with no storms. But that was the first one had been through.

Scales: How did you manage to get back on your feet?

Pitts: What you talking about, after the storm?

Scales: Yes ma’am.

Pitts: After the storm it just rained, looked like the clouds just opened up and just rained, just rained, just flooded. And about ten minutes the sun come
out shining just like it’s shining now, just like it hadn’t been no storm.

And it wasn’t nothing standing, nothing. It only left the floor of the house that my mom and dad was laying on. It blewed them out the bed and just took the bed and put it out in the yard. Took my other aunt and put her, she had a little boy about, he was about two. She had him in the bed with her. She was laying, they all were laying across the bed. It took the mattress off the bed and put it out in the duck pen and they were still on it. They were still on that mattress. It was an awful day and a few minutes you didn’t hear nothing but ambulances, police, you know, running, the cars blowing. But none of us got killed but we got hurt. Something hit me. Do you see that right there?

Scales: Yes ma’am.

Pitts: Something stuck through that but it came out, it didn’t stay in and I couldn’t walk for about three weeks but thank God I wasn’t killed and wasn’t none of us killed. And something hit my uncle and knocked his teeth out but it wasn’t nobody killed. But over here on Fort Lawn our usher of our church she was about eight months pregnant and it nailed her, pinned her to the ground with a two by four, just stuck it through her, pinned her to the ground. Her name was Susie Staples. It was awful.

Scales: Did you all build the house back?

Pitts: Yes, the boss man built the house back. They took action and went right on and built the house back. Like about a month and a half the house was built back and we moved back in and just kept on going.
Scales: Where did you stay during that time?
Pitts: Well, we had some empty houses on the place so the Red Cross give us beds and stuff, stoves and safes. The Red Cross helped us back on our feet, uh-huh.

Scales: Have there been any other storms like that one?
Pitts: No, that was the only one that had ever been through and the next year on the fifteenth of March it come through around () and did the same thing down there.

Scales: So every year at that time?
Pitts: Well, for two years, no, not every year, just the two years, just the two years.

Scales: 1943 around the same month?
Pitts: Uh-huh, around the same month but it was on the fifteenth day. It didn’t hit us this time. It hit down around () that next time.

Scales: Man, that’s interesting.
Pitts: Yeah.

Scales: You were saying that, you said people put the ax in the ground.
Pitts: Uh-huh, and split it, split the cloud.

Scales: It would split the cloud? (Someone enters room.) You were saying about the ax.
Pitts: Yeah, like the clouds, a dark cloud would be coming up old people used to stick that ax, a certain way you could stick that ax and you’d see that cloud parting, splitting.
Scales: And did he teach you how that was done?

Pitts: He taught my mom. He taught my mom. My mom could do it but I was scared because you could also bring it over too.

Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh. So he taught her how to stick it against that cloud.

Scales: So it’s a certain way you have to do it?

Pitts: A certain way you have to do it and it works. And I’ll tell you, a Bible works better than it all.

Scales: Put that in the ground?

Pitts: Uh-uh, just open your Bible and lay it up and it will either get high or go around you.

Scales: And so did other people have ways of surviving those storms like that?

Pitts: Yeah, yeah, they were surviving the same way. People learned, people learned, you know, you learn how to do things and after that people started to digging storm pits. Dig a hole in the ground and a lot of people walled it up and cut steps to go in and put a top on it and cover it back over with dirt.

Scales: And they would get down in there during a storm?

Pitts: Uh-huh, uh-huh, they would get down in there and then if the house blew away it would blow over, blow over you.

Scales: That’s amazing.

Pitts: Uh-huh, people learned to survive.

Scales: Was it the older people telling the younger people how to do those things?
Pitts: Right, right, right, it was the older people.

Scales: Did people back then talk about spirits like haints?

Pitts: Uh-huh, they would talk about spirits. My mom could see them.

Scales: Oh yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: How was she able to see them?

Pitts: I don’t know but she would see them. She would always see something, a man or somebody. She could really see them. She could see things. I’m scared of them. I can’t see them. My daddy couldn’t see them often but he would see them but he would always say (). He would always, he said there wasn’t nothing he could see he couldn’t name. He would always name it something else.

Scales: Oh, really?

Pitts: Yeah. (Laughter) Now he worked for twenty-five cents a day.

Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh. When he got his driver’s license he paid twenty-five cents for them he said.

Scales: Oh, really?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: So that’s your husband?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: Would people talk about signs back then, different things, what certain signs meant? If you, let’s see, what have I heard about the black cat?
Pitts: Oh yeah, yeah, people believe in signs like if a black cat cross the road they turn their hat around. That’s what you’re talking about?

Scales: Yes ma’am.

Pitts: Yeah, they talked about that and you couldn’t eat no peanuts in my uncle’s car. He said he swore they was ().

Scales: Oh, really?

Pitts: Uh-huh, yeah people had signs.

Scales: So peanuts was?

Pitts: Was one of them. If you wanted to ride in his car don’t eat no peanuts in his car.

Scales: Really?

Pitts: Uu-uh, he swore that you would have a flat. (Laughter)

Scales: Do you remember some other ones?

Pitts: No, not right off. Yeah, something like they said don’t hit you with the broom do you’ll go to jail. You heard that one?

Scales: Yes ma’am.

Pitts: They hit you with the broom and spit on the broom don’t you’ll go to jail. Yeah, they have plenty of signs. Don’t sew no clothes, if you got a dress, you know, people used to say I’m going to tack my dress up, you know, tack the hem in on it. Don’t do that, put a match in your mouth or somebody’s going to lie on you. (Laughter)

Scales: Really?
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Pitts: That’s what they would say, you know. I don’t think all that was true. I think, you know, people had signs.

Scales: Did people talk about prophecy and things like that, like being able to tell something was going to happen?

Pitts: Uh-huh, yeah. Some people did but I don’t know too much about those prophets, you know.

Scales: I was wondering because you all worked on a farm, did people use the signs to plant by like the almanac, from the book?

Pitts: Uh-huh, oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

Scales: Did your family use it?

Pitts: Uh-huh. I use it now. Now that is true. It’s certain days you can plant a, you can plant and you won’t have nothing but a flower. It’s called flower day, if you plant on flower day. Then it’s a day you can plant they call bug day and the bugs will eat your plants up.

Scales: If you plant on bug day they won’t or they will?

Pitts: They will.

Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: The bugs will eat it up, you know, bugs, insects.

Scales: Right.

Pitts: Uh-huh, yeah, now that is true. And you’re born on signs, you know.

Scales: Oh, really?

Pitts: Uh-huh. You’re conceived on signs.

Scales: You’re conceived on signs?
Pitts: Uh-huh, you’re conceived on signs.

Scales: And people actually would follow those things?

Pitts: Yeah, yeah.

Scales: You said when they’re having a baby they would try to?

Pitts: Yeah, you have babies on signs and they’re conceived on signs, uh-huh.

You don’t just conceive anytime.

Scales: Right. So people would follow those from the calendar and the days?

Pitts: Yes, uh-huh, you know, whatever you conceive you conceive on a sign. I guess they wouldn’t notice that, you know, but you really is but when they get ready to have the baby then that’s when you notice it.

Scales: Notice that ()?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: What if the baby was born on a Saturday, what does that mean? I mean wasn’t there…?

Pitts: No, it’s in the moon, the sign’s in the moon.

Scales: Oh, okay, it’s in the moon.

Pitts: In the moon.

Scales: That’s interesting.

Pitts: Uh-huh, in the moon. You don’t just have a baby anytime. It either come on a quarter, change or full.

Scales: What if it came on a full, what does that mean?

Pitts: You know, it doesn’t mean anything, it’s just that’s the way they come.

They come on…
Scales: Oh, okay, so it’s a certain pattern?
Pitts: Right.
Scales: Okay, I understand.
Pitts: Yeah, certain pattern.
Scales: Do people still practice that?
Pitts: You still there, I mean you still be born on signs because anytime a woman have a baby you just watch that moon. It’s going to either be born on a quarter, full moon or on a change, young moon. You don’t just have babies anytime.
Scales: Did you have to go to church when you were growing up?
Pitts: Yes, yes, yes! My granddaddy was a preacher. We had to go to church, uh-huh, sure did.
Scales: And would people get the spirit back then?
Pitts: Yeah, people shout and get happy. Mens cry and get happy just like mens back then, yeah, sure did. Yeah, people went to church. Well see, it wasn’t no whole lot to do then so people went to church. Some of them would go to ballgames. They had ballgames, you know, like that but it wasn’t no wrestling and nothing else and they would have, they would go to the movies. It was called the picture show then. They would go there. But the most of them then went to church.
Scales: Was the church a place where you would meet people?
Pitts: Uh-huh.
Scales: Did people court?
Pitts: Yeah, they would go to church and meet people, you know. People from everywhere would be walking to church, coming to church. They’d be walking. We had to walk. People had to walk. People walked to church.

Scales: And did they have baptism?

Pitts: Uh-huh, I’m a Baptist.

Scales: Okay. And where would they baptize people?

Pitts: In the river, in the river. The deacons would go down like if you’re going to baptize today on Sunday the deacons would go down and clean off a place going to the river down, find a good level place close to the church and they would go down and clean it up and that Saturday some of the deacons that could swim, somebody that could swim would go out and test the water and stick sticks where they’re going to baptize at so they’d know how deep the water is. And if you had tall people to baptize they’d go out a little further. But if the children are short they stayed, you know, come closer to the bank.

Scales: Would there be a lot of people?

Pitts: Oh, what you talking about. People would be around that riverbank singing and praying. Uh-huh.

Scales: On your place Sunday was a day to get away from working?

Pitts: Yeah, you go to church on Sunday. You go to church on Sunday. You had to go to Sunday school and church.

Scales: Did you all talk about religion on the place?
Pitts: Yeah, be in the field talking about religion, anywhere. Them old people get together they wouldn’t have to, sometimes they wouldn’t have to be at church. They go talking about it and shout at home. (Laughter)

Scales: Would they be singing in the field while they were working?

Pitts: Uh-huh, sometimes, some of them. Some of them be singing out in the field, I used to hear singing. Men, you could hear them singing plowing behind the mule, you know, uh-huh.

Scales: When people would leave and if they owed the boss man something would they have to sneak away?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: Do you remember people doing that?

Pitts: Yeah, people used to run off, slip off. Sometimes people would leave, a lot of them would leave that way. They’d get up the next morning looking for him and he gone or she gone, they gone, whole family gone.

Sometimes they be () to move. And some people, they didn’t have much now. People then didn’t have nothing like nice stuff you’ve got now, you know, they didn’t have that. They might have had a bed and a chair and a stove, table and an old safe. It wasn’t like cabinets, china cabinets and stuff. They had something called a safe. Well, it’s made like this but it had screens in the door and some of them had glass in the door, you know. But it was called a safe and you put your dishes in. They didn’t have cabinets like they got today. Houses didn’t have that.

Scales: Did your family ever help somebody sneak away?
Pitts: No, not that I know about, uh-uh. People didn’t have, see, people didn’t trust people enough to do that.

Scales: Oh, no?

Pitts: No, they didn’t trust people enough to do that. If you was going to run off you didn’t tell nobody. You just went. You just went.

Scales: So the next morning…

Pitts: He didn’t show up at work then you’d go down there his house empty, he gone and he didn’t have much, might have a () mattress and an iron bed and it’s left in the house.

Scales: Took off?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: Would they ever go look for the people?

Pitts: No, sometimes they would have people looking around see if you see them but.

Scales: What if they would have caught them? Were there forms of punishment?

Pitts: Uh-huh, sometimes they said it was punishment. I never did know nobody to punish them but they said sometimes people would punish them when they catch them.

Scales: And when the people would have babies on the plantation would they have to work at a young age when the babies got up a little bit?

Pitts: Uh-huh, when the baby got about six weeks old.

Scales: Six months old?

Pitts: Six weeks then they would go back to work, uh-huh.
Scales:  Oh, the mother would go back to work?
Pitts:  Uh-huh, uh-huh. Leave the baby home with the children or if an old person wasn’t there to tend to it that didn’t work, then you’d leave your baby with the children.

Scales:  What was the youngest people they had working?
Pitts:  Well, back then if you was eight years old they’d cut the hoe handles off and let those little eight year old children chop cotton, eight and nine years old children chop cotton.

Scales:  () owner would have that?
Pitts:  Uh-huh, you see, you know how long a hoe handle is?

Scales:  Yes ma’am.
Pitts:  They would cut the handle off, the end off, about that much of it off.

Scales:  About a foot?
Pitts:  Yeah, so the children could, you know, wouldn’t be sticking up, uh-huh, and give it to them and let them chop, give it to them and they had to work, they had to work.

Scales:  Would they encourage the people to have children?
Pitts:  Not that I know of, not that I know of.

Scales:  Did people when they left go north?
Pitts:  A lot of them did leave and go north. A lot of them did leave and go north. And a lot of them, when you left you had to leave. You had to get on, just like you were to stop, if you run off and over somebody you didn’t stop around, you’re gone. You had to go. Had to go on off, you know,
because he would get you, he would catch you and there’s a place, where
is it at now, I hear of old Brownie now. You ever heard tell of Brownie?

Scales: Yes.

Pitts: It was a place out there called a county farm, they’d put you out there.

Scales: And what happened out there?

Pitts: And work, you know, you had to work. You’d be on the road working or
cutting ditch banks. They had you doing something. They had you
working. That’s the punishment they’d give you if they caught you if you
run off owing them or if you did something on the place, if you cut up
somebody on the place or cut up somebody or got to fighting, hurt
somebody that’s where you would go, they’d put you for six or seven
months.

Scales: Could the plantation boss get you out of that?

Pitts: Oh yeah, if he wanted to. If he wanted to he could get you from
anywhere. If you had killed somebody and the boss said go get him, let
him out, they would let you out.

Scales: Even if you killed somebody?

Pitts: Uh-huh, yeah. According to whose place you lived on you didn’t even go
nowhere.

Scales: Did the people on the plantation get to vote?

Pitts: No, no, back then they wasn’t voting see. Blacks wasn’t voting at that
time. Blacks was not voting in Mississippi. Blacks didn’t start voting til
after 1963 after Martin Luther King’s time. And even then if you voted you had to move. You had to move.

Scales: So you couldn’t vote and stay on his place?

Pitts: Uh-uh, and that was after 1963 because it didn’t start no civil rights til 1963. That’s when it started. And they locked up a lot of black people.

Scales: Do you know anyone that tried to vote?

Pitts: No, I didn’t know them but I’ve heard of people trying to vote and they had to move, had to move off the plantation.

Scales: Did the blacks on the plantation ever talk about, you know, those things, type of things?

Pitts: About voting?

Scales: Yes ma’am.

Pitts: Yes, they would mention it, you know, and talk about it but they was mostly afraid too much to say too much, couldn’t say too much til after Martin Luther King’s time.

Scales: Did you ever get the chance to travel when you were growing up?

Pitts: Uh-uh, no I never did do no traveling, none of the family. My aunt used to go to Memphis. Well, I went to Memphis once or twice when I was growing up.

Scales: Was that different than what you were used to?

Pitts: Yes, uh-huh, it was different. We’d catch the bus and go because my mama’s people were in Memphis.

Scales: And was the bus, was is segregated with the blacks?
Pitts: Yes, yes, blacks went to the back. They was at the back.

Scales: Was the picture show segregated too that you went to?

Pitts: Uh-huh, yeah, it was segregated. There was black, how long you been here?

Scales: About three days.

Pitts: Okay, you hadn’t been here long. Well, they made an apartment out of it now but it was a () Theater was for black people. The Dixie Theater was for black people. But the Paramount, I’m trying to study. I don’t know whether the Paramount was segregated but I know LeFlore was for whites. That was a white theater they had.

Scales: So they had an entire, when you went to the movies it was entirely black?

Pitts: Yeah, everywhere you went was entirely black, no whites.

Scales: So they didn’t have the whites, it wasn’t split? I’ve heard people say ()

Pitts: Well, that might have been at the Paramount but I never did go. Yeah, somebody said the Paramount was like that. The whites set at the top and the blacks at the bottom. But I never did go to the Paramount Theater but they say that’s the way it was.

Scales: Right.

Pitts: Because I always went to () and Dixie was all black.

Scales: How much did it cost to go to the movies?

Pitts: Twenty-five cents, twenty-five cents.

Scales: What was your favorite movie?
Pitts: You know they would have different things. They would show westerns and they would show, you know, funny movies and they would show love pictures like that. They would show that. They didn’t have nothing else.

Scales: And do you remember which one you liked the best?

Pitts: I used to like the cowboy movies. (Laughter) I liked those shoot-em-outs.

Scales: Did they ever have blacks in the movies?

Pitts: No, uh-uh, they was white. The films they were showing was white until later, you know. Later as time go by then they started showing black with the movies.

Scales: When did you start deciding that you were going to court or how did the courting process work when you were coming along?

Pitts: If you courted you courted at school. (Laughter) You had to slip and court. You had to slip, parents better not hear you talking about no boyfriend. (Laughter) You had to court at school. When you leave school courting was over until you got about eighteen. When I got eighteen, uh-huh, I didn’t start going out til I got eighteen.

Scales: So were you considered an adult at eighteen?

Pitts: No, I still wasn’t considered an adult.

Scales: At school there was no time that he could come visit?

Pitts: No.

Scales: Your parents didn’t allow that?

Pitts: Uh-uh, no, parents didn’t allow that. Didn’t allow that.
Scales: At what age did you become a woman, that you think you left girlhood behind and you became a woman?

Pitts: When I got eighteen and nineteen then I started to going out. My aunties, I had some aunties, they was older so I started going with them then. At eighteen I started going with them. And they was about, they was in their early twenties, they was twenty-something so I’d go with them. We’d go out, my sister and myself and then I got nineteen, twenty I was just, I would go when I got ready. But I had to be careful where I go because if somebody told my daddy where I went was the wrong place I still got chewed out. Because he wasn’t a fighting man, he didn’t do much whipping. I didn’t get no beatings. I didn’t get no whippings because I wasn’t a bad person.

Scales: When you were growing up could a white men date black women?

Pitts: Not and be known. Well, it always have happened but, you know, mighty few people knowed what was going on because they couldn’t get out do that person, something might would happen to them.

Scales: Like on the plantation or some place?

Pitts: Anywhere. Blacks stayed to themselves. But like I said, the white man been courting the black woman a long time but it was under the cover. And I’ve known people to come up missing. I’ve known people to come up missing and they said that’s what they were doing. I don’t know, I’m not sure because I didn’t see nothing.

Scales: Now the people are, used to be the white person that was missing?
Pitts: No, no, the black person.

Scales: The woman he was interested in?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh, sometimes they would come up missing.

Scales: Because they might tell or something like that?

Pitts: Something happened. I really don’t know what happened but they would come up missing a lot of times, sure would.

Scales: Well, did the same thing hold true for black men and white women?

Pitts: Yes, black men were scared to look at a white woman. You didn’t look at them do they’d call it eye raping. You didn’t look at them.

Scales: Eye raping?

Pitts: Raping, uh-huh, when you look at a white woman too hard. You didn’t look at white people. A black man didn’t look at a white woman too hard.

Scales: And if it had repercussions, did it have an effect on him? Would that be just a common everyday thing for people to know that you shouldn’t do that?

Pitts: Uh-huh, yeah. People know you shouldn’t do that. They knew. They know they couldn’t do this. Just like you know that fire will burn, they didn’t bother with the white. Black men did not bother with the white people period. They just worked for them and go on if they wanted to live.

End of Side A, Side B
Scales: …occasion ever present itself or the plantation you were raised on?

Pitts: No, we didn’t have that problem out there. Didn’t have that kind of a problem. We didn’t have that kind of problem, not on the plantation.

Scales: Have you heard stories that other people would tell about that?

Pitts: No, uh-uh, they didn’t have that kind of problem on the plantation but in the city, in the town, little town they might would have that problem every once in awhile.

Scales: In the town?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: When you went to Memphis was that something that happened up there?

Pitts: No, nothing because I was small. I was about five and I can’t remember anything different, you know. Anything could happen up there but be different because I was small, can’t remember.

Scales: When you got old enough to like go shopping and go to different places were there places you couldn’t go because you were a black woman?

Pitts: Uh-huh, like you could go in any store and shop but you couldn’t go in there and eat. You couldn’t go in the restaurants and stuff and eat.

Scales: You couldn’t go and eat you’re saying?

Pitts: Uh-uh, like they would sell you food but they had a window, a window, they’d hand your food out if you bought it. You could buy it from them but you couldn’t eat it there.

Scales: What about shopping for women’s clothes?
Pitts: Oh, you could shop anywhere. It’s never been, you could always go in a store and shop because they always wanted your money.

Scales: Did they have like white and black water and things like that?

Pitts: Well, you didn’t go in the restaurants and stuff. You didn’t go where the water was because, you know, if they had the water in the stores, you know, it was in the back somewhere, you didn’t see it. So I don’t know about water because we didn’t ever go in, when we’d go to the stores and stuff I know it was bathrooms blacks couldn’t use at some service stations so I’m sure you couldn’t get the water either, you know, out the fountain because that’s where they drank.

Scales: When you were traveling did that present a problem because they didn’t allow blacks to go to get water and use the bathroom?

Pitts: No because I was small, like I say, I was small I can’t remember, I can’t recall. I can’t recall that. But I do know we set at the back of the bus and had a like some little curtains on these rods right here. You couldn’t sit up in front of that curtain. You had to get behind that curtain, that little thing. That’s where your seats started.

Scales: How did you feel about those?

Pitts: Well, at the time you felt all right because you didn’t know no different see. At the time you didn’t know no different. That’s all you knew, you know. At the time you didn’t worry about trying to get, go in places and do things that you knew you wasn’t supposed to, that you couldn’t do. You didn’t worry about it.
Scales: Did things get better?

Pitts: Yeah, after Martin Luther King’s time, after Martin Luther King had that march. You know, he marched. He marched, in fact, coming down 82.

We saw him. We could see him.

Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh and people would be following him.

Scales: Were there any people that you remember that were speaking about some of those political things on the plantation?

Pitts: No, not that I can think.

Scales: When did you all leave the land?

Pitts: We stayed there, when did I leave there? We left in ’77.

Scales: You moved to?

Pitts: Here.

Scales: Right here?

Pitts: Uh-huh, moved here. We left there, I went to work at Valley in ’77 and that’s when I left the plantation in ’77. And I went to Valley and I worked there until a year ago, two years ago when I retired.

Scales: Okay, tell me about your experiences at Valley.

Pitts: Oh, I loved it. I loved it. When they hired me they hired me in the social science building. That’s where I went as a maid. And I stayed there for about six years. Dr. Curtis was the head of the department then. Did you meet him before he passed?

Scales: No ma’am.
Pitts: Okay. And I remained there until I believe it was '82, '82 or '83 one and
they moved me to the president’s house. So I went under the
administration of Dr. Boyer, Joe Boyer and I worked for him until he left
and Dr. William Sutton come in and I worked for him until I retired.

Scales: So you worked on the land and then you went straight from the land to
Mississippi Valley?

Pitts: Uh-huh, straight from the land to Mississippi Valley.

Scales: Could you compare how those two jobs were?

Pitts: Yes, I’d rather been at Valley because I was chopping cotton see.

Scales: How many years did you chop cotton? When did you first start?

Pitts: When I was twelve, when I was twelve years old I went to the field.
That’s when I went to the field and started chopping cotton.

Scales: That’s a long time.

Pitts: Yeah and I stayed there, we’d chop cotton and we’d pick cotton by the
day. Pick cotton by the hundred, chop by the day. That’s the way we
made out living and we was getting, well, for the last three or four years
that I was there we were getting a dollar and a quarter an hour. We left
three dollars a day and we was getting a dollar and a quarter an hour.
When I left there that’s what we were getting, a dollar and a quarter an
hour for chopping.

Scales: When you left there in 1977?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: Dollar and a quarter?
Pitts: A dollar and a quarter an hour, getting a dollar and a quarter an hour.

Scales: And you had children by then, right?

Pitts: I had all of them. My baby was born in ‘71. He was born in ’71.

Scales: And were they working the field too?

Pitts: The girls, the older girls did and my older son, he would work but the last ones, these didn’t. These here were last so they didn’t work. They wasn’t big enough to work when I brought them out here. They were still in school and by this time you couldn’t pull them out of school. You couldn’t pull them out of school. They had to go to school. They forced them to go to school.

Scales: How many children did you have?

Pitts: Ten. I got six girls and four boys.

Scales: Amazing. When they came along did you tell them how to get along in the world?

Pitts: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, I sure did. I told them how to make it here because you know your do’s and don’ts. You know how it is, you know.

Scales: So did you tell them about the black and whites and how the two couldn’t eat at the same places?

Pitts: Yeah, but see they knew about this because they knew about this, they were in school then. They were in school then. The teacher was teaching them that then. By this time they knew that, the teacher was teaching them, was beginning to teach them because this was after ’63 see.

Scales: Okay, after ’63, right.
Pitts: Uh-huh, this was after ’63. Then that’s when everything, after the children then they started teaching them about segregation and different, you know, in school.

Scales: And what would you all do on holidays when you were growing up?

Pitts: We didn’t take no Fourth of July, you chopped. Back then you didn’t take no Fourth of July. You worked on that holiday. And Thanksgiving if you wasn’t through picking cotton you picked cotton. But you always took Christmas.

Scales: Always took Christmas?

Pitts: Always took Christmas because you’d be at home because it was in the wintertime see.

Scales: Would people come together and have big meals and things?

Pitts: For Christmas?

Scales: Yes ma’am.

Pitts: Oh, yeah, you always had, I would be so glad when Christmas come. (Laughter) Because you’re going to have a big meal, you’re going to have a plenty and things that you didn’t get, couldn’t get through the year you’d get it on Christmas.

Scales: Really?

Pitts: Uh-huh. Like apples and oranges and a lot of good candy and good food and stuff, see you couldn’t get that all through the year because you couldn’t afford it. But we could eat chickens all through the year because we raised them.
Scales: And the chickens, would you have to kill them yourself?

Pitts: Uh-huh, we had a big yard. You’d have a yard like we got now and all our chickens and things was in the yard. And you’d have, well all these things was out in the country and you’d have a big chicken house built out back there and they’d roost in. Then you’d have hog pens out from the house where, you know, your hogs and you’d have cows. There was a fence out there for you to put your cows in.

Scales: Did people back then talk about digging money?

Pitts: Yeah, they’d be looking for money if someone never did find it.

(Laughter)

Scales: Why would it be in the ground?

Pitts: Why would it be in the ground?

Scales: Yes ma’am.

Pitts: I don’t know. Somebody buried it there years, years, years ago. They did tell me but I can’t remember why people were burying money but they buried it, it was in the ground. A lot of people said they found it. And a lot of people said spirits would tell them where it would be and they’d go get it.

Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: Put money in the ground.

Pitts: Yeah, that money was buried in the ground.
Elizabeth Pitts 39

Scales: They said they would go dig and the spirits would tell them how to get to it?

Pitts: Yeah, my uncle said, he dead now though, but he told me says one night a man told him to go down beside the road, he’d see a piece of iron. And you dig down there by iron you’ll find a pot of money. And he said he went down there and the iron was there but he was scared to dig.

Scales: Really?

Pitts: Uh-huh, that’s what he told me. He was scared to dig.

Scales: And the spirit had told him to do that?

Pitts: Uh-huh. He said it was a man told him.

Scales: Oh, a man told him?

Pitts: But he was a spirit.

Scales: You wonder why he decided not to get it. It might have been…

Pitts: He was scared. It was. It must have been there because he said he went and the iron stob was there just like he said which it hadn’t been there. And he went back a day or two later the stob was gone. It had sunk back in.

Scales: Oh, you think somebody else could have?

Pitts: Uh-uh, nobody didn’t get it. He said it sunk back, went back in.

Scales: Oh, it went back in the earth?

Pitts: Uh-huh, they say money works up. It works up and then it’ll go back down. That’s what they told me. I don’t know nothing about it because I was scared to try.
Scales: Did people talk about stuff like voodoo and things like that?
Pitts: Voodoo?
Scales: Yes ma’am.
Pitts: Oh, yeah.
Scales: Did they have people doing that back then?
Pitts: Yeah, people would do it. People would do it and people would put down things for you, put down stuff for you.
Scales: For their?
Pitts: For people having sick.
Scales: What do you mean?
Pitts: People would put down stuff and have people sick, you know.
Scales: Oh, yes, put ()?
Pitts: Uh-huh.
Scales: Was that something people talked about?
Pitts: Uh-uh.
Scales: No, it was kind of hush-hush?
Pitts: Yeah, kind of hush-hush. Kind of hush-hush. People was scared to talk about it because they didn’t want anybody to put nothing down for them.
Scales: Right, right. And was there any people known for that sort of thing?
Pitts: Yeah, it was people known for it and people were scared of them too.

(Laughter)
Scales: Oh, yeah?
Pitts: People were scared of them.
Scales: Would they go down to New Orleans or something like that?

Pitts: No, people right around () and Greenwood and stuff would do stuff like that, uh-huh.

Scales: Well, when you were growing up did they have an all black cemetery?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: Place where the blacks were buried. Where was it?

Pitts: One up there at that church I was telling you about where I went to school.

One there and there’s one on down on race track plantation.

Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh, you ever heard tell of race track plantation?

Scales: No, I’d like to, yes, the race track plantation, yes ma’am.

Pitts: Uh-huh, that’s where all my family buried.

Scales: Okay. Would they put the blacks the same cemetery with the white folks then?

Pitts: No, not then. Even when you’re dead they didn’t put you together.

Blacks had their churches, whites had theirs.

Scales: When they buried people back then would it be different than now?

Pitts: No, you just might not have had as nice, you might not have had as nice caskets and things as they have now.

Scales: Oh, okay. Would people dig the hole?

Pitts: With shovels, with shovels, uh-huh. They would dig the holes with shovels and bury them. Now a lot of people didn’t have, wasn’t any insurance so they’d just dress you and lay you in a wooden box and put
the box in the ground and bury you if you wasn’t in no insurance or nothing.

**Scales:** Well now, I was going to ask, those people that went up north when they came back were they looked at differently, the blacks that decided to migrate up there?

**Pitts:** Uh-huh.

**Scales:** When they come back and visit would they be the same people or would they be looked at kind of differently?

**Pitts:** You mean looked at by the whites or blacks?

**Scales:** Both.

**Pitts:** No, people would be glad to see them and a lot of people went back with them. A lot of people would go back with them just like if you leave and go up north and I’m related to you, my sister or my brother or something, if you come back then you tell me how it is sometimes I go back with you or we’d go back with you. Sometimes the whole family would get up and go.

**Scales:** Oh, yeah?

**Pitts:** Uh-huh, sure would. A lot of times the whole family would leave and go north. We had a bunch of people to leave of the plantation and go north.

**Scales:** And would they have cars and fancy things?

**Pitts:** When they would come back, uh-huh. When they would come back they’d have. That’s what make people go with them see because like they’re doing so good people would go back with them. Get better jobs
and more money because they wasn’t paying no money here worth
nothing see. They’d go up there where they were paying big money and
get those jobs.

Scales: Did you ever go up that far?
Pitts: Yeah, I’ve been there but not to live. My son went up there. My son was there, my oldest son after he come out of the Army he went on to Chicago and he stayed there for sixteen years.

Scales: Oh, yeah?
Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: How did people get their news about what was happening in the community?
Pitts: Newspaper. People take papers.

Scales: Did they have a black paper?
Pitts: Uh-uh, no, yeah, well they had a black paper. I was trying to study what that black paper was. I done forgot the name of it now. Was a legion, I done forgot the name of that paper. They had a black paper but it wasn’t coming from Greenwood.

Scales: Oh, no?
Pitts: Uh-uh, wasn’t coming out of Greenwood. Greenwood always had “Commonwealth.”

Scales: What about that time back then do you think is really, really important that people should know about, the signs of Jim Crow?
Pitts: What you mean?
Scales: Like sometimes when historians write history they will leave some things out that are really important. I’m saying that what do you think about your experiences during those times, you know, would you like, do you think people should really know about?

Pitts: Well, I don’t really know anything that they should know about right now. I can’t think.

Scales: Or a lesson that you may have learned growing up during those hard times.

Pitts: I can’t think of nothing that really went on that’s hid, you know, that’s still hid. I can’t remember. I can’t recall nothing that went on back then that’s still hid because everything has came out, uh-huh.

Scales: Did blacks have cars back then?

Pitts: Yes, a few, a few blacks had cars but not a lot.

Scales: Did your father ever have a car?

Pitts: Uh-huh, my uncle had one.

Scales: Your uncle had one?

Pitts: Uh-huh, my uncle always had one and my daddy had one.

Scales: What kind of car was it?

Pitts: The first car it was a Nash but I can’t remember what year but it was an old Nash. It was old.

Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh, the ’28 Fords was out but I don’t remember when they came out. I don’t remember my people having one of those.
Scales: Okay. What did your husband do for a living? Did he work on the place too?

Pitts: Uh-huh, yeah, he worked. He worked on the place. Now he’s a lot older than I am. He could tell you a lot more than I could tell you.

Scales: Maybe I could talk to him too.

Pitts: Yeah, he could tell you because he said when he got his license he paid a quarter for them, his driver’s license. And he said he has worked for twenty-five cents a day.

Scales: Rough times.

Pitts: Rough times, rough times but when I got big enough to start working I was getting three dollars a day, you know. We made three dollars a day and we’d get two dollars a hundred for picking cotton, two and a half, two dollars or two and a half a hundred for picking cotton.

Scales: Okay. When did you all get married?


Scales: Oh, yeah?

Pitts: Uh-huh.

Scales: And did you have your ceremony there on your land?

Pitts: No, went to the courthouse and married at the courthouse.

Scales: Would they ever have people get married right there on the land?

Pitts: You could get married at the church. You could get married at home. You could get married anywhere you wanted to. A lot of people married
at their home. A lot of people married at the church. And a lot of people went to the courthouse.

Scales: If people got married at their homes on that plantation who would do the marriage?

Pitts: Your pastor, your preacher. You always had a pastor of your church, he would marry you and if not that you’d go to the courthouse and get married. A lot of people had church weddings at the church and the pastor would marry them at the church. Wherever you get married if it’s out, if it wasn’t at the courthouse your pastor married you or some preacher, you know. You’d get some preacher, just any preacher. A lot of people just get a preacher to marry them. Buy the license, get a preacher to marry you and you sign them and take them to the courthouse and get them notarized.

Scales: Would people have any time to spend with each other like for a honeymoon?

Pitts: No, people wasn’t able to go no honeymoon. You get married today, you go back to work tomorrow, you know, back then, you know. But later, you know, people went when they got married they’d go on their honeymoon because they had started to working and making big money so they could do this later. But back then, no, people didn’t hardly go on no honeymoon unless it was somebody, well you found a few families had a little money, you know. Some people always have been fortunate than others, you know.

Scales: Right. Were there any people that would talk about Africa back then?
Pitts: Uh-uh, no.

Scales: No ()?

Pitts: No, didn’t talk about that.

Scales: At what age did you realize that there was a difference between whites and blacks and how they were treated?

Pitts: I knew all along before I grew up with it, you know. I knew all along since I was big enough to know. I know you had to Mr. and Mrs. Everybody, all the whites.

Scales: Would you have to call the children?

Pitts: No, well, when they got teenagers they wanted you to call them Miss and Mister. When they got big like eighteen, nineteen years old you had to Miss and Mr. them, Mrs. them.

Scales: And you could have been older than them.

Pitts: Yeah, yeah, yeah, older people had to say Mr. and Mrs.

Scales: As a grown woman would they call you by?

Pitts: Mrs.? No, they’d call you by your name. Didn’t care how old you was. You get real old it was aunt and uncle. Just like him they’d sit on the porches, hi uncle. It was an older lady sitting there, hi auntie, how you doing.

Scales: So how did that make you feel when that would happen?

Pitts: Back then you didn’t have a choice. You know what I’m saying. You didn’t have a choice. You going to say something and get beat up or killed, you know. What you going to say?
Scales: Is there anything you’d like to say?

Pitts: No, that’s basically it with me. That’s basically the way I grew up.