Interview with Willie Harrell

June 29, 1995
Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
Memphis (Tenn.)

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Interview With
Willie Harrell

Memphis, Tennessee
June 29, 1995

Interviewed By
Mausiki Stacey Scales

Unedited Transcript by
1. **Harrell**: H-a-r-r-e-l-l. Harrell.

2. **Scales**: And your first name.


4. **Scales**: Ok. When did you come to the Memphis area.

5. **Harrell**: Oh, I don't know. I was young when I left Mississippi and come here to Memphis.

   Way back. I forgets what year, but that was way back there when I left Mississippi and come to Memphis. I left Mantee, Mississippi come to Memphis. I was just a young boy then.

6. **Scales**: What are your early memories of Memphis?

7. **Harrell**: I don't know. It's been a long time. It's been a long time since I left Mississippi and come to Memphis.

8. **Scales**: Why did you family come here? Why did you come here?

9. **Harrell**: I come here on account of, see, I was on a plantation. I got that time. It was tough on a plantation, you know. You know, a plantation like you farming and all. That down there the other side of Parchman, Mississippi. You hear tell of that?

10. **Scales**: Parchman?

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11. **Harrell**: Yeah. Right down there from Drew, Mississippi. Down in there. I was down there for years. Farming. On a plantation. And it got so tough from down there I left there and come to Memphis.

12. **Scales**: Did your entire family move up to Memphis.

13. **Harrell**: Yeah. All of my people's up here and my grandma and my granddaddy, they dead. I got a cousin live right there. We was the same place and raised together and she here and all. The rest of my family they still down there in Mississippi.

14. **Scales**: What attracted your family to this area here?

15. **Harrell**: Just got tired of the country and we just come here.

16. **Scales**: What did they do when they came into the city.

17. **Harrell**: What kind of work? They did housework. She used to do housework, but I worked for Memphis Housing Authority. I worked there 25 years. That's where I retired at. That's where I retired, at Memphis Housing Authority.

18. **Scales**: Were there a lot of black businesses?

19. **Harrell**: Naw. There wasn't no black businesses down there for no colored. It was all for whites. And that time of year, no.

20. **Scales**: About when was that?
21. **Harrell:** I can't recall when it was at. That was way back there. Everything you had to do was outside of the door. It wasn't inside the house like a bathroom. We had to take a bath in a bathtub in front of the fireplace in the house. They didn't have it like it is here, when I was coming up. Uh huh. It was in the country. Didn't nothing have it but the white people. Colored didn't have nothing like that. You couldn't go in a front door down there. You had to go in the back. During that time, if you was allowed to go into white folks house, you had to go around to the back. They used to feed you outside of the door. Outdoor. You wadn't allowed to go in there. That's been some years back there.

22. **Scales:** How would that make you feel if you had been treated like that?

23. **Harrell:** In that time, it made me feel bad. After I got big enough to realize, when I got big enough to realize it and since I been here in Memphis the only time that things change now on account of Dr. Martin Luther King, you know. He changed a lot of things. We couldn't drink water or go in places here in Memphis until they had that riot, you know. He got things. We was on the bus, you had to sit in the back on the bus, and now you sit on the front. See that made it a whole lot different than us then.

24. **Scales:** Were there any leaders before him or before that time?

25. **Harrell:** Naw. It wadn't none. It wadn't no leaders or nothing before then. He's the only one straightened out this country. Dr. Martin Luther King lost his life on it straightening out this country, 'cause if he didn't it'd have been just like it was then. It was tough when I come up from Mississippi. When I was born and raised in Mississippi, it was tough. They didn't
have, people, ladies have babies, they had mid-wife at home in the house. That's back there. Way back there in them days.

26. Scales: People would come to the house.

27. Harrell: And deliver babies. I was born, they delivered me in the house. My mama had me in the house. They delivered me in the house. It ain't like going to the hospital when they treat them, when I had any children.


29. Harrell: Yeah. It would be a mid-wife, ladies.

30. Scales: How did they learn how to do that?

31. Harrell: That's what I don't understand. That's what I don't understand how they learnt to do that, but I know several of them back there that delivered babies at the house. I don't know how they come to learn to that, you know, cause I was small, but I can remember it. Yeah, I can remember that in them days.

32. Scales: Did they have black doctors during that period.

33. Harrell: No, they didn't have no black doctors. Wadn't nothing but white doctors. Back there then, there wadn't nothing but white doctors. That's all. Just white doctors. They didn't have no black doctors then, back then.

34. Scales: Could you describe your neighborhood where you were growing up.

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35. **Harrell:** Well, it was down there, when I was growing up 'fore I left there, it was down there at Mantee, Mississippi on a plantation. That's when I was growing up. I left there when I was young. Come here to Memphis. I was young then.

36. **Scales:** What would you do for entertainment here in Memphis?

37. **Harrell:** When I come here to Memphis?

38. **Scales:** Yeah.

39. **Harrell:** What I did? I didn't do nothing, but get out and try to find a job. That's what I did. Got out and tried to find me a job and got from where I is now.

40. **Scales:** What was your first job?

41. **Harrell:** First job I worked at was at Crosstown Storage moving furniture. It used to be down here on ( ). That's the first job I had. Naw, that wasn't the first in Memphis. The furniture factory was the first one I had before they moved it from there down on Brook. That was back there years ago when that Memphis Furniture Factory was over there on Dudley.

42. **Scales:** What did you do?

43. **Harrell:** I was stacking furniture. Warehouse. You know they was making furniture, back there then, they were making furniture like couches and beds and things. And I was stacking them back in the stockroom.

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44. **Scales**: How much did you get paid for that?

45. **Harrell**: I wasn't getting but 25 cents an hour. Twenty five cents an hour. When I started working for Memphis Housing Authority, I wasn't getting but $1.25 an hour. So they raised it until they got a union in there. Then they raised it on up.

46. **Scales**: Did the white people get paid the same wages as the black did?

47. **Harrell**: Naw. The white got paid more than the blacks did. They come in there, whites come in there higher, they bring themselves up. A colored come in there, wasn't getting, I worked for 25 cents an hour. And they would make, say about a dollar and a half or more an hour.

48. **Scales**: Would you all be doing the same amount of work?

49. **Harrell**: Yeah. We be doing the same work. Working the same, right side by side.

50. **Scales**: Would you all ever say anything about that?

51. **Harrell**: Said something about it, but wasn't nothing we could do about it. Else work or go home. That's what they tell you. So they didn't have no choice. Back there then you had to work, but see things back there then was cheaper than what they was now. You can take, say $1.50, and go to the store and buy a lot of groceries, but you can't take $100 and go to the store and buy no groceries now as high as stuff is. You see what I mean. Back then in them days things was cheap, but now it's done gone up.
52. **Scales:** Where was your neighborhood that you first moved to in Memphis?

53. **Harrell:** Over here on Porter.

54. **Scales:** Okay. On Porter Street.

55. **Harrell:** Yeah. On Porter Street. When I left Mississippi, that's where I came. On Porter Street.

56. **Scales:** Were people home owners? Did they own their own homes?

57. **Harrell:** No. Rent. When I come in, my auntie was staying on Porter Street in a big, old, tall, rooming house. That was years ago and she's been dead years ago. Uh uh. That's when I left from Mississippi and I come here. The people weren't owning their own homes then. They were renting, and I used to room, had one room, you know. So I got on up and come here with this man and I been living with this man about 10 or 15 years.

58. **Scales:** Did people own cars then?

59. **Harrell:** No. Colored didn't own. They didn't know what a car was. Back when I was in the country, my uncle had an old A Model. Old T Model we called it. Naw, the peoples living, they didn't have no car. They didn't know what a car was. They wadn't able to buy a car. Didn't nobody have a car but white folks. Them big white people owns them plantations. Naw, we colored ain't knowed what no car is now, then, but now look at them at what they're driving now. When I was coming up, we didn't' know what a car was. Didn't
know nothing about but mules and tractors. That's all we knowed about. All we ever did.


60. Scales: Did you all get paid for farming the land?

61. Harrell: Yeah, at the end of the year. At the end of the year. Yeah. Say they allow you so much a month for food, you know. Back there then you was, a pair of shoes, you getting shoes with food stamps. Stuff was rationed then. It was back there then, lard and flour and stuff, we had to come to Memphis to get lard and flour back there then. They were rationed. They used to haul our groceries on like these school buses. They used to come to our house down them dirt roads in the country once a month. That's when we'd get our groceries. They hauled it on a school bus. Wadn't no stores like it is now. There wadn't no store, you know, and buy your food. I was back there then. I can't recall back there, but man I can remember good. Yes, I can remember it good, but down there now, the things done changed. All my people down there now got fine homes and cars, but when I come up they didn't have it, you see. They didn't have it.

62. Scales: So did you all own the farm.

63. Harrell: Naw, we didn't own no farm. We just worked on a farm. Yeah, so they give us so much a year and if we cleared anything like on the sale of cotton and everything and settle up and if we made anything, they would give it. If we didn't, we had to go over another year if we was going to stay on that plantation, but if we were going to move on another plantation,
well, that boss man come to pay for what we owe and move us on their plantation. That's the way they did.

64. **Scales**: What type of crops did you all raise?

65. **Harrell**: Cotton and corn and everything you could name. We raised it. Cotton and corn, gardens, and everything you could name back there then. That's all they ever knowed was to do it. Cotton and corn. Beans. Peas. Peanuts and potatoes and everything. Yeah. At the end of the year. That's what we did.

66. **Scales**: What types of things would you all do for holidays?

67. **Harrell**: Nothing, but like fourth of July we might go to a picnic they allow them to have, you know. A big picnic out in the woods, you know. That's once a year. That's all we would go. That's the only where to go. When they laid by the crops in July, you got something else still to do. You still working. You don't never have no, you say, off. When they lay the crop by in July, you still cutting wood or doing something, you know. The whole year.

68. **Scales**: Did the people you all worked for treat you fair?

69. **Harrell**: Naw, naw, naw, naw, naw. I was down there at the plantation, when I left there I had to leave there at night. I left there at night. They hemmed me up in the barn like they feed mules and they whipped me. When I got here, I had to go out there to Gaston Hospital. They like to killed me down there. I had to slip off at night. When I left Mississippi, I left at

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night. I laid across the railroad track in Mississippi. The train woke me up and I took a handkerchief and flagged and caught the train and come here to Memphis. You had to leave there at night. You couldn't leave from down there in the day time. People catch you and kill you.

70. Scales: So you had to work for them or they would kill you.

71. Harrell: Yeah, you had to work for them. They had plenty of towels and mules and things. You had to get them up in the evening and feed 'em. Do all that stuff.

72. Scales: So it was like slavery?

73. Harrell: Yeah, it was slavery times. You see that picture on tv back here where the old timey slavery was. That's the way it was when I come up in the country.

74. Scales: So when they caught you they thought you were trying to leave.

75. Harrell: Yeah, they'd take you back and whip you. If they'd catch you trying to leave, they'd take you back there and whip you. Fasten you up in the barn and whip you, back there then. It's just like old slavery time.

76. Scales: So that happened?

77. Harrell: Yeah. Yeah. That happened to me. That's right.

78. Scales: So how did you manage to work out a plan to leave?

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79. **Harrell**: I'm telling you. I left at night. When they was in the bed asleep, round two and three o'clock at night. I got by their house at night when they was in the bed. I left there at night time. I didn't leave in the day time. You couldn't leave in the day. I left in the night when everybody was asleep. Round twelve. I never will forget it. I left there around about two or three o'clock that night and caught the train and come into Memphis.

80. **Scales**: So you were by yourself.

81. **Harrell**: Yeah, I was by myself. I was by myself, 'cause my granddaddy and grandma had done left from there. They left from there and come to Drew and I was in the hills.

82. **Scales**: Did they have to sneak and leave too?

83. **Harrell**: Well, naw. They didn't have to do it, cause, see, when they settled up at the end of the year, they paid off, but I just stayed on, you know. I was going to stay on til another year, but they got so bad I had to leave there. I had to run away from there at night.

84. **Scales**: Was Memphis different than living there?

85. **Harrell**: Yeah, Memphis was a little different. Memphis was a whole lot different than it is now when I come here.

86. **Scales**: No, I mean, between the place where you ran from.

87. **Harrell**: It wasn't nothing, too far. Out from Houston, Mississippi. Do you know where Houston, they call, Mississippi? Man picked me up, said, naw, that's too far. It wadin't too
far afore I left and come here. Naw. It wadin't too far. I was down there back here last year. But see, they all dead now. All them people's dead I was down there. Yeah, they dead down there now. Shoot, I didn't even know the town it'd been so long since I had been down there. I got a sister live down there now. That's the reason I was down there about a year ago. I got a sister still live down there on the same place I lived.

88. Scales: You said when you came here you had to go to the hospital.

89. Harrell: Yeah, John Gaston. They called it a bowl now. You know John Gaston out there now. They call it a bowl. That's where I had to go when I first come here.

90. Scales: And they took care of you there?

91. Harrell: Yeah. They treated me out there. They treated me out there and when I left Mississippi.

92. Scales: Did they have black doctors and nurses.


94. Scales: Okay, but in Gaston.

95. Harrell: Yeah, in Gaston. They had doctors. They got doctors here now. Black doctors and nurses, but they didn't have in Mississippi.

96. Scales: So that was the name of the hospital. Gaston's.
97. **Harrell**: Yeah, but they call it the bowls now. They changed it.

98. Yeah, Bowls Hospital. Yeah. Bowls Hospital. Now. It was, I first come here, they called it John Gaston. All nothing but colors, cause see, colored wadn't able to go to no hospital.

They didn't have no insurance or nothing. You understand. That's the only hospital they had to go to.

99. **Scales**: So here there would be mid-wives too.

100. **Harrell**: No, no mid-wives. I remember him. That's when I stayed in the country. Wadn't no mid-wives here. They all, when they have a baby they goes out there to the hospital.

That's when I was staying in the country. I remember mid-wives. Not here.

101. **Scales**: Was there any black newspapers here?

102. **Harrell**: Yeah, I know one. The only one I know is black, I can't call the name, but it's the black newspaper here.

103. **Scales**: What other types of way did the blacks get their news other than a newspaper?

104. **Harrell**: Nothing, but on the tv or radio as I know. The *Commercial*. That ain't a black paper, that's a white paper. *Commercial*. *Press Citizen* or whatever you call that thing.

That's a black paper. The only way we'd get our news was on the tv and radio.

105. **Scales**: Were there any black organizations here like the NAACP when you came?
Harrell: If it was, I don't remember, but I think it was. I can't remember. I can't remember, but I believe it was. But I didn't know anything about it, you know, until I got on up in age and then I found out. Yeah.

Scales: Were your family an educated people? Did they go to school?

Harrell: Naw. We couldn't go to no school. You take me. I didn't go to school but once or twice out of the year. That's right. I was in the first grade. I can't read and write now, 'cause I didn't have the chance to go to school back then in them days. Cause they had schools, see, was on the plantation. You didn't have a chance to go to school and their school house just like an old house, you know. You had to cut wood and sit up on the heater. I didn't have a chance to go to school like children got now. Back there then there wadin't no school like it is now. You had to walk seven or eight miles to the school. But now they got all kinds of ways to go to school.

Scales: How about your mother and father and your grandparents?

Harrell: Well, they had a little education, but not much. They had a little education, but they didn't have much. If I had the chance, hey, if I had the chance of going to school now like a lot of these kids, man, I'd stay in the school. Now you can't even get a job picking up paper lessen you got some kind of education. That's the reason I was lucky to work for Memphis Housing all these 25 years. That's where I retired at.

Scales: Where did you first start working?
112. **Harrell**: Shoot. I don't know. Way back here. I can't even remember the year I started back there with them. See, that was a job that didn't call for no education. If it did, I wouldn't have been working there that long. See I was working out there in the project. Picking up paper. Over there in the projects. Have you seen them projects since you been here? Like Lamone Gardens over there. What your home town?

113. **Scales**: My home town is Atlanta.

114. **Harrell**: Atlanta, Georgia. I know my pastor down at church used to be my pastor, pastors a church down there in Atlanta, Georgia. Reverend G. W. Williams. Did you hear tell of that?

115. **Scales**: Did you do much traveling back then?

116. **Harrell**: Naw. You couldn't travel. You didn't have no way to travel. You didn't have hardly nothing to eat let alone talk about traveling. ( )

117. **Scales**: Were there places of business that you wouldn't go? Were there places here that you wouldn't go.

118. **Harrell**: Now.

119. **Scales**: In the thirties and forties and fifties.
120. **Harrell**: Yeah, there's a lot of places here I wouldn't go in Memphis right now. I wouldn't go to North Memphis right now. As far as I'd go from here to South Memphis and don't go too far down there.

121. **Scales**: Why wouldn't you go to North Memphis?

122. **Harrell**: Cause. North Memphis is just a bad place. I don't want to go to no places like that. In fact, I been, every where you go now it's bad, but I'd rather go to South than to go to North Memphis. I wouldn't go to North Memphis unless I'm going up there for business and right back. You tell 'em what they got going on in Memphis, hanging around. Uh uh! Too rough. I don't go no further than that Southland Mall and back here. Don't go there unless I'm going for some business.

123. **Scales**: Well, what types of thing were happening up in North Memphis during the forties and fifties?


125. **Scales**: Were there places that just served whites only that you weren't allowed to go?

126. **Harrell**: Yeah, it was a lot of places back there then you wadin't allowed to go. Whites.

127. **Scales**: Like where.
128. *Harrell*: Like in clubs and different other places. Cafeterias, where you eat at and stuff like that. Uh huh, wadn't no colored people allowed in 'em places.

129. *Scales*: So where would you go instead.

130. *Harrell*: At that time, where would I go. Nowhere. I would stay at home. Yeah.

             Nowhere, but stay at home.

131. *Scales*: Did you ever listen to a Joe Lewis fight?

132. *Harrell*: Yeah, I have listened to it on tv. Yeah, and radio.

133. *Scales*: How would people respond when Joe Lewis would win?

134. *Harrell*: They was for Joe Lewis. Everybody was for Joe Lewis was colored as I know they're for Joe Lewis. Just as well as so I was and Mike Tyson, Sugar Ray Robinson. I'm for that. I likes that. Yeah. I'm for it, you know. Sure is. Yes sir. It was rough them days when I come up. How old is you?

135. *Scales*: Twenty seven years old.

136. *Harrell*: Oh, Lord, have mercy. You're really young. You're really a little young.

137. *Scales*: Did your family go to church?

138. *Harrell*: Oh yeah. We had a church and all, church. Man, we used to go to church in the wagon, mule. My mama and grandpa and grandma used to load us up in the wagon. We
used to go to church. Hook them mules up and go to church and man, you could hear them old church's bell a mile before you get there. I loved church. I goes now every Sunday. I don't miss a Sunday now. I likes to go to church. See, I'm an usher. I'm obligation. I sings in the choir. Yeah. I love church.

139. Scales: Did people back then talk about superstitions and h'aints?

140. Harrell: Oh man, yeah. What you talking about! Yeah, they used to have us scared a many times. Like people die. You go over, live in an old country house, you better go to sleep. Made like they could see h'aints coming in the house and all that such a thing. Yeah, the old superstitions. Uh uh, yeah, they used to, used to have us scared a many a time. They'd see a h'aint pass the cemetry, made like they see a h'aint and all that stuff. Wouldn't be seeing nothing.

141. Scales: It wasn't real.

142. Harrell: No, it wasn't no real. That just was some old superstition they would say. I ain't never seen nothing. They tried to show me something like that. I ain't never seen nothing like that. Uh uh. Naw, sure haven't.

143. Scales: Would people back then use plants and things to help people get better? Plants, and berries, and roots?

144. Harrell: Yeah. Yeah. Like when you have a cold and stuff, they like get them old roots and boil it, you know, and make tea out of it and mull it. Mama and them used to get horse
stuff and boil it and make tea out of it. Pour pine tar and make tea for colds. Pine rosin off of a tree. You know, like chewing gum and all that. Mama and them used to get that many a days for, sure would. Them old swamp roots. Dig them up and boil them and give us tea, you know, to drink. Yeah, all that old stuff, man. Looks like it was better them days than it is now. You can't take that stuff now. No kind of way. We used to give us that Vicks Salve when you have a cold, paint you with Vicks Salve and grease your chest and put flannel cloth and put you in the bed when you got a cold. But you can't use that stuff now.

145. *Scales:* Why?

146. *Harrell:* Cause it says that stuff now they tell you can't use it. It'll kill you. Doctors don't 'quire that now. Uh uh, they don't 'quire that now. Uh uh.

147. *Scales:* How did people learn about those things?

148. *Harrell:* I don't know. Old people learned about it. They used to take that kerosene and give us a teaspoon and put sugar in it and take a match and burn it and they used to give it to us. We used to eat it like candy, you know. Yeah. You can't do that now. I thinks about that. It wadn't no sickness then like it is now. Naw, it wasn't no sickness then like it is now. Might go to the doctor. Doctor gives you that old different kind of medicine and stuff now. Shoot. I never did know nothingbout no high blood pressure til years ago. I went to the doctor and they found my pressure was high. Now I'm taking a pressure pill every day. Every day and I don't even feel it. They say you can't eat pork and different things. I can eat all the pork I want. I don't be dizzy or have no headache or nothing. But now I have to take
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a pressure pill every morning. A wad of pills. Potassium. Teaspoon of 'tassium and iron pills. Every morning. Ain't got enough iron in your blood and all that. I didn't never know what that was when I was a kid coming up in the country. Since I got here, you know, doctors and things. Wasn't nothing right there.

149. Scales: You said that there would be a bus that would bring your food?

150. Harrell: Yeah. A bus you see like these old school buses.

151. Scales: Right.

152. Harrell: Yeah. They be loaded down like groceries. They bring you shoes and everything.

153. Scales: So you all didn't eat the food off the farm you worked in.

154. Harrell: Yeah, they brings it to your house. See and they allow you so much a month. You get it off of that bus. That's just like a grocery store. You couldn't go to no grocery store. They didn't have that many in town. You food come out on a bus like that. Shoes. It was food stuff. Rationed. Shoes was rationed. You couldn't get but one pair of shoes a year off of the bus. That was way back yonder then.

155. Scales: Were there ever any incidents where people got hung?

156. Harrell: Yeah. Those that got hung. Shit, you couldn't even look at a white woman hard back then when I come up. You would get hung. Yeah. Shore would. A many a times back here, that colored boy whistled at that white gal. They killed down here in Mississippi. You
remember that? Yeah. Shore will. Back then was just all slavery times. Fasten you up and whip you just like you a dog or mule, animal or something.

157. Scales: They would tie you?

158. Harrell: Yeah, they would tie you up or hem you up in a barn or something. Be brothers on the plantation, two or three brothers, old white honkies, you know, wear them old hats. You see them old hats they got on look like old Texas hats. Old honkies I call 'em. Yeah. Might beat you to death.

159. Scales: Did the people ever try to fight back?

160. Harrell: Naw, they couldn't try to fight back and get killed. Couldn't try to fight back then in them days. They would kill you. There wouldn't be nothing did about it. Yeah. Back then you couldn't fight back. I would say, I look at it every Sunday morning on Channel 13 over there in Haiti and how them children, you know, how them children is, I think about that when I was coming up. We's coming up it was just something like that where I was living at. It was just something like that. You wore boots along there. Them overalls. My granddaddy wore a pair of boots until he couldn't get a string in 'em. But he tore them and just kept putting strings in 'em, you know, to walk on. Couldn't get no shoes or nothing like that til the end of the year. I can remember good.

161. Scales: Did people ever talk about slavery back then?

162. Harrell: Yeah, they talked about it. Shore did.
163. **Scales**: Are there any memories that come down in your family you could share with us?

164. **Harrell**: Naw. Naw. It wadn't none in my family. ( ) this year, there wadn't any. But it was tough back in them days when I come up. I couldn't see no better til I got here in Memphis and then later years, and years, things commence getting better. They were for colored.

165. **Scales**: How did you all survive those tough times?

166. **Harrell**: Just good in the Lord. That's what it was. Just good in the Lord until it got away from that. That's all. Used to live in houses, it was snowing. You look up and you see the blue sky. Rain in it. That's right. Tough. Had toilet outdoors, you know. You have to go out outdoors to do everything you do or at night you go in the cornfield. They have cornfield, cotton field right around the house. Go out there. Yeah. Like I tell you. It was rough back there in them days. I can't think of what year that was, but when I was coming up it was tough.

167. **Scales**: Did you all ever get any crops and bring them straight home after a work day?

168. **Harrell**: Naw. It was just at the end of the year when we got through picking cotton and then ginning the cotton and settling up and pulling corn and get all that stuff in. Potatoes and peanuts and things like that. Hay and stuff like that, until they got all that stuff in. By the time you got all that in it was nearly time to start another crop back. When you got through with that crop, it was nearly time for another.
169. **Scales:** Who would decide what crops to plant?

170. **Harrell:** The white guy, for we be on the plantation. The old white guys. They be the one. We be the one farming, but they be the ones getting the stuff for us to plant and do around with.

171. **Scales:** Now you said a black man could get hung for looking at a white woman. Would white men look at black women.

172. **Harrell:** Wadn't nothing going to be said about it. Wadn't nothing going to be did about it. But blacks couldn't look at no white. But whites could look at blacks all they wanted. Ain't going to be nothing did about it.

173. **Scales:** Did that happen?

174. **Harrell:** Yeah, that happened. Shore that happened. Yes sir, that happened right down there where I used to live on the plantation in the country. Yeah, that happened. Shore will. It was rough back down in there then. It ain't no better down there now.

175. **Scales:** When problems would come up in the family who would be the one to solve them?

176. **Harrell:** It would be the oldest people.

177. **Scales:** Oh yeah.

178. **Harrell:** Yeah, and there wouldn't be too much that was solved, cause they wouldn't hear you no how. They wouldn't listen at you no how.
179. Scales: Was there health care when you came to Memphis?

180. Harrell: There was here. Yeah. They wadn't no health care when I was in Mississippi.

Wadn't nothing but doctors and they had to take you to doctors there. Doctors had the office in their house, in the back of they house. It ain't like it was in here.

181. Scales: Did you ever go to the Red Sox games here?

182. Harrell: No.

183. Scales: No.


186. Harrell: Yeah.

187. Scales: Where was that?

188. Harrell: That's out there at the coliseum.

189. Scales: At the coliseum.

190. Harrell: Yeah.

191. Scales: Would the crowd be segregated? Would the blacks be in one section and the whites be in another.
192. Harrell: Naw. They all together.

193. Scales: All together.

194. Harrell: Yeah, here. They all together here. Just like it is anywhere else. Like on these buses now. Whites all on the same seats and everything. It wasn't like that then when I was coming up. You had to ride in the back of the bus. The whites was in the front and you at the back, but now it ain't like that.

195. Scales: Do you remember your neighbors when you first moved here?

196. Harrell: Naw, I don't remember. I got some friends stay up here now. Didn't know where they staying. Done forgot their names and everything. When I was growing up a kid with. I got some there. I cut all fences. I forget their names and everything. They come by here once in awhile and holler at me. We just got parted from one another.

197. Scales: During hard times would people get together and help each other?

198. Harrell: Naw, uh huh. They wouldn't get together and help one another. Hard times, people like, when I come up my friends they was on one plantation and I was on another. That's just the way it was.

199. Scales: Could you visit other people?
Harrell: Yeah, after hours, at night. You could go and visit. Some time on a Sunday you could go and visit, but through the week you couldn't because you'd be working all the time. You wouldn't have a chance to go to visit nobody.

Scales: Did you marry?

Harrell: No. Never have been married. No. Never have been married.

Scales: What type of values do you think your parents gave you? What did your parents give you to help you survive as a human being?

Harrell: Like when I was staying with 'em. Nothing. I was out on my own. I was on my own after I left my parents. I was out on my own. As far as I left my parents, I was in the world on my own. I never did give my parents no trouble or nothing. I never is been in no trouble. I ain't never had a police to arrest me or to stop me or say nothing to me. I ain't never been into nothing. I ain't never, like a kid coming up fighting and things, I ain't never been in a fight or nothing, with children or nothing when I was coming up.

Scales: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Harrell: Yeah. I got two brothers in Chicago and got one sister in Mississippi. Yeah.

Scales: Who were the people most important to you when you were coming up?
208. **Harrell**: My people. That's all then. My people. Taking my cousin over there. Me and her was growed up little kids together. We was growed up and I got some more, but they's in Mississippi now. They out from Clarksville down there now. We's all growed up together.

209. **Scales**: You said you went to school a couple of the months out of the year?

210. **Harrell**: Yeah.

211. **Scales**: How would they decide which months you were to go?

212. **Harrell**: It was when it rained and you couldn't do nothing in the field or you couldn't do no other kind of work just like it rained and you couldn't do nothing in the field that's when you had a chance to go to school, but as soon as the sun comes out like it is now and dry off you in the field. Never did have no chance to go to no school in them days.

213. **Scales**: What about during the winter?

214. **Harrell**: In the winter? The same way, cause you always doing something. Cutting wood or doing sometimes. Cross ties or saw mill or doing something in the winter.

215. **Scales**: Only when it rains.

216. **Harrell**: That the only way. I bet you I didn't go two days out of a month or a year or something to school.

217. **Scales**: Would there be whites in the school?
218. **Harrell:** No. Colored.

219. **Scales:** All black.

220. **Harrell:** Colored go to school. All whites, they had buses pick them up just like these school buses, come pick them up at they house, deliver them at three o'clock, but we had to walk three or four miles to school.

221. **Scales:** Do you remember your teachers?

222. **Harrell:** No. Lord, I couldn't remember them now, teachers I ever went to school with. I can't remember. I can't think that far back. That was too far and I was just say a kid then.

223. **Scales:** Do you remember any type of business in Mississippi that the people have other than the bus coming in, where people could support each other?

224. **Harrell:** Only business I know they have just like cotton mills or stores or hospitals and things. That's all. But colored couldn't work there. Wadn't nothing but white. Wadn't no colored working there. No nothing but white.

225. **Scales:** Could you shop there?

226. **Harrell:** You could go to town. Yeah. And shop there at them stores and then like you staying on a plantation, the white people loads coloereds up on the back of their pickup and take them to town and let them buy what they wanted and they pay for it. Overalls and

*Willie Harr29*
jumpers and shoes like that. They would pay for it. They wouldn't give you the money to go and shop. They'd take you to shop.

227. Scales: They would buy what you wanted.

228. Harrell: They would pay for it, yeah. After you get what you wanted, they would pay for it. They wouldn't give you the cash money like you go and shop now. You see what I'm talking about. They'd take you and you buy what you wanted and they'll pay for it.

229. Scales: But would you owe them back?

230. Harrell: Yeah, you owe them. You have to pay. See you be on the plantation. They would furnish you that for the year. Overalls and jumpers. Big long underwear in the winter time. I know you don't know anything about them. Them long, them drawers with the buttons in the behind. You know anything about that? Boy, I can sit there and remember that right now. I laugh at myself. I say the Lord has really been good to me, has blessed. I'm telling you the truth. I've really been blessed by him. I was lucky they didn't kill me when I come from Mississippi. They tried to, but I got away from down there. I got tired of that. I'd have stayed on down there they would have killed me. I left there at night. Shit, I layed across the railroad track. Train woke me up, you know, hitting the rail. I had a white handkerchief. I took it and did that and they blewed and flashed that light twice and when they got up there to me they just stopped and let the gate down and I walked on up in there and come right on here to Memphis.

231. Scales: You were sleeping on the railroad tracks?
232. **Harrell**: Yeah, it was around two or three o'clock in the morning when I left the plantation.

I left it was about three or four miles from the house in the woods.

233. **Scales**: You would have gotten run over by the train.

234. **Harrell**: I wasn't going to get run over by the train. See, the train woke me up, cause the train was about six or seven miles and they hit that trail and was blowing. It woke me up. I woked up and got up to see and I just stepped back and took that handkerchief and did three flags like that. When they pulled on up beside me, the man, the conductor, whatever you call him, he let the gate down and I walked on in there and come on to Memphis.

235. **Scales**: Did he charge you?

236. **Harrell**: Yeah. I had a ticket.

237. **Scales**: Okay.

238. **Harrell**: I had worked until I made enough money, I can't think how much a ticket was now, to come here to Memphis. That's right.

239. **Scales**: Was the train segregated? Was black and white people sitting in different places.

240. **Harrell**: Yeah. They was segregated. Yeah. Shore was, 'cause I had to go on the back of the train. Sit on the back. Yeah.

241. **Scales**: Were the conditions there the same that the front of the train had. Was it the same?

**Willie Harrell**
242. **Harrell**: Yeah, it had seats. Yeah. It was the same seats and things. Yeah, same seats and things. You know, it was in the front. It was in the back. But colored wadn't allowed to sit on the front. They had to go to the back.

243. **Scales**: Well, how did you feel about leaving your family when you ran away?

244. **Harrell**: I didn't have no family, when I left there. My people was down in the Delta. I felt good from leaving there. They wadn't with me. They was done there and I was down there and I was looking out for myself. Save my life, see. They was down there and I was here. Yeah, I was looking out for myself. That's what I was.

245. **Scales**: They were trying to whip you.

246. **Harrell**: Yeah. They wadn't trying. They whipped me. Wadn't nothing I could do and I was a kid.

247. **Scales**: You were a kid then?

248. **Harrell**: Yeah. It was two brothers. Two old white honkies. There wadn't nothing I could do.

249. **Scales**: Did they have a whip?

250. **Harrell**: Yeah they had a whip. Yeah. You know one of them things that's plaited and it sound like a blackjack. One of them things you hook your hand over in that whip, you know.
Yeah. Shit yeah, they whipped me. Shore. Wadn't nothing you could do, but take it. You try to resist they would kill you.

251. *Scales:* And they would do that to all of the black people on that farm?

252. *Harrell:* Yeah. If they, you know, do something wrong. That's right and all the blacks had left from there like I did. Left at night. Yeah, left like I did. They left that farm like I did at night.

253. *Scales:* Did any of them ever get caught?

254. *Harrell:* Yeah, some of 'em got caught and some of 'em didn't. Some of them got caught, and whipped, and carried back, but they still left.

255. *Scales:* How could they catch them?

256. *Harrell:* Catch them leave from there. Some of them didn't have sense enough. They'd call their self trying to get away from

257. SIDE B

258. *Harrell:* One or two o'clock they fall asleep. That's how I got away from there.

259. *Scales:* So the people that were watching you fell asleep.

260. *Harrell:* Yeah, and that's the way I got from there. Like coming out of the gate. They had a gate and they call something like across the gate. If you cross there in a car, they could
wake you up. You know, just like you crossing an old bridge, but see I didn't have no car. I just stepped across there, you see. They had the fences up and the stuff on there would electrocute you, but see I was smart enough I got across there and they were asleep, you know, passed right on by the house there. And hit that dirt road and got in the woods. I bet you I walked about five or six miles in the woods. Onliest way I could see, you see these little lightening bugs at night light up. That's the onliest way I could see at night and I was all, clothes was tore off where I was going through the woods and trees, you know, and couldn't see it was tearing my clothes off until I got from there where I could catch this train.

261. Scales: So the only light you saw was from those bugs.

262. Harrell: Man, I was as raggedy as a pan of trout when I got here in them. Didn't have nothing but what I had and they was tore all off. Old pair of shoes. Bare with no socks or nothing on.

263. Scales: Were you afraid?

264. Harrell: Yeah, I was scared, until I got here and it took me about, shit, it was a year or two before I got back, you know, like I should, normal. Yeah. 'Cause I didn't know nothing about Memphis then and I trying to find a job and they was taking me. My Auntie was taking me around trying to find a job when I come here to Memphis, 'cause I didn't know nothing about Memphis. I was a kid.

265. Scales: What did you aunt do?
266. Harrell: She was doing work. She was working at Grid Iron downtown when they had a place they called Grid Iron downtown. She was up here way before I left from Mississippi. She was working down there and I come here and she was taking me before she go to work try to find a job. That's when I find a job working at Crosstown Storage. That was moving people, you know, furnishes and stuff.

267. Scales: Were there plenty of jobs for black during that time?

268. Harrell: Naw, it wadn't no plenty of jobs for no blacks to do, for whites, it wadn't for no black. It just come here in later years where blacks could get a job. All white.

269. Scales: What were the jobs for the whites and what were the jobs for the blacks?

270. Harrell: They was the same thing, but the white was getting more pay more than the colored was. Work along there aside the white but you wouldn't be getting what they be getting, the pay they's getting, you wouldn't be getting. You just be trying to make a living and during that time, the stuff was like I told you real cheap than it is now. Shoot you could take four or five dollars and go to the store and buy enough groceries to last you a month or two, but you can't do it now. Not now. The stuff's done got up there now. Yeah.

271. Scales: Can you remember at what point you felt as if you were a man rather than a boy ( ).

272. Harrell: Yeah, I felt, when I got a little older than what I is I felt a man from my boyhood. When I got to where I could manage and take care of myself. Shore did, yeah.

273. Scales: So was that when you got here?
274. **Harrell**: Yeah. That's when I got here, but it took me about a couple of years though before I could get myself together to see, realize I was a man instead of a boy. But when I was down there it was just like the penitentiary or something. Couldn't go nowhere. Certain time to go somewhere. Certain time to come in. Didn't have the freedom as I got now. That's right. That make a whole lot of difference. Yeah. Shore will.

275. **Scales**: Well, was there a black barber shop here?

276. **Harrell**: A barber shop?

277. **Scales**: Yeah. Who would cut your hair?

278. **Harrell**: In the country, my granddaddy would cut it with the clippers. You know what clippers is? Them clippers, hand clippers. My granddaddy cut hair when I was a little kid coming up. I didn't know what a barber shop was until I come here. Wadn't no barber shop in no Mississippi there. They cut hair with the scissors and clippers. Hand clippers and the scissors. And you know when shaving, you know them old shaving brush. Do you know what them is?

279. **Scales**: No.

280. **Harrell**: You ever see one? Shaving brush. You take soap and lather your face with it.

281. **Scales**: Oh yeah.
282. **Harrell**: I see 'em in the drug store down here now. I tell 'em I'm going to get me old time.

   Back there when I was a kid. Uh huh. Yeah. Naw, wadn't no barber shop.

283. **Scales**: How about when you got to Memphis? What barber shop did you go to.

284. **Harrell**: When I got to Memphis, I just went to any barber shop.

285. **Scales**: Ham's?

286. **Harrell**: I just went to any. I said any barber shop. I didn't have no certain barber shop to go to when I first come here. I can't remember the first barber shop I went when I come here.

   Only one now I know, onliest one I go to now is right there on Collins, but when I first came here, I can't remember, down there on Beale somewhere. It ain't down there now. On Beale down there. Ain't nary one down there.

287. **Scales**: Was it a black shop?

288. **Harrell**: Yeah, it was black. It was black. That's the only one I know anything about a black barber shop when I come here. Shore was.

289. **Scales**: Did you join any clubs or anything like that?

290. **Harrell**: No. Didn't know what that was. No clubs. Didn't know what no club was in no Mississippi. They didn't have no clubs for no colored in Mississippi. Clubs was all white.

   When I come up, wadn't no club.

291. **Scales**: The black wouldn't have any type of entertainment?

293. **Scales**: Did you ever sing?

294. **Harrell**: No, we never sang. Nothing but them old jukeboxes. You might go to the grocery store. They had them old jukeboxes in there, you know. Naw, you wouldn't know what no singing was, going out singing at no clubs. Wadn't nothing like that in no Mississippi.

295. **Scales**: At night you all would sing or anything like that.

296. **Harrell**: Sang at home in the bed or sang around the fireplace somewhere at home. Naw, you didn't go out nowhere, no singing. They didn't have nothing they'd want you to go out and do no singing or nothing like that. No sir. Shore wasn't.

297. **Scales**: Did they treat the women like the men on those plantations?

298. **Harrell**: Not as bad.

299. **Scales**: No.

300. **Harrell**: Naw, not as bad, but they treated them rough enough, but not as bad as they did men, you know, cause women always wash and iron for 'em, you know. They always have them washing and ironing for 'em. We men always have to be working on the farm or something.

301. **Scales**: Did they call you by your first name or ...
302. **Harrell**: They always called me son or Harrell. That's all they ever knowed of my name.

They called me Harrell or son. That's what they used to call me when I was coming up.

That's all they ever called me. Son and Harrell.

303. **Scales**: The older people, would they call them by their first name?

304. **Harrell**: Called them Whitman or something like that or uncle. Call them uncle. Yeah, them old white folks call the older people uncle or auntie. Uncles or aunties. Women was aunties and old men was uncles. That's what they were called.

305. **Scales**: How did people feel about them calling them by ...

306. **Harrell**: They have to take it. They feel just good about it. Wadn't nothing they could do.

They wadn't nothing they could do. They had to feel good over it, cause there's nothing they could do about it, but take it. That's right. That's all.

307. **Scales**: How would people get news on the plantation?

308. **Harrell**: The news about what?

309. **Scales**: Like about something happening ... 

310. **Harrell**: On the radio.

311. **Scales**: The radio.
312. **Harrell:** We had an old radio. You ever see them old record players what spin around. Old timey radio. That's the only way we got news. Didn't know what no tv and telephone was then that day. Then don't no black have nothing like that. It's all white.

313. **Scales:** When was the first time you saw ...

314. **Harrell:** Tv? When I come to Memphis. Then I didn't know what it was. The telephone. When I first come here to Memphis. Don't have nothing like that when I was coming up. They ain't no telephones or no tv or nothing like that. I can't remember they had no tv in Mississippi then. I can't remember no telephone was in Mississippi then. The white had it that I can remember, but I can't remember no tv. And we used to have old record players. Would just turn around. You had a needle in it. A needle. I can remember that.

315. **Scales:** Do you remember any of the songs you listened to?

316. **Harrell:** Church songs. I can't remember 'em now. Church songs. Put me to mind of last Sunday. I heard what you call sing one of them old church songs on the tv when I was getting ready last Sunday morning, but I can't think of it now. But that's when I was a boy going to church there. Call myself, you know, turning on the mourning bench, professing religion, you know. I was baptized in the pool where horses and mules were drinking water out on the plantation. That's where I was baptized at. The horses was on one side and we was on the other side baptizing. Preacher was baptizing me and my cousin over there.

317. **Scales:** So, was it a black preacher?
318. **Harrell:** Yeah.

319. **Scales:** It was part of the people that worked there.

320. **Harrell:** Yeah, down on the plantation. Yeah, but them preachers they didn't stay there then. They was from up here in different places. West Point, Mississippi. Starward, Mississippi. But they come there in the country to carry on a revival at the church and they baptized in the pool then. They didn't baptize in the church like they do now. I was baptized in a pond where the horses, cows drank out. Snakes and bull frogs was in there. Yeah. That's where I was baptized at. Yeah. Shore was. It ain't like it is now, baptizing pools in the church. That was old, that was back there old times then. Way back there.

321. **Scales:** Did a lot of people get together for your baptism?

322. **Harrell:** Oh man, yeah. It was like a dirt road like this be full of 'em, going down to the pool, be baptized. A lot of preachers and a lot of members and they always be full, be marching to the pool to have baptize. Then after you change clothes you go back to the church and get them wet clothes off and you go back to church.

323. **Scales:** Now did people say things about slavery?

324. **Harrell:** Then?

325. **Scales:** Yes.

326. **Harrell:** Yeah.
327. **Scales**: Like what.

328. **Harrell**: There was slavery there. They were slavery times then.

329. **Scales**: About times, old, old times. Did they talk about those times? Like your grandparents.

330. **Harrell**: Yeah, they used to talk about them. My granddaddy and them used to tell us a lot of things we didn't know before they died, you know. Old slavery times and stuff. They used to tell us about. I looked at that on the tv and it was just like it was when I was coming up like there was back here. That old picture you see's on the tv where they tie 'em up and whip 'em. You remember seeing it.

331. **Scales**: Roots?

332. **Harrell**: Roots. Yeah, puts me in the mind. That's the way they did us in Mississippi. That's right. Wadn't no difference in it. Wadn't no difference in it. Shore wadn't.

333. **Scales**: Would they sell you to other people?

334. **Harrell**: Naw. They wouldn't sell you to nobody. They just lie like the other mens on the plantation. If you didn't want to stay with them if you owe 'um some, this honkie would come over here and buy you from this man and you go and live with him and work the crop there a year. That's the way they did. That's the way they did.

335. **Scales**: Did people get separated from their families like that.

Willie Harrell
336. **Harrell:** Yeah, some of 'em did. Yeah, some of 'em went separated. A farm be on one plantation and some be on the other and they just gets separated from 'em.

337. **Scales:** Husbands and wives?

338. **Harrell:** Yeah. Husbands and wives. Shore did. Yes sir. Sometime I sit up in there and I get to thinking about that and then when the Roots come on, that time when they have it on, I cut it off. I couldn't stand to look at it, 'cause I went through some of it. I just flipped it off, you know, because it put me in a memory of what I used to go through. Yeah, you know, when I was coming up. I couldn't stand to see it.

339. **Scales:** Do you think a lot has changed?

340. **Harrell:** Yeah. A lot has changed now and there's a whole done change now since it was when I was coming up. Shore will.

341. **Scales:** Were your people always in Mississippi?

342. **Harrell:** Always in Mississippi, yeah. Always in Mississippi. Shore was.

343. **Scales:** Did you ever want to travel or ...

344. **Harrell:** Didn't have no way to travel. Didn't have enough to travel, no money. No colores didn't travel then. If they traveled, whites. Never did travel then, cause they didn't have nothing to travel with. No money or nothing. Like you take a vacation. You never
have no vacation, you know, like you go out of town and see yore people or something like that. No. Didn't have the money. Had to stay there and work all the time. That's right.

345. **Scales:** Were there any bad sections growing up where people were known to have bad character?

346. **Harrell:** What? Like fighting or something?

347. **Scales:** Yes.

348. **Harrell:** Yeah. There was a lot of that happening too. It was bad like that. It wasn't as bad as it is now. Things weren't like it is there now. When I was coming up, you could sleep out there on your porch or out there in the yard, but now you can't do it. Nobody never would bother you, but now these days you can't hardly sit on your porch. Drive by shooting going around. But then them days, you could sleep out on the porch, if the mosquitoes didn't eat you up. Wouldn't nobody bother you, but you couldn't do it now.

349. **Scales:** Did they have the Masons and the Eastern Stars organization?

350. **Harrell:** Not as I 'member. I can't remember they had nothing like that in the country. They just had that since I been here. That's the only thing I can remember. I don't 'member no Mason or Eastern Star or nothing like that while I was in the country. I didn't hear tell of it. It's since I come here. Well, my organization I belong to is over here on Trigg. Sir Knight on Trigg.

351. **Scales:** Sir Knight.

Willie Harrell
Willie Harrell: Yeah, Sir Knight on Trigg. I joined it when it wasn't but 25 cents, but they didn't have nothing like that when I was coming up in the country.

Scales: What types of things did you all do?

Harrell: We used to have different things, you know. Different things. Eating and stuff like that.

Scales: Did women have their own groups?

Harrell: Women had their own Eastern Star. They groups. Their large one's down here on Beale.

Scales: On Beale Street.

Harrell: Women's Eastern Star.

Scales: Did people ever talk about Africa during those times?

Harrell: Yeah, I have heard a few of 'em talking about Africa. Over there in Africa, in the country I heard them talk about a little of it then. Not much as they talk about it now when I was coming up.

Scales: What would they say?

Harrell: They was just talking about it. Said you'd go over there to Africa, and colored people, you know, over in there. That's all I ever hear them say.
363. **Scales**: Did people ever talk about trying to go back?

364. **Harrell**: Naw. They just talking about sending people from here over there to Africa.

   That's when I was in the country. Well, that's what they always talk about. Colored belongs in Africa. That's their state or whatever you call it, is Africa. Don't belong over here at all.

365. **Scales**: Did you all have your Ku Klux Klan down there?

366. **Harrell**: Yeah. They had Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi. Shore was. Them whites. Yeah, they had that in Mississippi down there. Shore is.

367. **Scales**: Did you ever see them?

368. **Harrell**: Naw, I never seen them, but I hear tell of 'em, you know. I never did see 'em, but I always hear tell of 'em. Ku Klux Klan. I never did see 'em. I always hear 'em talk about 'em.

369. **Scales**: Were there ever times when people had to help someone run away?

370. **Harrell**: Yes, some people at that time had to help 'em run away. There's a lot of people had to help people run away from down there.

371. **Scales**: How would they help?

372. **Harrell**: Just help 'em get away from there. At night. That's the only way you can get away from there. At night. You couldn't get away from there in the day time, broad open day time. At night. They'd have it set up how they can get you away from there at night.
373. **Scales:** Oh yeah.

374. **Harrell:** Uh huh. Shore was.

375. **Scales:** Can you give me an example.

376. **Harrell:** I was just like a, take a plantation. You have to go so far and they be waiting on your in a car and get you away from there. That's the only way. When they sleeping, just like I tell you when I left there. Be late at night when they sleep. You can tell then. On a plantation you can tell when they go to sleep, cause the lights go out. When they put them lights out, you know they gone to bed then. That's the way you can get away from there at night. You couldn't get away from there in the day time 'cause they always watching. You couldn't get away in no broad open day time. You had to get away from there at night.

377. **Scales:** You watched the lights at night.

378. **Harrell:** Yeah. I watched the lights at night when they go out. I stayed up all night to wait til they go to sleep to get away from there. That's the only way I could get away. Couldn't get away in the broad open day time, 'cause they's too many watching you. I got away from there when everything was inside. Gone to sleep. That's when I made my get away. I mean I got away. I ain't been back there but once since I left from there and I'm 68 years old and that's been back last year and I was scared then. I went down there then 'cause my sister was sick. I was scared then. I spent the night. I didn't sleep the whole night I was down there, 'cause I was scared. It was still in me. See? Same place I was when they did all that they did to me, you know. I couldn't sleep, but it wasn't like it is now, but it just still was in me.

Willie Harrell
379. **Scales:** When did you make the decision to leave?

380. **Harrell:** I just made a decision to leave when they got tough on me.

381. **Scales:** How tough?

382. **Harrell:** At that time, wadn't nothing I could do. I couldn't get nowhere. Just like I'm in prison or something. Watching you and everywhere. You crook. Couldn't go nowhere. Had to stay there and get them cows and mules up and feed them. Five hundred and some cows and mules every day out of the week. You didn't have a chance to go nowhere. You couldn't go and visit nobody, your friends or nothing. You had to stay right there. I got tired. I made up my mind to get on away from there and I got away. Anything get tired. I got tired and got on away from there. That's what I did. Couldn't handle it no more. I'd a stayed on there probably been dead by now. Yeah.

383. **Scales:** You left by yourself.

384. **Harrell:** Yeah. I left by myself. I left some of my people down there. But self and God for us all, I was looking out for myself. They had to take care of their self.

385. **Scales:** Did any of them leave after you got here?

386. **Harrell:** Yeah. There's a plenty of them left and right here in Memphis since I left from around there.

387. **Scales:** They run away like you did.
388. Harrell: Yeah they did. Only thing, my sister, she still down there and you couldn't get a bull dozer to push her away from down there. She likes that. The time I was down there.

389. Scales: How long did she work for those people?

390. Harrell: Oh, she worked for them people. Oh shoot, she was small too. She worked for them people I don't know how long. Now she works to the hospital down there. She works at the hospital and she got her own house now. She married and have a man. They got their own home, automobiles and everything. But shit then, when I was coming up there was no such thing. Colored had no automobile and buying no homes down there. Nothing but white. She stayed on down there and I left. I was looking out for myself. If she wanted to stay down there and take it, that was her business, but I couldn't take no more of it. Got tired of it. I got bit and I got too.

391. Scales: Well, I don't have any more questions. If there is anything you'd like to add.

392. Harrell: That's bout the only thing I can remember. I could think of a lot of things, but it'd be me a sitting up by myself. Think a lot of things. I been misused and everything. I think of that. Sometime it gets next to me. You know how it'll come up, you know, but the Lord blessed me. Shoot. I know I had a lot of my friends, man, come right on up right me and they dead and gone and I'm still here. Just like I said. I'm blessed to be 68 years old for the time when I come up. I come up the hard way, mister. People got it made now. I come up, shoot. You see me sitting on this porch, but I have worked in my day. I'm telling you. I
have worked in my day and that's when I said God blessed me to retire, I'm going to sit here and serve him and enjoy. That's the truth. Shore is.

393. Scales: Ok.


395. END OF INTERVIEW