Interview with Horace Mimms

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Durham (N.C.)

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Hunter: Why don't you go on and say your name first.

Mims: My name is Horace Mims from Durham, North Carolina. I began working at the American Tobacco Company in 1942, in August of 1942 up until April of 1981. And during the time when I first started beginning working there, see it was very segregated at that time, and the salary, I don't care who you was or what education you had or whatever, you still started at the bottom. Just like for instance, me and a white guy were hired the same day, neither one of us had never had our foot inside the plant, now they're going to start him off a nickel more per hour than they did me. So these are some of the things that we had to contend with, you know, down through the years.

Hunter: What salary did you start out with?

Mims: Well, at the time when we started out it was twenty-five cents an hour. So that lasted for quite a few years. I mean you got a raise every three months, two or three cents per hour. During the war, just like I said, during the war our wages were froze. We

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couldn't make over sixty cents an hour. That was the limit, sixty cents an hour. It was a job though. That's the main thing, it was a job. And a lot of people say now when we begin to talk about what we had to go through, a lot of young people like you, I'm just telling you for information, I wouldn't have done that. But we didn't have no other choice. We had to fight. We had to fight for this. And we had a union.

We had two unions, a white union and a black union and working for the same company.

Hunter: What were the names of those unions?

Mims: We had AFLCIO. So when we got ready to negotiate a contract, now the white union, they would go in first and negotiate then we'd have to come behind and take what was left. And I think you can get an idea what I'm saying in this respect. And that went on for quite a few years but we started to fighting and in 1943 we had to go out on strike. They couldn't strike without the black people, you know, as I said at that time we had two unions so they could not strike unless we went along with them.

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Hunter: What were some of the things that started that strike?

Mims: Well, for wages, to increase our wages and working conditions, whatever, you know. So finally we agreed that we would all go out together. This was only the beginning of us merging the unions. So that went on I think it was around about, I believe it was around about 1958 or somewhere along there that we merged unions, put all unions together, you know, just one union, AFLCIO. And we were represented by the AFLCIO, you see, that's the big union, auto workers and all of them is in that union. This is one way that we made some progress. It might seem funny to some people and a lot of this I have to go back some time because see this has been years ago because I've been retired for thirteen years. During that time, just to let you know some of the things we had to go through in order to achieve what we have today, we had segregated cafeterias. One side over here was white and one side was black. I mean this is some of the things we had to fight for.

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Hunter: Was this at work or school?

Mims: At work, at the factory where I worked. I'm just filling you in from the factory where I worked at American, what we had to go through. See we had a white cafeteria. It was in the same building, on the same floor but this side and that side. So we fought for that, you know, to correct that. And what I hate about some of our black people, at that time and you see the same thing now, they were still, didn't want, you know, they just would not, they all still would come right together. We had a the whole big area, cafeteria, but you'd find a whole bunch of, all them black guys, most of them, they'd be right over here in one little group and we tried to get them, you know, to mingle around because they were still segregating themselves. And as I say, we fought for that and everything and began to get a little more, a raise and everything but then the jobs were classified. We had to go to school, black people had to go to school if you wanted to be a plumber or mechanic or whatever the case might be. This is one way we got the classified jobs. That gave the black people, gave us a chance to

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go to school right on the job there. They had training right on the job there. So this is some of the ways that we, you know, closed the gap some. And at one time, you know, we couldn't go in the same door. This is the way we got some progress and everything. It might sound funny, just like I say, but we had to go in this door. Now the whites could come in the same door we went in but I couldn't go in that door where they went in. And we fought, we fought for that. So we went on another strike in 1968 and at that time things were beginning to shape up pretty good.

Hunter: How so?

Mims: Jobs were classified. They couldn't take a white person and just put him on the job, you know, electrician or mechanic or machinist or whatever. So everything began to kind of fall into place in that way. And one thing, now I cannot, it was a livelihood and everything. When I first went to work there you didn't have no insurance, no retirement, no kind of benefits. I've seen people work there was eighty...
years old and they had to quit because they worked them until you got so you couldn't work. But in the end we came out, we got insurance. A couple of years later we got retirement, a percentage of whatever your salary was, that's what your retirement, percentage wise. In 1960 we started profit sharing. Whatever your salary was for that year or whatever profit they made from your salary, that's what your profit sharing was. You could draw it every year or either you could wait and draw it whenever you wanted to. I chose to draw mine when I retired and most of them chose to draw their's when they retired because at that time our salary had increased a lot. But in the end everything worked out alright. But as I said, we had a struggle and that is the way life is, you have to fight. You don't just, it's nothing going to be handed to you. I had some guys come in there, young fellahs come in there in the 1970's, they thought that you were just supposed to give, you know, you're supposed to give me this. Give me a chance. And this is what I tell all the young people now, give me a chance. If you take a man, if he likes a fish, if you give him a fish everyday he won't never learn how to

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fish. You give him a pole, he'll learn how to fish. You don't want somebody just continuously giving you something, give me a chance. And that's what we had to work for down there was a chance. So when I left there we had electricians, mechanics, machine operators, fixers, you know, all of this. I mean you might not understand what I say about fixers, mechanics and all of this. See we had a lot of machines where cigarettes were made and you'd have to have a fixer over here to fix this and mechanic for certain different things and plumbers and electricians. Black people even up to foremen and supervisors. People we didn't have that when I first went there. For the first fifteen years we didn't have any of that.

Hunter: Can you describe what the factory was like during the early years when you were there? How old were you when you started working there?

Mims: I was twenty-three when I started there.
Hunter: What kind of a description of the factory can you give and the kind of work that you did?

Mims: When I went there the work that I did I was supplying tobacco for the machines. We had machines, you know, cigarette machines to make the cigarettes. We come up from the basement. See all of this stuff was processed in the basement and we supplied the machines. And the last twenty years I worked my job was some of everything. I worked as a watchman. Well, it would just consist of everything. The whole entire plant, I worked with the whole entire plant of different things as a watchman and parking attendant and just a variety of things that I was responsible for. At the time, the last year that I work and I thought I got rid of them when I quit work but I had more keys than this. See all these keys, still have a lot of keys. I had a key to every gate and building or whatever. I worked with maintenance, what you might say maintenance, because all of those jobs I covered as a watchman and looking after the parking lot attendants and just most anything that comes up at the whole entire factory. That's one reason so many

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people in the factory, because when I first went to
work there we had about eight or nine hundred people,
maybe a thousand at the time because we used to have
what they called a season.

**Hunter:** What was that?

**Mims:** That was when people would have tobacco, see this is
tobacco country here, and this tobacco would come in
from the fields and whatever and it had to be
processed in different little plants. We had a lot of
them that we don't even have them now. Where the
season workers came in they would work about six or
seven months out of a year. This is where the season
workers come in at. I think you follow me when I say
as you harvest tobacco, see you had a plant, two or
three different plants where you'd process this
tobacco at and then they would come to American at the
warehouse and things. See we had to buy for American
Tobacco Company. They would buy this and it would
come to processing plant as the people would bring it
into the market. This is what we called season
workers because they just worked six or seven months

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out of the year. They had a lot of people they just depend on this season work for five or six months and then they would be unemployed to draw compensation until the green season come around again.

**Hunter:** Was work difficult, especially in the early years?

**Mims:** I don't say it was so much difficult but it was hard work.

**Hunter:** How so?

**Mims:** Because it was hard labor work. You didn't have machines or whatever, it was labor. And see in these processing plants this stuff was very dirty and all that. It was labor. It wasn't no ( ) there or nothing, you just work. It was just labor processing. Because they had to run it through a process of cleaning and stripping the stems from it, whatever. It was just hard labor work. Even at American, you had a season plant within the manufacturing place. See I worked in manufacturing and we had season, different departments there was season work.

Horace Mims
Hunter: Where was the American Tobacco Company located?

Mims: You can almost see it from here. You see where they're building this ballpark?

Hunter: Un-huh.

Mims: Right up the street here. That was the American Tobacco Company. All of that American. They left here and went to Reidsville. See we had a plant in Reidsville and so they closed this plant down and went to Reidsville.

Hunter: What's the name of the place?

Mims: Reidsville, North Carolina. That's about sixty miles from here going north. It been gone about seven or eight years, something like that.

Hunter: Were there more black people in that company or more white people? What was the make up?
Mims: It was more white than it was black. In manufacturing or things like that, you're going to find percentage wise more whites than you would black because, as I say, those machines, see you didn't get dirty sitting around operating the machines. They wore white uniforms. They could wear them the whole week and you couldn't tell it because the cigarette, it had to be clean. I just wish you would have the experience sometime going through. If we had the factory here now I could carry you up there and you could tour the plant because I used to have to look out for that too. Maybe sometime if you get a chance Reidsville is about sixty miles from here, something like that, fifty or sixty miles and maybe sometime you might get a chance, during this that you would have a chance to go through there to tour it just to see how a cigarette is made because it's amazing. If you didn't see how one, I can't tell you exactly how it's made, what the process and it's some things I couldn't tell you no way because I'm not, they don't give away the trade secret or whatever and I wouldn't want to do something that, because I'm still living off them because without this retirement I'd be in bad shape.

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So I'm still living off American Tobacco Company. This is the good part. It ended up we had good benefits. In the end we had good benefits. But in the beginning there was no benefits. There was no benefits. Whenever you went there you worked until you got eighty or ninety years old, you come out with nothing but just a little social security because you didn't have no benefits. Now we got retirement and you've got profit sharing and life insurance. See right now and this is one reason why, as you live your insurance deteriorates and mine has deteriorated now down to eighteen thousand dollars. That's as far as it will go down, that is if they don't mess around and, you know, the way they're trying to cut it out and everything. That's mostly the way it was and I'm just thankful in the end it came out. But in the beginning, as I say, you can see what we had to go through in segregation and everything like that. You have to fight for it. I mean I really enjoyed working there in the later years because the benefits and you could speak out. You didn't have to, you know, be afraid to say anything.

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Hunter: During the strike did you say it was in 1942?

Mims: Yeah, we had one in 1943 and one in 1968.

Hunter: The one in 1943 especially, could you describe it more in detail? What kind of role did you play in it?

Mims: You see we just picketed the plant. Wouldn't nobody go in and nobody come out.

Hunter: Did you stay outside the plant?

Mims: Yeah, we had to stay outside the plant. Well, you've seen how they picket different places now. Well, that's the same thing as the way we was. We would picket the plant and we closed the plant down. Nothing could come out and nothing go in without a struggle. Of course there's some got in it. We didn't have nobody to come into work to produce anything.

Hunter: Was there ever a threat of violence?
Mims: Well no, we never had any threat of violence. That's one thing I'm glad of. We never had any threat of violence. When we went out we said we wanted to go out on peace and everything and so the people, didn't nobody, we didn't have no strike breakers to come in so to speak. It would have been some if some strike breakers had come in like some of these jobs, you know, where strike breakers come in. But we were fortunate, under each strike we did not have any violence.

Hunter: How long did that first strike last?

Mims: The first strike lasted two weeks. The next one, the one in 1968, it lasted something like about three or four weeks, something like that.

Hunter: When did you first come to Durham?

Mims: Well, I've been in Durham practically all my life. My people, most of them, in Alamance County in Mebane, a little place right up here, Mebane. I lived with my grandfather and them up there.

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Hunter: Why did your family first come here?

Mims: Well, I guess we just migrated around, you know, to different towns like that. But as I said, most all of them left here and went to Connecticut. My mother and all of them died, they passed when they were living in Hartford.

Hunter: Do you remember much at all about your grandfather?

Mims: Yeah, I remember a lot about him. He was a farmer.

Hunter: What was his name?

Mims: Oscar Mims. And you see, when I was living with them something happened. As we go through life and the way it was then, I mean you hear the expression a lot of times, the way it was then, there were a lot of things that I did not understand. This farm where my grandfather lived on, I was an errand boy, you know, small, I was an errand boy and I'd go to the store to get different things, Coca Colas. At that time black

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people didn't drink Coca Colas. You might not believe it but at that time, it has been a time you'd walk in a store, a black person said give me a Coca Cola, un-uh. You got a grape or orange or Pepsi. It just wasn't for you to buy.

Hunter: Why?

Mims: That was a white man's drink. (Laughter). I'm just filling you in some, you're young but this is some of the things that really happened now. You just didn't go around in rural places especially and say give me a Coca Cola. I don't have it. And they had it right there in the box.

Hunter: ( ) in rural areas.

Mims: (Laughter) But I'm saying that it was more frequent in the rural areas. So these are some of the things that you might not believe. It just don't sound true but it's really the truth.

Hunter: I'm sure it is.

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Mims: So as I said, when I was living with my grandfather I was their errand boy.

Hunter: Where did your grandfather live?

Mims: He lived in Mebane, a little place right up here in Alamance County about thirty miles from here. And one day this white guy sent me to the store. I was about a half a block from it and I had four or five different things to get and I didn't make no note of it. So he wanted some Prince Albert smoking tobacco. You don't know nothing about no Prince Albert smoking tobacco but that was a popular tobacco at that time. And I came back and I forgot to get the tobacco. When I told him, I said I forgot it and he cussed me out and talking about kicking me. And my grandfather didn't say anything. I couldn't understand it. And years later on I said if I ever get grown I'm going to, you know what I said, I mean you can imagine what. And that thing stayed with me until I guess I was about twenty-five years old.

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Hunter: Who was the white man?

Mims: His name was Suttles. And so one day at that time when I was that age I was indulging in alcohol.

Hunter: How old were you then? Was it the same time you started working in tobacco?

Mims: Yeah, that was when I started working in tobacco. That was early. I was about seven or eight years old or ten years old or something like that when this happened but it stayed with me all of that time because I don't care who you were, you don't kick nobody.

Hunter: Did he ever kick you?

Mims: No but he threatened me see and what I've seen at that time they would kick you. I'm saying that they would kick you and I was just fortunate that he didn't. You might not believe it but that's the first thing a white man would do, raise his foot. That's one reason why at the factory that I never wanted to joke and

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play with a white guy because you tell a joke he's going to tell a joke about Aunt Lucy and Cousin Marley and all of them and you get to playing with them and the next thing you know he's going to raise his foot. I think I have a witness to that because...

Joyner: Because I don't get into this but he might be wondering why your grandfather ( ) but the reason he didn't say anything you have to understand the power the people had during that day. If he had raised his hand he'd go and get the sheriff and say that he tried to kill him. You know, all he had to do was just raise his hand and you had an all white jury. If you had a lawyer it would be a white lawyer and it wouldn't be no good to get a lawyer unless the man you worked for say he's alright. The man you worked for on the plantation or whatever you was on, if this white man didn't stand up for you might as well forget it.

Mims: This is what I'm saying, reason why I couldn't understand it. But years later on, as I said, I told my grandfather I said I want to see him because I'd

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had me two or three drinks of that whiskey then. I hope you don't ever drink. So I said if I see him I'm going to tell him what he said to me and I'm going to do the same thing, you know, what he said he was going to do to me. And when I seen him he had got old, his hair was white, whiter than mine now and he was all bent over. And thanks be to God, the Lord would not let me touch him. I turned around and walked away because I could see he had suffered, you know, from this. And this is the way it was then. So those things happened just like Brother Joyner said. When I first started work I was working construction work help building bridges and they would call you, I don't like to use the word, they would call you, those white foremen would call you nigger just as quick as they could spit and it won't nothing you could do but go ahead on and, you know. But through it all I learned to live with it. But now this is one reason why sometimes, like this ( ) thing, the black people are in the background. See a lot of times when you are in the background, you hear music in the back, sometimes you don't ever see the person that's playing the music but it sounds good to you out there. Just like Nat

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King Cole used to sing a lot of background music for different things. They never did see him. And it's some other guy, here the other day I was listening to, he did a lot of speaking and talking in the background. He was black. But you didn't ever see him. And who got the credit? So this is the way I think about it sometimes in this ( ) thing. Now they are talking about all this stuff they're putting up here in front but who's back there doing the dirty work, who's supplying them? So this is the way it was with the factory. We was never up front but without us down in the basement they couldn't get up on the top floor. You understand what I mean because we had to bring the material up where they could sit down. It won't no sitting down for us but they could sit down. Because I've seen the time when you were caught up with your work or something, your machine was broke down, your foreman came around, get a broom and go to sweeping over there. Now I'm supposed to be over here running this machine supplying tobacco and it's broke for a few minutes - get a broom and go over there and sweep up over here. You're going to do something. You didn't sit down there and wait for the man to fix
the machine. You had to do something and see this is what a lot of those black guys when they, in the 1970's, like I said in the 1970's just before I retired, if they were working like that and something happened they'd sit down there and the man come - uh, man, I ain't doing that, I'm supposed to be doing this. And that's the way a lot of them whenever opportunity come around, they weren't included in it because of their, you know. Because see, you can make it hard for yourself. Sometimes it pays to be humble. I don't say it pays to be a fool but sometimes you don't, if you want something you go at it in a way that you don't just take it. Just like you right now, if you had your say so maybe going to school and all of this, if you had your say so well I can just sit down there and write Mr. Mims or Deacon Mims was saying without even talking to him. But see, it wouldn't work in the long run. It would catch up with you. Just like the lady over here in Chapel Hill right now running for the school board and she told a whole lot of lies. She's good but see, she lied in the beginning. This is the way it was in the later years down there at the factory when we started

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hiring. Some of these guys, they'd come in, and we had one guy they sent him to England to learn how to put a machine together. Most of the machines we had they come from England, Germany and England. And we had to get some people over here from Germany to come over here, you know, to stay awhile to show the mechanics how to fix them and everything. But they sent this black boy over there to train them so we don't have to them now. He can take a machine down and put it back together.

**Hunter:** When was this?

**Mims:** That was here in the last, they sent him over there right after I retired so it's been about ten years or eleven years ago when they sent him over there. Because he was working on the machines here but they said he had good quality and they sent him over there for training so he made it and now he can take a machine apart and put it back together just as good as any German. But see, they seen something in him. He won't always, you know, when they got ready for him he won't always absent or wouldn't half do what they
would say do. We came a long ways in these factories and things like that. And I can truly say now, as I say, with my retirement everything and whatever, it's been good to me. But I earned it. It won't something they just gave me. I'm not just say me but all of us, we had to earn it. As I say, when I first started to working I was doing construction work about thirteen or fourteen years old building bridges and highways and all of that.

Hunter: Where?

Mims: All through the area up here in Mebane and Burlington, Roxboro, just all around all these areas here.

Hunter: Were you working with the state or?

Mims: I worked for contractors.

Hunter: Which contractors?

Mims: One of them is out of South Carolina, I can't think of the name right now. But all of them I worked for they
were different contractors. I never worked for the state. It was different contractors like Nell O. Teer. Nell O. Teer is one of the biggest contractors there is here. It's another big contractor.

**Hunter:** ( )?

**Mims:** Yeah, I can't call them right now but all of those I worked for, they were contractors.

**Hunter:** When was that you were working with construction companies?

**Mims:** Yeah, I was building bridges and highways and things, you know, construction. Building bridges and all of that, you know. Most of the time when I was building bridges we had to mix concrete. We didn't have these big plants like they have now. We had to have a little old mixer. You had to load the mixer with a shovel and everything and the sand and all of that and mix it. But now they just take a dump truck and dump the whole thing down in a container and then mix it up and they spread it. See we had to use a wheel barrow

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and they used to have a thing you call a Georgia buggy. It had two wheels on it and those wheels stood about like that and they were iron wheels about that wide. Had kind of a bucket down in the bottom where it would swing. That's what you call a Georgia buggy. You had to push that thing up a ramp, you know, to pour a form or whatever. Now I ain't never been no size but those Georgia buggies, if you hit a little pebble or something about like that, brother, it's going to throw you. Those Georgia buggies, as I say, the wheels were about that high and they was iron wheels and had a bucket down there, you know, the bucket would swing when you got ready to turn it over to dump the concrete where that bucket would swing. And they didn't have no mercy on you. You went there to do a job, they didn't have no mercy. I don't care how big or small you was, you were on that job, that was it.

Hunter: Did you work with white people or black people or both?
Mims: Well, mostly in construction were white people all except carpenters. See building bridges you had to have carpenters to build those forms and things. The work that we done was with a shovel. Most of the work that we done was with a shovel. I'd say you'd have working on a job or project where you got ten people, mechanics and carpenters, ninety percent of them were white. You might have one or two blacks out of ten. The rest of it was labor. When I say labor, I want you to get what, it won't no steel. See just like you're doing now, you're writing. You didn't have to require no writing. If you could write real good you might wouldn't even get a job. See that's what I'm saying when I say labor. This was hard labor. Anybody can get a shovel and go out there and dig a hole, you know. It won't no skill to it. Anybody can grab a broom. See that's what they call labor, hard labor. But as anything else, just like you're writing now, you was a secretary or whatever. If you're sitting over here just pushing a button you're qualified for that particular job. But in shoveling dirt and stuff like that, anybody is qualified. You can walk up and grab a shovel and start. They don't
have to train you. And that's what I did, wheel barrows. They used to have what they called a water boy. Had to carry water around. I worked to Fort Bragg down there when they were building the camp down there. I was the water boy down there. They first started me off, you know, they were building forms and things and then they started me out carrying water and I had to carry water, I had two buckets. One wrote on there black, I mean colored, they didn't use the word black. You'd better not call nobody black, you was in it. You didn't call nobody black.

**Hunter:** Would that offend them?

**Mims:** Who? You call somebody black, brother, you had a fight. But they had on there, colored. We called each other nigger and they didn't think nothing of that but if you say black then you got a fight. And carrying this water, see we had a bucket over here said white and one over here said colored. I would take those buckets and I would let half of them drink out it, you know, and then I would take that water and change it and put the white dipper over here and the

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black dipper over there. The dipper didn't have no mark on it. (Laughter) You'd be drinking out the bucket a black had just drunk out of three minutes ago (Laughter) and didn't know the difference. I did it just for, you know. I'd run out of a bucket. I'd have more white guys and I'm about to run out and I'm not going back and draw no more. I'd take that water out of the black bucket and pour it in the white. And they'd drink it - man, it's good. But if they'd have known that I wouldn't have had no job and probably got threwed off one of them forms up there.

Hunter: This is when you were working where?

Mims: Working at Fort Bragg.

Hunter: When was that?

Mims: This was in 1940. See they started building Fort Bragg down there in 1940. I worked down there about six months. But I'm just filling you in on some of the things. He's here to witness because me and him was kind of in the same bracket.

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Joyner: When you're talking about the early days, at that time nobody asked you for a birth certificate. If you were on the job and the man was out there doing labor work, if you were big enough to do it, you was grown in his eyes.

Hunter: Would you state your name just so I can have it on tape as well?

Joyner: Percy Joyner.

Hunter: Where are you from?

Joyner: Durham. I went in the Army at seventeen and before I went in the Army I had worked at ( ). That was a grocery chain that was owned by Mr. ( ). It was private owned but they used to own a restaurant and I was there before then and then I worked at Duke University and ( ). I did that before I was seventeen. When I was seventeen I went in the Army.

Hunter: What year did you go in the Army?
Joyner: 1946. I didn't have a, nobody asked for my birth certificate then. I went and registered and told them I was eighteen but they didn't require any birth certificate.

Mims: And you know, as he was saying, since you want to kind of cover the whole thing, to get away from American, I think I've given you all about American that would really be necessary to pass on to somebody. But as you was saying when you was talking about our early age and whatever, different things in the early age, now I was looking at something the other day about ( ), they bring back some of the things now, back then when they got ready to advertise a job to hire a group of people if they didn't want you, they'd put in there white only. I was looking at something the other day, they put in there white only. When they got ready to hire a bunch of black people they'd put it in there black only because there won't no white people going to go there looking for it to start with because they know what it was. It was a dirty job. And when you're talking about blacks, black people calling each
other black or whatever, they would say we need fifty people or how many jobs and you take twenty-five women standing out there, you're hiring women, them twenty-five women standing out there, two or three of the women out there all real, real, real light skinned, hey you.

**Hunter:** First one?

**Mims:** You were the first one was hired.

**Hunter:** The light skinned one?

**Mims:** The light skinned one. I'm not trying to put our race down but I'm saying this is the way it was with them then. So there's two or three, we used to call them yellow and you didn't call them yellow because you'd have another fight (Laughter). That was degrading because when you'd call them yellow or something like that you were referring to them in a sense they thought as white. And they did have a lot of white but you know what they say, as long as you got one drop of blood in you if you're black it don't make no

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difference how light you are or how white you are. That's the way it was then. You said you wanted something so I'm giving it to you just like it was then. If there's somebody here that don't like it but that's the way it was.

Joyner: Reason that was, that came down from slavery. If you were light skinned it was assumed you had a white father. Most of them did the housework and the black people, most of the blacks were out in the field. That gave them a feeling of superiority because they was doing work that a lot of the black people would do. A lot of times the white man, you know, he wouldn't, it was his child and the neighbor's child, he would separate his child and he didn't work him as hard as he would one of the others. He might have him around the house or doing this around in the yard or something like that but the ones out there in the field, they were just simply black. That's the reason why a lot of people didn't like to be called black because they were considered the lower.

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Mims: These things are what we are saying. It might not be what you wanted but if you want the truth and I think any black person that is our age would agree because they have been there. It ain't no need to say they haven't. If they say no, he's not telling the truth. We used to have a deacon up there at the church, Deacon Blake, he's from South Carolina and he never said he or her he said him - him ain't telling the truth. (Laughter) He never would say, it didn't make no difference, he would say him - him ain't telling the truth. And so if somebody would say if they're hearing this tape, he'd say no, him is not telling the truth. He said he don't know nothing about it.

Joyner: Take any black person that come along at that time and said he wasn't mistreated, it's not likely he's telling the truth because white people mistreated most all blacks in one way or another. Just like I was telling about his grandfather, and maybe his grandfather might have lived on some land that belonged to him and if he didn't do that he knew the sheriff, you know. I had an instance down in Wake County. My father, some man wanted him to come there
and sharecrop. He started to take the job but then the sheriff that knew him because he knew my granddaddy and he told him, he said don't take that job. This man hires somebody every year and then when time comes to harvest tobacco he calls the sheriff and says he stole something. Then the sheriff would pick him up and put him in jail and he could ( ) and all his labor would be free. He'd done worked the whole year in the field and wouldn't get nothing. And so when the time come to sell tobacco he'd have ( ). What happened, all of the sheriffs knew what he was doing. He knew they hadn't stole nothing. All he had to do, when they'd go out there in the field he'd carry something down there and put it in the shack where he lived and call the sheriff. The sheriff would come out there and get him out of the field - we found it in your place there. The shack belonged to him and all of the sheriffs knew what he was doing. One white man wouldn't go against another.

**Mims:** I don't care what happened, they would not go against the other. And this is something today I wish that we would realize, back in those days a white man would

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take and pick a black man just like me and Brother Joyner. Now if he liked me better than he did Brother Joyner he's going to have me do something to Brother Joyner, beat him up beside the head or do something, anything we could, you know, to get even with him. And I had this experience when I was working at the factory and working at the A&P store, used to have a store called Haiti. You hear about Haiti, the black community used to be here. Now I'm working at the store and I was working at the factory too, you know.

So now he tells me, we had about five black guys working there and he tells me now look, you watch them and I'm going to pay you a little bit more. If you see them taking something you let me know because I'm going to pay you a little bit more. But I didn't fall for it because see I had learned, you know. But it's so many that would. And this is how it seems like we're getting back now because it seems like we don't have sense enough to know this is - we fight each other but we never fight a white man. I mean we didn't kill like we do now but we'd knock you in the brick or whatever because that's the way they trained us to fight each other. Now he's sitting back

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laughing, he don't have to fight. It just like that man said he was going to pay me, Sam ( ), he was going to pay me a little bit more to snitch on them. And it seems like that's the way most of the young people are today. They are killing each other. Most everything, all these drugs and guns, who's manufacturing those guns? Who is shipping all them drugs in here? Who's the head of it? We've got, somebody might be just like bootleggers. Back in the days of the bootlegging and those days, it was white people who was furnishing that white whiskey. You hear tell about the bootleg whiskey back in the prohibition days. Who was selling all that, Brother Joyner? Who was selling all that whiskey here? Who was making all the whiskey? The white man was making it and giving it to the black people to sell for them and the black people drinking it and getting drunk and raise sand with each other. And it seems like the same thing is going around now. You could find some big king pins here just like we did here, some big bootleggers that were black. But the head of it, the root, was coming from the whites all up here in these mountains where they make, you know, make whiskey and

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just bring it here. And that's the way it was back in the prohibition days when they won't allowed to sell whiskey. The white man was furnishing the whiskey. And just the way it is with all these drugs coming in here. You might have one or two big shots, so to speak, just like we did then. We had some big shots we called bootleggers. But the head, the root, was the white man. I'm not hating them or nothing like that but this is where it's coming from right today. How many black people do you see that you can count got all these boats? Just like right here in Durham this man down here had all this down here and he's supposed to be in jail right now spending two or three life... (End of Tape 1 - Side A)

Tape 1 - Side B

Mims: We worked together in church and everything and he belonged to another church but we go around to rest homes and look out for sick people and all. That's the reason he was by. He brought a check to put into the fund that we have. Yeah, all those things, just like we said, all those things, it might not sound good or whatever but this is the way it was. I thank

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God it's better now. We have a choice. We have a voice. What we have to do now is to use it in the right way. We black people, we have got to stop everything that we are putting the blame on somebody else. Just like President Truman, I think he was the one that said the buck stops here. Don't shift it off on somebody else, it stops here and it stops within us. We have to do something and we have did something just like at the factories and different places. The first sit-in we had in Greensboro, you heard about that. The blacks sit-in in Greensboro at the five and dime store. That's history. I'm quite sure you heard about it, in Greensboro.

**Hunter:** When was that?

**Mims:** That was in 1960 I think it was when they first started the sit-in. You are going to have to catch up on some of this history because this is history. This is the reason why I'm quite sure you hear a lot of times of this black history month and this is when a lot of this is brought out just like D-Day and different months that we have that.

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Hunter: Were you involved in that?

Mims: No, see I was working. This was young people, school. These were students that started sit-ins. These were college students going to A&T in Greensboro when they had this sit-in. Woolworth's. See at the same time we had a Woolworth's here which is closed now but not on that account, it was part of the sit-in. Woolworth's, Walgreen's and all those places, the lunch counters. Because you couldn't sit at the lunch counter. You'd go in there to buy a drink or something, you'd go buy it and then you got to come outdoors to drink it, come outside to drink it. And as I said, see at that time I had my children. I had a daughter, she was in Fayetteville at Fayetteville State and all of them were doing, my nieces and nephews, all of them were there in the 1960's and they were doing all them sit-ins and we were supporting them. A lot of them, they'd go to jail. They didn't mind going to jail. They didn't mind going to jail. They'd have a bus load of them out here on Chapel Hill Boulevard out here. They had a place out there where

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they didn't allow blacks. Ramada Inn I think is one of them. They went out there and so they had about thirty of them I reckon, a whole bus load and they brought them back and locked them up and one of the jailers up there said if I could get another job I'd quit because these people are about to worry me to death. I mean they didn't fight or nothing but they just sang, they just, you know, just kept something going. They won't using bad language. At that time in the 1960's you didn't find these young people cussing and going on like they do now and kiss my this and all that. Those people, they acted with respect but they would sing and they would just, you know, things like that just to keep you awake. They didn't worry about sleeping. But those people up there see they wanted some rest and some sleep but they had to stay up all night long with those children. Most of them were in their teens, I'd say from eighteen on back through their teens and they just kept something going. One of them would sleep awhile and the other ones they would be up singing and clapping and going on. And so my daughter, she was down in Fayetteville, she was in school down in Fayetteville to the college

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and she was spit on a lot. They'd spit on you and everything, you know, picketing and going on, they'd spit on you. But most of them, they would accept it. This is the reason why Martin Luther King, he didn't want no violence. If you felt like you were going out there with a chip on your shoulder, it won't no need of you going out there because you won't going to accomplish nothing.

**Hunter:** I want you to talk a little bit about your own family history. Who your parents were, how was life in your family at home.

**Mims:** Well, during that time everybody, they didn't have much resource or whatever, as I said. My grandfather and them, they farmed and during that time, as I say, I started working construction work very early just doing different things.

**Hunter:** But your grandfather did? What did he farm?

**Mims:** He farmed tobacco and stuff like that.

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Hunter: Did he own his own land?

Mims: No, in the later years he just quit and worked different jobs like people worked railroads and saw mills and all that stuff. You never hear that mentioned now. My mother and them, mostly they worked like maids. That was a black woman's thing at that time back in the 1920's and all of that. Black women were working as maids and nursing people's children, white children and all of that. This is what their work was mostly about. And most of the men, their work was in labor, you know, building different things, saw mills, railroads. Because at that time back in the 1920's and all of that there was a lot of construction going on with railroads and building, you know, a lot of building because at that time things had just began to kind of pick up. During 1932 everything kind of fell out. That was in the Depression. I'm quite sure that you've heard about the Depression in 1932. During that time they come up with something, you had a lot of soup lines and things in New York and all different places like that.
Hunter: A lot of what?

Mims: Soup lines. People would just stand in line. They couldn't get a job and they'd just stand in line just like these homeless people now. You know these homeless people. They've got some place for them now but at that time they didn't have nowhere for them. They just had a place where they called a soup kitchen because most of the things they would get was soup. This is beyond you but they would take what they used to call a beef bone, called it a soup bone and make a whole pot of soup. It won't much meat there. It's just like a lot of people say chicken broth but where's the chicken. Won't no chicken in it, you just eat that broth what they called it. And that's the way it was then. They'd just take, you know, stuff like that and just make a pot of soup. It was some nourishment, you know, to keep you going.

Hunter: What was the Depression like for you and your family?

Mims: Well, just like I said, I was working construction work and different things. Some of the people, they...
got by with their own farms and things like that, you know, where they could raise their own, grow their own stuff and their own meat, beef and hogs and whatever.

And people would share with each other. If there was something you needed they would share. But now see nobody anytime somebody, they don't want to give you nothing now. They don't share no more like that. But used to if you found out a family was hungry, didn't have nothing to eat, they'd scrap up a little bit here, a little bit there and they would give it to them. You don't find that now. People used to, they'd, what they call in your community, your church, what they call pounding. It didn't have to be a pound but that's what they called it. You'd take a little bit of flour over here, a couple of cups of flour, somebody else would take a couple of cups and put it in a bag or a few beans or a little piece of fatback meat. They call it salt pork now, they don't call it fatback no more. And they would carry it to the church and would distribute to these families. But they don't do that now. Most of the time we have somebody come to church, I need a hundred dollars to pay my bills. Now we have gathered food for like

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Thanksgiving, you know, the missionaries to distribute among people. But they don't have the stuff for families now. The families now, I need fifty dollars to pay a gas bill or a hundred dollars to pay rent or whatever. But during those years didn't anybody have no cash money to give like that. They'd just take a little bit, whatever they had out of their cupboard or whatever and you'd put a little bit here and a little bit there from each one. And you might start off, this cup for instance, I got just enough to fill it up right along here with water, somebody else can fill it up right there and somebody else and next thing you know you've got a whole cup of water that will fill me up. I'm just saying it like that and that's the way it was with people back in the 1920's and the 1930's and during the Hoover days. That's what they called the Depression. That was when President Hoover was president. So after Roosevelt became president that's when they started a lot these, WPA and welfare system. They had places during that time where you would go, warehouses and things, you would go and you were on that list for welfare, you'd go pick up potatoes or beans or whatever. Now something else, you had a lot

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of white people on there too but now the day that they were going to do the distributing the white people would go today on Monday, you'd go on Tuesday. You'd get what they left. I'm just saying – you don't know nothing about that as young as you are and whatever – but this is the way it was then. Just like say now we're going to make the distributions, like people get these food stamps and things now, certain time they get them. During that time they distributed the food, you didn't have no food stamps. White potatoes.

Hunter: Where would they distribute it?

Mims: They had a warehouse where you'd have to go get it.

Hunter: What, like a YMCA?

Mims: Just a warehouse where they stored stuff or whatever, where they had a place you had to carry your card or whatever you had to identify yourself and they would give you what your family called for. Just like I said, the white people they would go and say they were going to do it on Monday, they'd go Monday and you
didn't go until Tuesday. You had to take whatever they left. I'm just saying since you want to know what - and all that just leads up to just like it is today. See, those people, we didn't know who was on welfare. You couldn't tell they was on welfare. Just like today, they're talking about black people, we've got more white people on welfare right today, getting food stamps than you have blacks. But it's done in a way that you don't know it. I mean you know more now than you did then but right now when it comes down to food stamps and welfare, most of the fingers are pointed at the blacks because of their community. All those white people, they live in a clean community or whatever but they are on that system and everything. But most of the blacks on the system, it's the community. I mean you can see that. But that's where they point, of course, a lot of them don't live in a dilapidated community, but this is where they point at. That's the first thing they focus on.

**Hunter:** What are some of your early childhood memories? You mentioned the story about the white man for who you
worked. Do you have any other stories about childhood or even early adulthood?

**Mims:** That's about all that, all of those things, so many of them were ( ) what I was saying here, that you just didn't have the, and as he was saying, we just didn't have the voice and everything. If you would speak out you were subject to lose your job if you had a job. Once you were black balled it's just like, I don't know whether you've ever tried to join any different kind of club or something like the Masons or something like that, they have what they call a black ball and if somebody's in there and you tried to join the Masonic or the Elks if somebody's in there that don't like you, they have a thing, you know, you put a ball in there, you don't ever know who it is just like voting but they've got a little black ball and ever who put that black ball in there, they're against you. You don't know who it is because it's done secret.

**Hunter:** Were you a member of it?

**Mims:** I was a member of the Elks.
Hunter: How long have you been a member?

Mims: I joined the Elks in, I think it was 1951 or 1952, somewhere along there. I'm saying these things, that's the way it all adds up. If you would speak out, you go to get another job or something, the man, he could fire you for most anything. He didn't have to have an excuse. Somebody done been to him and told him look, you fire that nigger because of such and such a thing, you were fired. Now they might not say it but this is black history. It's the way it was ( ). As I say, in my early childhood these were the things that we had to go through. We didn't have much but it's one thing, at that time black people were more together in those days, so to speak. The population wasn't what it is now but you could get a favor more so than you can now from your own people. Because when you do something now people are looking for pay back. But in those days, the Depression days and in my early bringing up, we would share. Whatever we had we would share it and nobody didn't look for no pay back. Nobody said I gave him such and such a

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thing. Right today I'm quite sure if you do somebody, somebody you know might do somebody a favor and when they get out, yeah, I let him have ten dollars over there and that joker hadn't paid me yet. You might have been through that. But that's the way it is now. But during that time, of course it won't no ten dollars, ten dollars was a hundred and at that time if you had ten dollars you could buy enough groceries to last two weeks. But now you go and you can't hardly buy a meal for ten dollars. But at that time if you had ten dollars you could buy enough groceries man, the groceries you could buy. We used to have what they called at these stores, they called it dray boys.

Hunter: Dray boys?

Mims: Yeah, they had a little wagon and people would go to the store and buy their groceries and these little dray boys, they would carry it home for them for fifteen cents or twenty cents, whatever. They would be at the store. They would be lined up just like cabs, you know, and don't go get in front of one now.

(Laughter) You're going to have a fight on your
hands because they lined up. That was in order to keep them, you know, give everybody a chance. If you had a special boy now it was different but you don't just get your wagon and say I want dray today, that was on a Friday or Saturday, you've got to get in line. If you had somebody special that you wanted, that was your's. But you don't just get your wagon and come up and say I'm going to work today. Or you come from some other store or something, you wouldn't come from over there and work over here in this store.

You've got to fall in line because if you didn't you've got somebody standing there and they'd been standing there probably for an hour and hadn't had a trip and here you come and get right in front of them.

Time you did somebody would come out and want a dray and this boy has been standing there an hour and you're going to walk up in front of him and take them, un-uh. I guess you can see where I'm coming from and I don't blame them, that was the thing. That was the thing because just like the cabs now, used to be the cabs would line up but they've got so now they run about all, you know. But used to be they would line up. You'd make a trip and when you come back you got

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to fall back in line. This one up here and you make a trip and come back you've got to fall back here until it go around. But now most of the cabs they drive, they've changed it some but it used to you had to get in line for a cab unless somebody had a special. But just somebody call in on a cab, see you had to be in line just like if you had some relative driving a cab or something then, you know, he could go ahead on and take that trip. But just anybody call and say I want a cab, the man in front there, he's the one got the trip.

**Hunter:** How long did you go to school?

**Mims:** I quit school in the ninth grade. That's when I came out and went to work.

**Hunter:** Which school did you go to?

**Mims:** I went to a school up here in Alamance County, Byrd's School.

**Hunter:** And what was that school like?
Mims: Well, when I was in school we had a lot, it was discipline. It was so much different then than it is now. To me school was, just like I said, school was alright. I wanted to stay in school but during that time, all that during the Depression and everything, you had to take whatever you could get to go to work. Just like I said, you'd go to work, didn't care what age it was as long as you could do the work. But school, it was good. I made good grades in school and everything and I never had to repeat a grade the whole time I was in school.

Hunter: Was it an all black school?

Mims: Yeah, it was an all black school, black teachers. And too, just like what we're talking about now, busing, white people have been bused all of their life. If I lived right here and there was a white school right up there on the corner, I'm going to walk. You know where Central University, the college is. If I lived right here and there was a white school right there, I've got to walk all the way down there. Now here's a Horace Mims
white school right there. Now wherever they lived at the bus, but we didn't have a bus. Never had a bus, they got a bus once you started to high school. But right in your neighborhood, if there was a white school in your neighborhood you had to walk. Children from down here at East Durham, but I could say, I'm trying to get some place where you - do you know where Hillside School is down near the college down there?

**Hunter:** What school?

**Mims:** Hillside High School. It's right there next to North Carolina Central. The people that lived back on this side of town about five miles, they had to walk and the white kids, they didn't live nowhere hardly, they were bused. So when it comes down to busing, white kids have been bused all their life. Black children haven't. They had to walk. They walked because they didn't have the money to ride the city bus. The city bus, it won't but a dime but who had the dime.

**Hunter:** What kind of things did you learn in school?
Mims: Well, math, you know, just the regular, well at that time we didn't have all these fancy names. We had arithmetic and division, times tables and multiplication and geography. We didn't have too much. We were more in geography than things like history.

Hunter: You didn't have history?

Mims: Yeah, we had history but we focused more on, you know, some subjects, you know, that you figured were going to benefit you like geography and multiplication, division, adding and multiplying and all that stuff. That meant a lot to us because every dime or nickel you get you want to know how to, you know, how to multiply it or how to subtract from it, what you're going to have left and things like that. As far as history, that pertained more to being a professional or something at that time. At that time it seemed more like it was something that, you know, because when I came out of school it was back in the 1920's and the early 1930's the only thing that you could get when you came out of school mostly, you wound up being

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a school teacher. We had just a few black doctors or professors. I mean that was all in education. But other than that, you know, all these other things what you get now when you come out of school, study science and all this and everything in that major, and secretarial work and all of that. It won't even no future in a black person in the 1920's and 1930's being a secretary. You know now everybody has to have a secretary. Especially a black. So that's why we focused more on reading, writing, and what we called arithmetic then. Things were just so much different than it is today because now you've got science and everything. It's just a lot of subjects now that we can see more into. There were very few black working, I mean we had a lot of blacks working in later years but in the early years even if you graduated from high school, just like I said, the only thing probably you could find was a teaching job. And at that time white teachers made more than black teachers. Black teachers, just several years ago they got on the same level. But white teachers used to make, if a white teacher made a hundred dollars a black teacher didn't make but about sixty, you know, a month. It won't

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that much then. I'm just putting it at that figure.
No, black teachers didn't get the same pay white
teachers got. You talk to some old black teacher way
back there sixty or seventy years ago and they'll tell
you they didn't get the same. It's just like, that
was just like school. You know they said at one time
they didn't want to integrate but they wanted to make
all schools equal, you know, with different things.
It's no way you could make it equal because, just like
I said, at the time when I was going to school we got
hand me down books.

Hunter: From the white schools?

Mims: Or either you would go get the books from the whites.

They would turn in there books, you know, whenever
they made books. That's where we got our books from.

We never got a new book. It was always a used one.

See they had a library where they'd turn in books. If
they was in pretty good shape they'd turn them in and
that's where we would go if you had to buy. You still
would get it at a discount. A new book would cost
seventy-five cents. People back there didn't have no

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- what I'm say, seventy-five cents at that time where you could buy, three people almost could go to the store and buy almost a good meal for three people. So see, you'd get beans, they're about three or four cents a pound, five cents a pound and a chicken, that was about ten cents a pound. You know, things like that and as I said, with seventy-five cents you could buy a whole lot for seventy-five cents, especially that type of food. You didn't go buy a steak and all that. Of course, steak was cheap but yet and still you didn't have that twenty cents to pay for a pound of steak. You could get a whole pound of salt pork or fatback, whatever you want to call it, for ten cents and a whole pound is going to feed three or four people. So that was the case. A book costs seventy-five cents and most of the black people just didn't have that to pay it if it was a brand new book. But like I'm saying, most of the books we got was hand me downs. And this is the way it was with the schools. Most of the schools, everything, it was cheaper or they just wouldn't put the work into it that they would the white schools.

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Hunter: Did you do a lot of traveling?

Mims: Well, not at that time. Most of the traveling I done was after I was grown and everything. Just like going to Washington or Connecticut or somewhere like that, places like that. But as far as going overseas and everything, I did not make the, I didn't go in service. I was turned down. I had ( ) because of my ankle here. But other than that I have never done a whole lot of extensive traveling. We used to, we have an usher union and we used to do a lot of traveling going to St. Louis and Kentucky and Philadelphia doing all them different things.

Hunter: How did you travel?

Mims: We traveled by bus because we'd be gone a whole week. We had a five day tour and we'd go different places like that, New Orleans.

Hunter: What was it like traveling down the road?

Mims: We'd charter a bus.
Hunter: Where would you stop and eat?

Mims: Let me see, we stayed in motels, so many different ones. But we would always have to put in reservations. See because it would be about thirty of us. We'd charter a bus and there would be about thirty of us and we'd put in - just like this month, we used to go in this month but we put in for it the first of the year. We never had any, one time my wife and them, they went to New Orleans and they stopped at a place to be served and the lady talked, we had a couple of white people to drive the charted bus and they said the lady talked like she didn't want to serve, you know, and so nobody didn't eat. They just got back on the bus and left.

Hunter: You're talking about recently?

Mims: Well, this was just before I retired. It's been about fourteen years ago or something like that. But we have been some places, we stopped at a place in Tennessee one morning for breakfast and the lady
there, they were very good. They said we haven't opened yet. People hadn't come in, you know, but she said if ya'll are hungry if ya'll will help, she said ya'll come on in. And so two or three of the people that was on there, they helped prepare breakfast and we just had a good time. She said I want ya'll to eat if ya'll want to help me get it ready, ya'll come on in. So we went on in. That was the only place that we ever had any - down in New Orleans. This was in Alabama when they stopped in Alabama. This was in Alabama where they had this little bit of. If it was now they probably would, you know, there would have been some, but they didn't want to have any problem because they was on the way to New Orleans.

Hunter: In a second, I want to ask you some biographical questions and your family history. Before that I just wanted to know if there is anything that I haven't asked that you want to add to your interview about life in the Jim Crow South.

Mims: Well, I think I've covered just about everything I can cover in there because all these things back in the

Horace Mims
early days of my youth, as I say, there were certain places you couldn't go and just like he was saying about the Coca Cola, you couldn't go to certain places when I was a child, not when I was a child but after I became grown. But you didn't go in the store and ask for no Coca Cola. They'd tell you right quick, they'd have a drink box and a Coca Cola was in there but I don't have one. Some place you go in I got a grape or orange or something like that because back in those days they'd have grape sodas and orange sodas and things like that but now since they've come up with all these Pepsi Colas and RC Colas and all them different kinds of drinks. But that's what we had to go through. And travelling, this is the reason why back years and years ago when people got ready to travel they would cook a lot of food because they knew there won't nowhere they could stop and eat. And this is the reason why on the bus, I think they've cut it out now, but take a whole lot of food on with them. People leaving here going to New York or Washington or wherever, they'd cook them a whole big box of food because if you got hungry there wasn't nowhere to eat. And if you go off, some people travelling in an

Horace Mims
automobile going to Washington or New York or Connecticut or anywhere they'd fix a great big box of food and then when they'd get hungry they'd stop on the highway somewhere and eat because you just didn't go in those places. In other words, just like I said, the black people did not have eating places on the highway like, you know, you'd find very few black places, I mean run by blacks. You find all these Wendy's and all these other places but at that time it was just a few places on the highway and they was operated by whites. You didn't find no black places. You had to go through some little town and probably get lost, go down there and find some little hole in the wall. But on the highway you didn't find no places. And I can remember, this was in the 1930's, going from here to Raleigh. I used to work with a guy, we did tree surgical work, you know, working on trees and different things like that and they had a couple of places on the highway where you could eat. So one day me and him was coming from Raleigh, he said let's stop and get something to eat. I said where are you going to stop at. See we had quit work and he had had him a couple of drinks. So he said we're going to

Horace Mims
stop at this place up here. I told him I said now you know I cannot go in there and eat.

**Hunter:** He was white?

**Mims:** Yeah, he was white. And I said now you know I can't go in there and eat. You know what I'm talking about because me and him, we'd talk, you know. He was about half high, he said well I'll tell you one thing, he said if I get up here and I run this car off of this bridge and I kill both of us, if we go to hell we can eat together and if we go to heaven we can eat together. (Laughter) I said no, that's alright, we'd better stay right here. I mean me and him, we'd travel. Sometimes we'd ride all night to get to different places, you know, to do the work. Every time we'd eat in his car or whatever. But just like I said, during that time there won't no places on the highway to eat except for, you could get something but you've got to come back outdoors and come around to the back, you know, to get it. And I won't going to do that. I said I'll wait until I get home before I do that. So this is what I ran into a lot of times.

Horace Mims
I know one time we were going down to Charlotte on the other side of Greensboro down here and it was late that night so I had drove all that evening and it was about two o'clock in the morning. So he said I know you're tired so I'm going to drive some now so you can get you some sleep. So I gets in the back and laid down and went to sleep. We stopped at an all night service station. It was four or five white guys standing out there and so they come out to the car and they looked and they seen me laying in the back asleep and they woke me up. What's that nigger doing back there sleeping! So he told them, said we work together, said he's been driving all day, he's done got sleepy and I'm driving. But see I'm supposed to be driving. He ain't supposed to be driving me. (Laughter) I'm laying in the back seat all asleep and everything and he's up there driving. They want to know what's he doing laying back there asleep. He told them, no, it ain't nothing like that. We work together. But see that was something that we had to go through.

**Hunter:** What year was that?

Horace Mims
Mims: That was in about 1938, 1939 I think it was. But you see that's what I'm saying, it was up until just a few years ago, what you might say. Thirty years ago just been a few years with me. At that time, as I was grown at that time, you know what I mean, working and everything but that was some of the things that coming up in the family. Everybody, all black people, most of us poor and we just worked and we shared things, whatever we had to share. And it won't no little you's and big I's at that time, so to speak. But now people have accumulated and some of them have prospered a lot and some people can't stand prosper. Some people when they prosper a little something they get big headed and they don't want to look back at you. See a white man he's always been so, I don't care how sorry a white man was, he won't going to talk against others. He didn't want to be with him now. A white man, he hated to be around what you call a cracker. But between you and that cracker, and you a black man, he was going with that cracker. You know what I mean, he was going along with him. I don't care how poor he was. But he was not going to turn

Horace Mims
against him for you. I don't care how bad he was he wasn't going to turn against him for you. This is what coming up all through the years up until now. We say now that, as I can see sometimes now we run into, it's a lot different. And one thing see, people always have said, you know, you used to think you go to New York or somewhere there won't no, everything was alright or whatever. But anywhere that you go certain places, you're going to run into hate. I know I had an uncle lived in ( ), New Jersey and I'd go up there to see him. He was a contractor, had trucks and things, contractor. He took me through some neighborhoods, he said don't be caught in this neighborhood when it gets dark. But see nobody thought that in New Jersey. But you see the difference in that is in the south they let you know but those in those places, they'd cover up. You know what I mean. But you know where you could go down here, where you could and you couldn't. You know that up front. But some of those places you didn't know it until you had lived around it long enough to know it. He told me said, he carried me through some places by him being a contractor, he had four or five trucks,

Horace Mims
done hauling, contracting. He knowed how the place was because he had been there so long and everything and by him being in business he knowed all the places, New York, Philadelphia. As I say, he was a contractor. So he finally gave it up. It got to the place, when he first went into business, he used to be in a clothing business too, he said he would hire black guys to drive to haul for him and he said when they won't making nothing he said they were right there with him ready to work. But after they started making that good big money they worked two or three days and they told him man, I can't work today. But when the money won't, won't making nothing much they worked everyday. But after they got to making about a hundred dollars a day, worked two or three days and got them two or three hundred dollars, they won't going to work until they spent that money. So it just got so hard and by him getting older he just gave up all the trucks except one.

Hunter: What was his name?

Mims: He's dead now. His name was Harvey.
Hunter: A white man?

Mims: No, he was black. He was my uncle.

Hunter: Oh, your uncle. What was his first name?

Mims: Harvey.

Hunter: Mims?

Mims: Yeah. He's my uncle. That's the reason why I said when I'd go up there he'd carry me through those places. I still have some cousins living in ( ).

Hunter: Do you have a middle name?

Mims: No, just Horace.

Hunter: What's your date of birth?

Mims: April 12, 1919.

Horace Mims
Hunter: And what city were you born in?

Mims: I was born in a rural area up here, Mebane.

Hunter: And you're married?

Mims: Yeah.

Hunter: What's your wife's name?

Mims: Lunie. She was a Carpenter. Carpenter was her name before she married me.

Hunter: What's her date of birth?

Mims: 1924, December 19.

Hunter: And where was she born?

Mims: She was born in Durham.

Hunter: And what did she do?

Horace Mims
Mims: She retired too. She used to work different places. Hospital, domestic work and different things like that.

Hunter: What was your mother's name?

Mims: Emma. She died in Hartford.

Hunter: Do you know when she died?

Mims: In 1962 or 1963. I've got all of them in yonder. I think it was 1962.

Hunter: Do you remember when she was born?

Mims: No, I've got those things in the Bible and different things around here. I don't know the date. Back in those days they didn't keep birth records.

Hunter: When do you think your mother was born, 1890?

Mims: Somewhere along there because I've got one aunt that was born in 1910 but she was older than she was.

Horace Mims
**Hunter:** What's your mother's maiden name?

**Mims:** Dewr. See she was a Mims. I'm by the name of Mims but her name was Dewr.

**Hunter:** Where was she born?

**Mims:** She was born in Chatham County.

**Hunter:** That's North Carolina?

**Mims:** Yeah.

**Hunter:** And what did she do?

**Mims:** Well, just like I was telling you about the green season, factory and things. That was mostly her work. She worked in the green season but during the off season she worked domestic. Like I said, back in those days that's what the people depended on that season work what I was telling you about. But after the season work was over anything they could find to

Horace Mims
do until the season work started up again. But mostly what she done was domestic work when the season was over.

Hunter: What was your father's name?

Mims: Oscar Mims.

Hunter: And when did he die?

Mims: He died in 196_. I had so many people die right along in there, had about four people die in the 1960's. It was 1960 I believe it was. 1959 or 1960, I forgot. Like I said, all of those dates... (End of Tape 1 - Side 2)

Tape 2

Mims: Back in those days people didn't keep birth certificates. Most of the people born in those days when I was born, they wasn't born in the hospital. They had what they called these ladies to go around to
deliver babies. In those days people wasn't born in the hospital, especially black people.

**Hunter:** What did they call those ladies?

**Mims:** I forget it right now. What did they call those ladies that used to go around? What did they call them? What did they call them women that used to deliver babies?

**Mrs. Mims:** Mid-wives.

**Mims:** Mid-wives, that's right. That's what they called them. That's what most people back in the 1920's and 1930's and the 1800's, they had a mid-wife. See they didn't keep no birth certificate.

**Hunter:** Where was your father born?

**Mims:** He was born in Chatham County.

**Hunter:** And what did he do, he was a farmer?

Horace Mims
Mims: Yeah.

Hunter: What else did he do?

Mims: Sawmill and different things. People done different things. They didn't have one occupation. They just worked whatever. That time farmed, sawmill, railroad. That was the biggest industry for black people.

Hunter: Do you have brothers and sisters?

Mims: All of my brothers, all of them have passed. Just like I say, all of them passed in Hartford.

Hunter: What were their names?

Mims: Two of them passed here. One of them got injured in an automobile accident. One of my brothers passed in Hartford. His name was Ulseye.

Hunter: Do you remember when he was born?
Mims: He was born, they had his birth certificate I think. His and mine was kind of mixed up but he was born in 1920.

Hunter: Do you remember when he died?

Mims: He died in 1990 I believe it was. All of that is in a book in there. All of them have passed.

Hunter: Was he born in the same place?

Mims: Yeah, un-huh. My sisters, all of them were born, one of them was born here and the other two were born in Chatham.

Hunter: And your brother was born in Mebane?

Mims: Yeah.

Hunter: What are your sister's names?

Mims: One of them is Annie B. Adams.

Horace Mims
Hunter: Do you remember when she was born?

Mims: No, all of their birthdays are back in, they didn't keep no birth certificates. All of them, you know, I'm about four years older than she is so she was born somewhere along about 1924 or something like that.

Hunter: And she died?

Mims: Yeah, she died year before last in 1992.

Hunter: She was born in Mebane?

Mims: Naw, she was born in Chatham County.

Hunter: How many other brothers and sisters?

Mims: Mary Magdalene Stewart, she was born in Durham. And one named Ella Mae Bryant, she was born.

Hunter: They were born around the same time?

Horace Mims
Mims: Yeah. About a year or something like that difference in age.

Hunter: When did they die?

Mims: Ella Mae, she died in 1989 I believe it was. Mary, she died in 1985 I believe it was. All of them just a few years apart.

Hunter: And they were born in Chatham?

Mims: Yeah.

Hunter: So were you the firstborn?

Mims: No, I had one got in an automobile accident, he was the oldest. He was born in 1910.

Hunter: That was?

Mims: You don't have the name. His name was Owen Green.

Hunter: How long ago did he die?
Mims: This was around about the late 1960's, somewhere along there.

Hunter: Was he born in Mebane too?

Mims: No, he was born in Chatham County too. See most of them was born in Chatham County.

Hunter: So you were the second born?

Mims: Yeah.

Hunter: Do you have any children?

Mims: Yeah, I have three, two girls and a boy.

Hunter: What are their names?

Mims: Willie Lee Murphy.

Hunter: When was she born?
Mims: She was born here in Durham. She was born in 1942.

Hunter: What are the others?

Mims: Doris Mims, she was born in 1943. Horace, Jr., he was born in 1952. No, 1955. I get all of them tangled up. When you get as old as I am you won't be thinking like that either. You might think well, he can't think. But you get seventy-five years old, especially behind two heart attacks.

Hunter: Do you have any grandchildren?

Mims: Yeah, I have one, two, three, five grandchildren.

Hunter: What was the first place you lived in when you were younger? What was the first place? Mebane?

Mims: Yeah, Mebane.

Hunter: How long did you live there, until you were about seventeen?

Horace Mims
Mims: Off and on until I was around about fifteen or sixteen, something like that. That was off and on, you know.

Hunter: ( )

Mims: Something like that, 1930 or 1931. You know, off and off. I was here to there, here to there.

Hunter: Where did you live after that?

Mims: I've lived in Washington and different places. I got married in Portsmouth, Virginia. I was living in Portsmouth, Virginia at the time I got married.

Hunter: So you lived in Washington?

Mims: Yeah.

Hunter: How long did you live there?

Mims: A good while. During that time I was doing a lot of travelling from one place to another.
Hunter: And you lived in Portsmouth?

Mims: Yeah, Portsmouth, Virginia and I got married in Portsmouth, Virginia. Then came back to Durham.

Hunter: How long have you lived in Durham?

Mims: Off and on about sixty-five or seventy years. About sixty-five years, you know, off and on. I came back here in 1942 and I've been living here ever since. I left here and went place to place.

Hunter: What was the name of the school you attended?

Mims: Byrd School. When I was living in Portsmouth, Virginia it wasn't no place for lodging. It was just so crowded with service people. At that time it was just so crowded you couldn't find a decent place to live so I came back here. When I came back here that's when I started to work at American and I've been here ever since.

Horace Mims
Hunter: And that was really carpentry work at first, right?

Mims: Construction, doing construction work, yeah. Building bridges, anything, highways or whatever.

Hunter: And that was here?

Mims: All around, Roxboro, Mebane, Burlington. Just anywhere, contract anywhere. Do a job here and leave when you finish and go some other place.

Hunter: And you did that off and on for?

Mims: Quite a few years.

Hunter: Starting when?

Mims: 1930's, 1935 or 1936, somewhere along in there.

Hunter: And then you went to the tobacco company?

Mims: Yeah I went to tobacco in 1942, American Tobacco Company, Inc.
Hunter: That's in Durham?

Mims: Yeah. You see where they're building the ballpark. That whole entire area, all of that belonged to American.

Hunter: When did they tear it down?

Mims: The building hadn't been torn down. That parking lot where they're building that ballpark now, that was the parking lot. Right behind the parking lot is where that big building from one corner to another. That was the factory. You ride by there sometime and just look over there where they're building that ballpark and you'll see the building over there. You have to go around. Used to you could go straight in front of the building but they've got it blocked off since they're building that park. But you can go around and you can see the whole factory. You just ride by there some time and check it out.

Hunter: And after you retired from tobacco, what did you do?
Mims: No, I haven't done nothing.

Hunter: Your church is Baptist, right?

Mims: Huh?

Hunter: Have you always been a Baptist?

Mims: Yeah.

Hunter: Have you been in (    ) for awhile?

Mims: Thirty years.

Hunter: You went to church where?

Mims: I wasn't a member of a church there but I used to attend different churches. I used to attend a Methodist Church down there on South Alston Avenue but that's not where I became a member.
Hunter: You mentioned you were part of a union at work, the AFLCIO. What other organizations have you been in?

Mims: Well, I belonged to that union and a member of the Elks. That's the only other, you know. Just like we have an usher union. We have all denominations usher union. It's all denominations, we don't exclude nobody. Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Holiness, whatever. Churches from all different parts of the state of North Carolina. All over North Carolina. We have some in the union in Virginia. Our convention comes up in August. We have a convention every year. I forgot where the lady said. Last night we had a meeting but I've done forgot where she said it was going to be. I used to attend all of those conventions but in the late years a lot of us older people, we don't do too much attending because as I said, I had these two heart attacks and at times I don't like to go off and stay two or three days. We used to have it three days but now it's only two days.
Hunter: Any kind of favorite saying or phrase or quote or anything that you would like to say that you would like for me to know or have people know?

Mims: I can't of any specific thing now. You got so many different phrases and things. Right now I don't have any. I can't think of anything right now.

Hunter: I think if you don't have anymore to add I'll cut off the tape.

Mims: No, I don't have anything more to add. When you go through this and searching the different things I've said and be in contact with other people, with older people, senior citizens, you will find things, you know, what I've said you'll probably hear repeated because anybody that's seventy-five years old they have travelled the same road. We all have travelled the same road. So I hope and pray that people will take heed to this because you have the chance and the opportunity to go forward to be whatever you want to be. As I was saying, in my coming up we had to strive for what we could get and a lot of times we didn't get...
what we wanted or to be what we wanted to be. Because when you've got the chance, education now, before I retired there were certain things that I wanted to do but my educational background, I couldn't, you know, because of the pay. This is the reason why when I became, they started whenever you got sixty years old, they would begin to ask you when are you going to retire because you could retire at sixty-two.

Machinery had advanced so much that they didn't need us because we didn't have the educational background to operate different types of machines. Because machinery is taking over manpower. Some machines down at American Tobacco Company where four people had to look after that one machine, they cut it down where one person could operate it. In other words, they joined two machines together and one person could operate both of those machines. So therefore they were cutting back on the labor and replacing it with machines. That's the reason why now you need a specific, like they used to say a long time ago, that pigskin, if you don't have that you ain't getting nowhere. That used to be a word they used to use some years ago when the educated persons begin to take

Horace Mims
over. They'd ask you if you go somewhere, if you don't have that pigskin, that sheepskin, you don't have it. That was it. If you had that sheepskin you could get it but if you didn't. They were advertising some years ago because just like you say - how old did you say you was?

**Hunter:** Twenty-six.

**Mims:** See this was when you won't even hardly thinking about it because this has been ten or fifteen years ago when this was really coming out. So you've learned a lot from talking to older people and what we're telling you is not something we made up. It ain't no hearsay.

I can't tell you, just like ( ) for instance, nobody can tell me, you can't tell me how a drunk man feels if you haven't ever been drunk. You know how he looks. You know how he acts. You know how he smells.

But you don't know how he felt. I mean it might sound, but that's the truth. If you ain't never drank any whiskey and never been drunk, how do you know. He looks like he's drunk. He smells like he's drunk. He acts like he's drunk. But you don't know how he feels.

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on the inside. So this is one reason why when you talk to several people who ain't never had a heart attack and they say yeah, I know how you feel. You ain't no never had no heart attack you can say I hate you feel like this or whatever but if your heart ain't never been busted you don't know how it feels. You can have some pain and compassion but seeing somebody else that's had a heart attack, we can talk to each other because we all had that same experience of going into certain different things in that heart attack. If you ain't never had one don't - don't say I want to have one - un-uh, don't you do that. (Laughter) You don't never want that feeling. When I looked at mine, the monitor there beside the bed and I could look at it. They said you want to see it and I could see how my heart was functioning and just to think, now if this thing knocks off, you know. To look at it I could see how it functioned and everything. But when you're looking at it and this thing is doing this and that, like a valve or something. You can take off this arm here, this hand or finger, I can go ahead off. You can't take that and say well, you can go ahead on. Un-uh. It's just an experience that you'll

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never forget and you don't ever get tired of talking about it because everybody that's had a heart attack, nine times out of ten when they start talking to you before it's over they're going to mention something about it. So many people have them and never be able to tell it. That's the way it is. Like I say, when you talk somebody else they might tell you something but when it comes down, it all gels right together. They might tell you in a different tone or different things but it all adds up to the same thing. You might work a problem one way but we're all looking at the same answer. You might work a problem five and five is ten one way or whatever, you know, eight and two is ten or five and five is ten or seven and three is ten but you look for ten. I don't care what, you're looking for ten. Like I say, you might say five and five is ten, seven and three is ten, eight and two is ten, six and four ten. That might be the way you write it. I might write it five and five is ten. But you want ten. Regardless of what numbers you use, it all adds up to ten.

Hunter: I really appreciate it.

Horace Mims
Mims: I enjoyed doing it.