

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

African American Migration to Youngstown, 1940-1965

Personal Experience

O.H. 1919

ERNEST RHEINS

Interviewed

by

Michael Beverly

on

February 19, 1999

B: This is an interview with Ernest Rheins for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on African-American Migration to Youngstown, 1940-1965, by Michael Beverly, on February 19, 1999, at 444 W. Evergreen Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio.

Could you give me some background?

R: I was born in Port-au-Prince, West Indies. I was brought here when I was five years old to Florida. I grew up in the Everglades with the Seminole Indians. I was schooled at Howard Academy. Howard Academy is the high school in Jefferson County, Florida. I graduated from high school there. I went to Florida's A & M. That was in 1932. It took me two years to get my B.S. degree, and the reason for that was that I was so far advanced in high school. My professor advanced me so far in high school that I took a state examination and I began college a junior instead of freshman year.

B: Really? Wow.

R: It took me two years to get my B.S. degree. I graduated from Florida when President J. R. E Lee, Sr. was the president -- not Junior, Senior. That was back in 1934. I went from 1932 to 1934 to get the B.S. degree. Then I went to New Orleans Seminary studying for the ministry. While I was in New Orleans Seminary, I took some biology under George Washington Carver at Tuskegee Institute. Finishing New Orleans seminary, then I came to Wilboforce. That is where I got my S.T.D. degree in theology and pastoring. Then I was blessed to get my PhD in theology from Oxford University in Oxford, England. Mrs. M. L. Goldberg, a Jew, sponsored my education over there. She paid for it for me. That is how I got that. I began pastoring, if you want the truth about it, when I was a child. I was about six and a half years old when I started pastoring Junious Hill Missionary Baptist Church. I have been in the ministry ever since 1923. I was ordained. June 24, 1923.

B: What year were you born?

R: I am going to tell you that. My birthday is the 25th of December, 1916. 1916, that is my birthday. Now, I do not know my biological father. The only thing I know is Daddy Abraham, and I was not adopted because back then you did not have to adopt children. He just took me in with his children, and that is where I grew up. That is why I had to grow up with those Indians. Okay. Now, I have been on my own practically all of my life with the help of Daddy Abraham. I call him Daddy Abraham because he is the only daddy I know anything about. And Miles Groover. Miles Groover was the county agent for the 4-H Club. That is a farming section, you see. His daughter and I grew up together, and we finished

school almost together. Now, in preaching, I only pastored eight churches in my life. Four of them was what you would call circuit churches, you know. A church every Sunday.

B: I understand.

R: During that time, you can pastor four churches because you had a leader in every church.

B: Was this in Jefferson County, Florida?

R: Jefferson County, Madison County. I am coming to that now. Madison County and Taylor County. Now, the biggest church that I have pastored was Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. It was two Sunday church. Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church was a two Sunday church. Shiloh was in Madison, Florida. Then I left Junious Hill, and I went to Masadonia Baptist Church in Perry, Florida. That was Taylor County. Now during this time I had to walk because I did not have no car. All preachers had to walk. During this same time, there was no such thing as no choirs, no piano, no organs. We had what they called spiritual leaders sung the spiritual songs. They sung the meter hymns. The men was known as deacons, and the women was the deaconesses. But we had a pretty good educational system. By the way, whether you believe it or not, we had to make a grade inside of four months. So that is the only time we had to go to school. We had to work eight months out of the year, so we had go to school four. So we had to make a grade every four months, and we made them. A lot of things that you think would be impossible that seem to be impossible now was a possibility then because you had to make do with what you had.

B: Right.

R: Now I like segregation for one reason. Segregation taught us how to take what we had and make what we want out of it. In segregation, we our own banks, we had our own churches, we had our own schools, and we had our own practically everything. So that gave us a pretty good boost as black people.

The next thing segregation taught us to do, it taught us how to pull together. In pulling together we can be stronger financially, spiritually, and physically. One needed help, all of us would go and help them. One house burnt down, all of us would go there and build them a house. That is the way we did it because there was no such a thing back then as insurance like you got now. If a person got sick, we sit up with him, two men. If it was a women, two women would sit up every night until she got well. If you were a man, the same thing with the men.

Now, you might have heard them talking and hear them praying, the older

folks praying, about they was glad that last night was not the winding sheet and the cooling board. I am going to tell you how that come about. They did not have no undertakers to embalm people. So the law would not let you bury a person that died under three days so you could be sure they was dead. But during the same time, that is where this wake come from. You had to sit up with them because a cat will eat a dead person. So you had to sit up with them in the night time. To keep them cool, they had two wide boards that they carried in the community. They carried around to the dead people, you know? They had to wash them and put them on those boards. Then they had the winding sheet, a piece of white cloth, to wind them up in so the air could get to them. That is why you hear them talking about the winding sheet and the cooling boards. That is what they are talking about.

B: What happened to your mother?

R: My mother I do not know. I do not know. I was going to come to this. I do know this. My mother was in Haiti, but where about I do not know. I never have seen my biological daddy at all. I do not know him at all. The only thing I know was that he was an Everett. If you know the truth about it, my name is Ernest Frank Everett. That is my name. But Rheins, the man that took me in and raised me, they are the Rheins'. So I go by his name.

B: Did he have a wife?

R: Yeah. His wife was named Hattie. We called her Nane, but his wife was named Hattie Rheins.

B: Did everybody work outside the home?

R: All of us worked in the farm. All of us was farming. Daddy Abraham, he was a blacksmith and a machinist. He made guns and pistols, and he made wagons and ploughs, things like that.

B: He was not a Seminole Indian, was he?

R: No, no, no.

B: He was black?

R: He was black. Now, another thing. All the black people in America did not come from Africa. Daddy Abraham did not come from Africa. Daddy Abraham was what we call a Canaanite. He came from the land of Canaan, better known as Israel today. See, that is where he came from. Daddy Abraham's people came

here before the Mayflower. They was in America before the Mayflower. Now, do not ask me how long because I do not know. That is too far back for me.

B: Right.

R: But I do know that much. The next thing, he was never a slave.

B: Oh, really?

R: He was never a slave. My people were never slaves. We owned a little land.

B: Because you were born in Haiti.

R: Right. None of us were slaves. So, actually, we were not rich, but we were not slaves. We did not have to work half-crops. You know, we did not have to work for the white men unless we wanted to work for them because we was on our own land. What little we had, we owned that. Now, Daddy Abraham always told me it was better to be free and be your own boss. It was thousand times better to be your own boss, he said. You may not own so much, but whatever you have, own that and care for it. So that is how that started.

Now, after getting educated, I have spent all of my time trying to build colored people. I really want to build colored people. Now, the time when I was in Florida, I worked with the NAACP, branch number 36, in Florida. I worked with the Florida State Convention, Baptist State Convention, and the Bethlehem Baptist Association. Now, these organizations have their own college, Florida Memorial Industrial College. The Baptists in Florida still got their own college today. Just about every denomination in Florida got their own college. The Methodists got theirs, Edward Waters College in Jacksonville. The Primity Baptists got theirs, Griffin College in Tallahassee, and so on. All of us looked for and had and provided education for our children. One main thing that you notice, even up until today, you have never heard of a strike in a school system in the South. You have never heard that. You never saw it on television, never heard it on the radio because the people are more interested in the children's learning than they are in money. That is why we are so advanced.

Now, even today, if my grandson had to go from here to Florida and start school, they would set him back two grades. They would set him back two grades for one reason. Up here, you have to get 18 semester hours. Down there you have to get 24. When you get 24 down there, you do not have to have no tests to go in no southern university. You are qualified to get in any university that you want to get into, even Princeton, Yale, any university. You are qualified to go in there. How I came here and pastoring in the South. My uncles, Alec and Amos, they was living here, and I came up here to visit them. I preached at Tabernacle Baptist Church. Samuel Phillips was pastor there.

B: This was during the 1950's when you came here?

R: No, this was back in the 1940's. This was back in the 1940's before I moved here.

B: Okay. So you started visiting here first.

R: Visiting here first. They talked about me, and I ran several revivals in here. That is how I got up here.

B: So this is through your uncles. Are these your biological uncles?

R: No.

B: Okay. Your adopted uncles.

R: My adopted uncles, Daddy Abraham's brothers.

B: They live here.

R: I do not know none of my biological people if you want the truth about it. These are the only people I know.

B: Those are your real people.

R: Those are my people, yes. They are the only ones I know, see. I ran several revivals up here, and Holy Trinity got without a pastor. So they called me up here to come. I ran a revival in here for them, so they called me. I went back to Florida and served out my 90 days down there. Then, I came here in 1960. I took over the church here the fourth Sunday in June of 1960 at Holy Trinity. That is on 243 West Rayen Avenue. You know what old churches are down there on Rayen.

B: Yes.

R: That is where it was, and from that on up until now I have been right here.

B: Was there anything down in Florida that drove you to leave? Did you like it down there?

R: Oh, yes, I liked it in Florida. I was not drove here. Listen to me good. I was not drove here because I got along pretty good in Florida myself. I went wherever I could do good in the pastoring way. That is why I am here. Now when it comes

down to bad parts in the South, I know all about segregation. Plenty of times I used to be, when I was pastoring, walking to church. White people did not like to see you dressed up. Plenty of times we would look back and see a dust coming, a car coming. You did not know who. They would come up and shoot at you.

B: Really? So those things did not really matter to you?

R: Well, that is a way of life for us.

B: I mean, it did not enter into your mind as one of the reasons that you came here?

R: No. I came here because I wanted to come here to preach. After I got going and got established, I would shoot back. [laughter]

B: Right.

R: See what I am talking about?

B: You have to defend yourself. [laughter]

R: Yeah, I have got to defend myself. They would do that. Just like if you had on a white shirt and a black tie, they would come by and pick at you and say that it was a Negro choking a white man. See, you could not wear that and all that stuff. Now, one thing I want to set straight. All the lynching that was done down there was not done by the Ku Klux Klans. It was done by vigilantes. Poor white people did not want to see the Negro come up and have something.

B: Okay. So it was not all done by the Ku Klux Klan.

R: The Ku Klux Klan beated white folks as much as it did black folks if they out of line. But the more vigilantes, the poor white folks. You know what I mean?

B: Yes.

R: Just like you had an automobile or something like that, they would pick at you and all this other stuff.

B: Did your family have trouble with them?

R: I had trouble. I had a shootout with one.

B: Really? But that was not Ku Klux Klan?

- R: No, no. Was not no Ku Klux Klan. It was a vigilante. I know what I am talking about because I lived through this.
- B: Yeah. You are right. When people think about the South, they always think about the Ku Klux Klan.
- R: But people do not understand that. Do you know where the Ku Klux Klan's birthplace is at? In Salem. Salem, Ohio. Right there where it was organized. It was first started in Salem, Ohio. But it took old vigilantes, poor white people who did not want to see you have nothing. They would pick at you and all that stuff. So we learned how to fight back. Now, I know all about Rosewood. Did you ever see that picture?
- B: No, I have not seen it, but I have heard a lot about it.
- R: Well, all right. I knew about Rosewood. Rosewood was an all-Negro town south of Perry, Florida. South of Perry, Florida, and northeast of Cedar Keys. Now, what happened there was they had paved streets and everything just like the white folks. A white man wanted to buy some land in there. They knew, if he got his land, he got a foothold in there, he would rule everything. So they would not sell it to him. All right. In order to have his way about it, he said that one of the Negroes there raped his wife.
- B: Oh, that is what happened.
- R: It took them three weeks to burn it up and kill the people. See, I know about that. I had a chance to go there, and you could smell human meat burning just like fried meat. That is how that was. The state of Florida would not give them no protection whatever.
- B: Was the movie close to what really happened in your opinion?
- R: Well, I have not seen the movie. From what I hear of it, it will give you an idea, but it was not exactly like it. It was worse than the movie, I can tell you that much. It was worse than the movie.
- B: So Rosewood does not exist anymore?
- R: No, no. There is just a sight there. The land is still owned by the black people, but they did not build it back. Now, they have got another town there that they could not bother and did not bother because it was too dangerous for them, and that was Jacobs, Florida. That is out north of Miriana, Florida, and south of Dothan, Alabama, near the line. That is Jacobs, Florida. This town is owned



and operated by Negroes. You see, they had what they call a rat rule. That is where black folks had to go and get the food and stuff. At the time, they were not allowed to go up on the pave. So Negroes did not go there. They built their own town and put their own paves in, and this is what those poor crackers did not want to happen.

B: Why?

R: See, the lower they could keep the Negro down, the more they could work you for nothing. Every time one tried to come up, they would discourage it.

B: Was your father the one who was behind your becoming so educated? Did he push you?

R: The best he could, yes. But I am going to tell you one of the best things that made me a man. Number one, I could not see me digging a ditch all my days with a pick, we called it a mad ax, and a shovel. It made blisters and callouses in your hands. I could not see myself doing that all my days. All right. We were not rich enough to have money to put in our bank. So the best thing for me to do was to get an education. We had such people as Booker T. Washington, in Tuskegee, and people like Wilson Martin, educators like Step Tillman, and people like that. They would come in the community. They would set up, we call it workshops now, but at that time we called it improvement meetings to improve the community. George Washington Carver, when he went into his peanut stuff, business and stuff, he invented a way that poor people could go and get chalk clay from the side of a hill and boil it in salt and make paint to paint all the houses with. Several things he taught us. We was not able to get rugs for the floor. But we would go and he taught us how to take the shucks off of corn, the husks, and soak them with water and put them together and make rugs. You see?

B: He was a brilliant man.

R: We knew how to take cotton and make cloth, too. We had the cart to clean the cotton, and we had the spinning wheels and the loom and all that stuff. We did that.

B: So you say you knew George Washington Carver, right?

R: I went to class with George Washington Carver.

B: How was he as a teacher? Did you like him?

R: George Washington Carver was a man that, if anybody wanted to learn anything, they had to like him because he would make it so simple and still it was so fascinating, see? It was still so fascinating. Back when I was going to school under him, he invented a chemical. He did not give it a name, and he destroyed it. And he destroyed the formula because it was too powerful. He could take a drop, an eyedropper, and drop six drops on a pine stump and step back and hit it with a hammer, and it would explode and blow that whole stump out of the ground.

B: Oh, man. So I guess he was kind of afraid of it.

R: He said it was too dangerous, and so he destroyed it. He would not even keep the formula for that at all. He demonstrated it to us. He is the one that learned me the three stages of the caterpillar: the egg, the caterpillar, the cocoon, and the butterfly. A lot of stuff I learned. Now, another thing that we had, we did not have no music. We had people that wrote music to come in and teach us music. One of the greatest men that we ever had in the Negro race of singing was Rolan Hays. Rolan Hays was what they call a first tenor, and he could carry his voice so high he could knock five windows out of the church. If it was glass, he could knock five glass windows out of the church. He is the one that discovered Miriam Anderson. He discovered Miriam Anderson. Would you believe that they would not let him have a concert?

B: Is he from Florida?

R: No, he was born in what they call Molehill, Georgia, right at the foot of Stone Mountain. That is north of Atlanta. That is where he was born and raised, in there. He left from there after his daddy died. He left from there and went to Chattanooga, Tennessee. Then, the only thing he could do was sing to colored people. He could not sing to others. They would not give him a concert at all. So he left from Chattanooga and went to Louisville, Kentucky, and a man give him \$40 a week to sing. But, you know how he had to sing? He had to sing behind a movie screen. He could not sing out so people could see him. He had to sing behind the movie screen.

B: That is a shame.

R: He was not recognized until he went abroad when he went to England. Then, it was in a year, King George V heard about him, and he demanded him to come to Buckingham Palace and put on a concert there. When he put on the concert there, then the king in France did the same thing, Germany, and all over. The newspapers in America picked it up, see? Then when he come back here three years later, then they would let him sing. They did Jesse Owens the same way.

Jesse Owens, when he was in Berlin to win the world record, the same year he won the world record he could not even eat at their table. He had to eat hot dogs in light bread in his room.

B: That is amazing.

R: Take me. When I was going to Florida's A & M, we had Fisk University. Jubilee Singers come down to Florida's A & M, and they borrowed me from Florida's A & M to lead three songs for them on a tour. I led those three songs. All the singing we could do was to sing to Negro churches and things. We could not give no public concert.

B: When you came to Youngstown, were there a lot of differences from Florida?

R: Well, in a way it was and in a way it was not. When I first came to Youngstown in 1960, they had discrimination here. They had it disguised. They had what they called key clubs, and if you did not have the key, you could not go in. They just saw that the black people did not have no keys, so we did not get in.  
[laughter]

B: When you came here, where did you first live?

R: When I came here, I moved with my uncle on 533 Griffin Street. That is right in front of the project up there. All that is tore down now.

B: In a house?

R: In his house. We stayed there about three months, and then the church rented us a home, a house, over on Fruit Street.

B: On the east side?

R: On the East side, yeah. On Fruit Street, it used to be a flat. You know what a flat is?

B: Yeah.

R: It used to be a flat there, and the house belonged to Miss Carter, east of the flat. We stayed there a length of time, and then we moved from there right on the corner, still on Fruit Street, but it was in Mr. Brown's house. The church owned that. Then, in 1965, the church bought this, and I have been here ever since.

B: If you had a whole lot of money, all the money you wanted, when you came here

to Youngstown, did you feel you could move in any house in any part of Youngstown that you wanted to move in?

R: No, you could not move into any house.

B: You could not live in the white sections of Youngstown?

R: You could not do it. You did not do it. You see, people will not tell you this, but they had what they call the Monkey's Nest. They wanted you to live around that Monkey's Nest. Now, what they would do, they would not tell you you could not move there. But just like out there in Boardman, there are some places out there in Boardman that they do not tell you you cannot live there, but when you go to buy the price is so high that you cannot reach it. Do you see what I am talking about? So you will not buy it because the price is high, but the white man can come and get it for half of the price. That is how they did it here.

B: Were you able to go anywhere like movie theaters? Could you sit anywhere that you wanted?

R: Yes. They had it so that you could sit practically everywhere you went. In fact, when the mills were running, there were so many people here that you could sit anywhere you wanted to sit. They had different clubs you just could not go in, period. It was not right for you to go in, period.

B: How were you treated by the black people when you came here?

R: When I came here, I was not used to walking by people and not speaking. In the South right now, you can go down there and be a stranger, but you would not pass by without someone saying, "Good morning. How are you feeling? My name is such and such." They would get acquainted with you. That is what I was used to. Up here, they pass right by you and do not say a word.

B: Even the black people do this?

R: Black people did this.

B: Who helped you get adjusted to Youngstown?

R: What happened was I had done a lot of traveling because I did a lot of mission work. I knew how to take the bad and make the good out of it, sort of mix it. The next thing when I came here, you did not have a colored teller in the bank, and you did not have a colored clerk in the store when I came here in 1960.

B: You never saw one?

R: No. In the South you did not see it down there because we had our own stores. Do you see what I am talking about? Up here they did not have their own stores, but you still did not see it. Me and the secretary of the Council of Churches, Dr. Sharp. Me and Dr. Sharp were the first ones to put the first black teller in Dollar Bank.

B: Was this in 1960?

R: 1962. And we started working from there and putting them in there like that.

B: Was it about this time that you first starting seeing black clerks in stores, too?

R: That was the start of it right there. After we started that, then the Council of Churches and all the priests come together. The Baptist Preacher's Council, they came together, and we were fighting for it then.

B: So you were very active in trying to get rights for black people?

R: Yes. Trying to get black people in everything we could get them in. One thing that we found out, though, we had to get them educated. Plenty of them would just finish high school and would not get nothing else. That was not enough. If you go apply for to be a teller in a bank, you have to have a business course. You have to know how to run it. So we had to fight for that. We had to fight for putting classes like that in the school system. There was not many black teachers here when I came here.

B: Did other pastors help you?

R: Yes. All of us got together. When Dr. Sharp and I and J.C. Tony and Henry J. Pippins, who was pastor of Tabernacle, all of us preachers got together. J.B. Myers of Friendship, Cox with New Hope, and Jones down in Union. All of us got together, and we went to put them in there. We told them what you have got to do. You have to get in there, but you have got to have your education. You have to be trained for it. People were going to places like ITT, vocational schools and colleges and things and getting themselves ready. What had happened here was the most the white men wanted the black men here to do was to shovel that coal into those furnaces.

B: Did you ever work in a steel mill?

R: I never have worked in a steel mill. I never have been in one at all. But that is

what they wanted him to do, and they wanted to keep them so they could work there. If you could go work in the steel mill, how come he could not run a crane? Give them some of the jobs the white man had.

B: The skilled jobs.

R: Yeah, the skilled jobs. And that is what we were fighting for. Now I am going to tell you something. You have still got an undercurrent here now against blacks. It does not look like it, but it is here. If you do not believe it, look at how many colored people have tried to start businesses here that went under because you got an undercurrent here. They cannot put in a store. Now that is a fact. Take me right now. I have got a franchise right now with Church's Chicken. I could put a Church's Chicken or a Church's Popeye in Youngstown right now. I cannot even get the help. I cannot run it by myself. I cannot even get the help. It is a funny thing to say it, but even my own people will not help me, talking about I am too old. I am trying to start something for my grandchildren. The white men do it. How come we cannot do it?

B: That is true.

R: If I started a Popeye, probably your daughter would want to get a job there after school. This is one thing the black man in this valley got to learn. He has got to learn to produce his own and patronize his own so he can help his own.

B: Back in the 1960's, when you first came here, do you feel that they were helping each other more than they do now?

R: When they got to see how the advancement of them was taking hold and how things was coming better with the race, yes. Now, there is a sense that this is as far as I want to go, and I am not going no farther. They are satisfied. Once you become satisfied, you start to decrease. I do not have to tell you that. When you stop growing, you start to die. That is the way it is with them. When I came here, they was more together. They did not have the killing they got now. It was safer. We looked out for one another. Now, they do not give a confound whether you live or die. I do not know whether you see it or not, but I see it even in the churches now. You do not have the love in the churches now that you had back in the 1960's when I came here. You just do not have it.

B: I believe that.

R: When I came here, we had morning worship. Sunday school, then morning worship. Come back at 4:30, B.T.U. 6:00, night service. We had prayer meeting through the week. We had choir rehearsals. We had bible classes.

You know what they did before I even stopped pastoring? They voted B.T.U. out and voted not to have no night service.

B: How many years did you pastor at Holy Trinity?

R: 36.

B: That is incredible.

R: If the Lord let me live, I am supposed to preach Sunday morning up at New Bethel for Reverend Kenny Simon. He called me this morning. If I be able to preach that sermon, that would be my 10,999th sermon.

B: Wow.

R: I am lacking one sermon to preaching 11,000 sermons.

B: God really blessed you. He really blessed you.

R: I want to tell you my health is pretty good. December 25, 1998 I was 82 years old. I even got my wisdom teeth. I went through a wreck five years ago. Hard-headed, I did not have on my seat belt. To tell you the truth about it, I wrecked my car to keep from killing a carload of children. I was going down 46 through Austintown over there, and it was raining. There was a little Chevette in front of me loaded with children. You could see them playing. I followed them about a mile, and all at once she just put on brakes. When she did that, the car turned crossways in the road, and I was driving a Grand Marquis Mercury. I did not make but two payments on it. If I had hit it sideways, I would have killed everybody in there. So I just said, "Lord have mercy." I pulled into the woods. I totaled that car. By me not having on my seat belt, hard-headed, I broke six ribs in my right side, three in my left side, broke my collarbone, and broke my right leg. It drove that motor right back on me.

B: You are still here, though.

R: And would you believe that they would not keep me in the hospital but nine days? I came here to this house. I did not take no therapy. I therapied myself. My wife would leave and go to work. She would cook me some breakfast, you know. Cook me some Cream of Wheat or something. I call it nothing. Oatmeal, you know? [laughter] And no sooner she would leave, I would get my walker and come down the steps there. I would go in there and cook me some ham and eggs and grits. [laughter]

B: That sounds a lot better.

R: I learned myself when I was 82 years old, and I can still go without a stick or crutch or anything. I think that I am doing pretty good.

B: You are doing fine.

R: Now, I brought up my children. I brought up two sets of children. I was married twice. My first wife left me with five kids, and I brought them up. I educated all of them before I married again. Then, I married the wife I got now. She and I have been together 43 years, and I brought up 3 boys: Ralph, Mark, and Phil. You know Phil?

B: I know Phil.

R: That is my baby. Mark is two years older than Phil, and Ralph is six years older than Phil. Mark and Ralph are organ players. They are musicians. So all of them are doing good now. My wife is an administrator up there to the hospital now. Here is another thing I want to tell you. Age does not amount to nothing when it comes down to it. Now, take me. I married my wife. She was not but 18 years old when I married her. I am 22 years older than my wife.

B: Age does not mean anything.

R: No, it does not mean nothing. Sometimes, I think we are too close together. My head can start to hurt and hers will hurt. If hers hurts, mine will hurt. Well, you know what the Bible says. It is one flesh. That is what happens.

B: Now these are her three sons, right?

R: Right. All was raised right here. Now, Ralph, the oldest one, was born in West Palm Beach. He was two years old when we came here. But the rest of them were born here, and all of them were raised here. All of them was educated. They all graduated from South High.

B: So you had two sets of kids. Were they educated down South? [tape stops] Which are the best -- the kids that you had down South or the ones here in Youngstown, then?

R: Let us see. The only thing I can go by is the results. Now, the ones that I raised down South, I raised them by myself. Every one of them never did get on no cocaine, and all of them got degrees. How I did it was by us having our own college down there. All I had to do was buy clothes and books because I had



two sets of twins and a single. I had five kids in college at one time. [laughter] See what I am talking about? By us owning our own school, I did not have to pay no tuition or nothing. All I had to do was get them some books. That is how I got them there. I got a boy that has a PhD in electronics. He works for NASA in Texas where they shoot up those missiles. He works for them. I got a boy that was the president of Tennessee State University in Cookeville, Tennessee. He is a wizard. I got another one in Madison. He has a PhD in philosophy. He is a wizard. I will tell you what. The ones that I raised down there went further in school. Every one I raised down there went as far as they could go. I started them, but they kept going. They went as far as they could go.

Now the ones up here. I do not have but one up here that come near them in their schooling. Phil is studying now for his master's. Now Phil is behind. When I was 35 years old, I had my PhD. He is behind me. [laughter] He has got to hurry up. I would think the ones down South took a better chance with their education. Ralph finished high school. Ralph told me, "Daddy, I do not want to go college." Well, I appreciate that. I had taught Ralph how to weld. By me growing up around the machine shop, I know how to weld, forge weld, seblcn weld. So he learned that, and that is how he got out to General Motors.

B: He works at General Motors?

R: Yes. He is welding out there and making those H-frames for those vans and things. When Ralph was 20 years old, he was making 60,000 dollars a year. Now Mark, he was a momma's boy. I believe my wife ruined him. My wife bought his first car when he was in the ninth grade. Inside of ten years, Mark owned five cars and did not pay for one. I gave him two, and his momma bought him three. [laughter] He is in Annapolis now. I told him, "You are 36 years old, and you have never had a job. You are gonna have to work." He is up there working now.

Now Philemon, I have never had no trouble out of Philemon. Philemon always wanted to be on his own. So I am going to tell you how Philemon got his start. Philemon finished high school, and he was working out at the mall. I would carry him out there and bring him back. So one night I went and got him, and I brought him back by the party shop. He stopped up there and bought some lottery numbers, and he caught the lottery and bought his first car. That is how he got his start. Then, he went on to college. First of all, he went to college and got his associate's degree. Then, he stopped and went to the military. He was coming from Dallas, Texas, down there, the military base down there. He had been through Ft. Knox, Kentucky. He was on his way to Alaska, and he got in a car wreck. He split the spleen here. So he got 85% disability and discharge on that. So he went back to school. He does not have to work for his living. He gets his medicines, and he gets his payments. Now, he works for the Youngstown Union. So he got two incomes instead of one. So, actually, he has

been on his own. He has his own home up there with a swimming pool and everything.

B: That is great. They are doing well.

R: All of my children are doing good now. All of them are doing good. Ralph, he lives in Ashtabula. Ralph will not come here. See, he got hocked on that crack stuff, and he took an overdose. I put him in Glenbay and forgot him until they dried him out. When he got dried out, he came back and told me, "Daddy, I am not going to stay here because I will get with the same old gang. I will get right back where I was." So he moved.

B: When you came here, did your wife and kids stay in Florida?

R: No.

B: They came with you?

R: Yes. I brought them all with me. She and Ralph, the three of us came here. Two of them were born here. Mark and Phil were born here. Ralph and she and I came. Now, when we came up here, it was segregated. We had to stay in segregated hotels when we came here.

B: So even the hotels were segregated here in Youngstown?

R: The ones in Charleston, West Virginia, I know because that is where we stayed. We could not make much time because we did not have but a two-lane road. Sometimes we had to follow those slow trucks and stuff, you know. You could not make the time that you can make now because you got expressways now. All these expressways were built since we have been here.

B: Could you tell me the differences between white people here in Youngstown and in Florida? When you first came here, did you think they were more tolerant here of your race than they had been in Florida or was it the same?

R: The white people in the South, I will say they were segregated, as you know. If you was a good worker and had a good head on you, they respected that, and they would help you a lot quicker than the ones here. Even until now, you could go to Florida right now and you are a stranger down there. You get you a job, you can have any sort of house built you want to. They are not going to ask you about it. They say this. "We own the house. You cannot take it with you. It is insured. If it burns down, we are going to get paid for it. Why not build it for you?" They start you off with a building. You can get a foothold quicker. Now

here, take me right now. I can go and call and get me a Lincoln towncar. I can get a Mercedes Benz. Any big car I can get right now if I want to. But if I go down there to try to buy a house, I never could. They do not seem to want you to have security.

Since segregation has been banished in the South, the Negro salvation is in the South. The Negro salvation is in the South. Number one, the people in the South are so busy trying to get an education and trying to make a living, they do not have time to try to hold you down. That is number one. Number two, all your best black people, best-educated black people, came out of South, and they are in the South, too. Number three, I have got a brother-in-law. I hate for him to come see me because I am ashamed of the house I live in compared to where he lives. He had ten other children, and I did not have but three. See what I am talking about? Number four, those people down there treat a Cadillac just like you treat a wagon. They do not care nothing about something like that. Their homes are beautiful.

One of my members here, June Tunnlen, she belongs to the Young Farmers' Club here. So they give them a vacation in the South. She went down there. A busload of them went down South, and she thought that she was going to be in a log cabin and all that stuff. Now she tells this. When she got down there, a girl came to her. The girl had on some overalls, had one leg rolled up, had on some tennis shoes. She said, "Come on. You come with me, you stay with me. You be my guest this week." The girl grabbed her suitcase, and she went to the car and put the bag in it. She thought, "That is the boss man's car." That is what she said. They got in the car, and the girl that was driving was talking and said, "I know you are all from the North. You got fabulous this and fabulous that." Got out into the country then to a big red bungalow with green grass all around it. She got out, and two other girls came, two sisters came. She said, "June will stay with us this week. Show her her room." She thought she was going to have to walk down the road to the cabin. The girl grabbed her suitcase and said, "Follow me." They went into the house. Now one thing that I said that is this. In the South, when it was segregated, they just let you know that they did not want you with them.

B: You kind of knew your place then.

R: Right. They called it your place. Well, when you understood them, you could get anything you wanted. It never was hard for a black person, especially if you paid your debts and worked, it never was hard for you to live in the South.

Now I came here. When Mr. Lenton first died, me and my wife wanted to buy his home right down there on Glenwood. Margaret wanted to sell it to us. She gave us a good price. There was four acres down there to that house. She told us, "Since you applied, I do not want it. I will sell it to you for 36,000 dollars." I went down to the bank. The bank said, "Yeah, I will finance it." My wife said,

"Well, let us go buy the home investment." The home investment said to me, "How much finance?" I said, "Well, I want to finance 30,000 dollars." He said, "Well, I hope your wife works." I said, "I did not ask you about my wife working." Now he wanted me to pay him 289 dollars a month for 30 years. I would have borrowed 30,000 from him, and I would have paid him back 104,000 dollars for 30,000. I told him, "Do you think I am a fool to give you 104,000 dollars for 30,000?" Now if I had been down South, I could have bought the home for six percent interest. That is the difference.

The next thing, they do not want you to have a thriving business here. One of my member's daughters, Mrs. Miller. She used to be the administrator of a hospital in the surgical department. They kept her working and picking at her until she got out from there. Her and her husband started a computer business. They went broke there. This is a bad place for black people to try to really get up, but not so in the South. If you got the will, the way is down there.

B: Do you think you did the right thing by coming to Youngstown?

R: For what I came for, yes. I came here to try to help the black people, and I have done a lot of good through the Lord. Some children that I have baptized, they are doctors. Doctor Davis, David Davis.

B: Yes, I know him. I went to school with him.

R: Well, I baptized his mother. His mother was my first candidate when I came here that I baptized. She was educated under me. All his aunts and uncles was educated under me. He was educated. I baptized him.

B: Is he here now?

R: Yes, he is a doctor.

B: I remember that he is a doctor. Is he at St. Elizabeth's now?

R: He is doing his intern at North side. I got a goddaughter. She is an attorney. I got a lot of children that was under my wing that I advised and took and pushed them.

B: Do you think you made things better for you and your family by coming here?

R: No. Financially, no. But when I retired, I did not have nothing to retire on but my little social security that I paid. I paid my own social security because I used to do carpenter work. I paid my own social security. Black people's churches do not have no retirement, nothing like that. So that is what happened. Financially,

I slid back down the ladder. If I had stayed in the South, when it was time for me to retire, I would have had a retirement. Down there the churches, when you are called to a church in the South, your family is insured, hospitalization, life insurance, retirement. They pay social security and everything just like your job. So, financially, I went down the hill. Now, with experience and knowledge and wisdom, I did good by coming here because it sharpened me.

B: Just dealing with people?

R: By dealing with people and meeting different circumstances.

B: When you first came here, was the first house that the church rented for you and your family in a mixed neighborhood?

R: Most of the people on Fruit Street then were black people. Most were. Now there were a few whites over there on Fruit Street, but most over there was colored. Now when I moved here, this was mixed. This was mixed. This used to be a fine neighborhood when we first moved here. This used to be a fine neighborhood. Whites used to live right over there. This was a nice place.

B: When you were active during the early 1960's and trying to help the blacks, how were the city officials like the mayor and council people? Were they behind you? Did they help you, or did they work against you and try to stop it?

R: During that time, Pete Stalks was in. He helped a whole lot.

B: Was McCullough Williams a councilman then?

R: McCullough Williams was a councilman when I first came. Then they had that L.S. Bonds. He was a councilman. Even down in Campbell, Reverend Walter Bobo. All them. All of us, we pulled together.

B: How about the white city officials?

R: The white people did not want to give in, but they had to. One time we had a Sparkle Market. We had Ralph's Sparkle Market up on Market Street. They did not want to hire no colored people. So we just told them, "Well, we just will patronize you." When they saw the effect, they went to give in.

B: Was this recently or was this in the 1960's?

R: This was in the late 1960's. This was the same time that they was fighting for the civil rights in the South. We had to fight the same thing.

- B: So you were always behind Martin Luther King?
- R: Martin Luther King. Before I left Florida, we had raised money for him to buy a busline in Montgomery. When he went down there and told them about boycott, when he told them that, he went down there and said, "We are not going to ride your bus unless we can sit anywhere on it. I came down here prepared. I can buy your bus. We will buy our own buses because we are not going to ride yours and sit in the back."
- B: During this period, were there many gospel singers who came to Youngstown and put on concerts here?
- R: Yeah, a lot of gospel singers came. There were a lot of singers in the South, too. Take them Gospel Ambassadors out of Delaware, they was here. The Fairfield Four, they came through here. A lot of Negro entertainers came through here. Take B.B. King, they all came through.
- B: Where would they sing at?
- R: Stambaugh Auditorium.
- B: In schools or anything?
- R: In schools, anywhere. Now in the South, it was different there because we had an all-Negro show. A minstrel show. Do you know we could not sit in the front seats of our own show? But up here, see, you could not put on. It was different there. You had the concert hall here, and everybody bought a ticket, white and black.
- B: Groups like Mighty Cloud of Joy?
- R: Yes, all of them. All of them came. Maheled Jackson, Claire Ward, the Martin singers, the Dixie Hummingbirds. All of them. All of them came through here.
- B: There were some good times, then?
- R: Yes. Listen to me good. It was not all bad. Some things were bad, and some was good. When it comes down to concerts and things, Youngstown was good for that, Warren, anywhere in here. Cleveland, anywhere. You had Pilgrim Travelers. All them came through.
- B: All the churches during this time all worked together then in trying to build a community.

R: Back in the 1960's, I came here, and I organized. Your granddaddy Reverend Shaw, he was in the organization when we organized the Male Chorus Union.

B: Yes, I remember that.

R: We took that union. Every fourth Sunday night, we went to some church. We bought many organs and pianos in these churches around here, and we brought in singers.

B: There were some good times.

R: We had nice times.

B: Would you have picnics in parks?

R: Yeah. We had Idora Park over there before it closed down. My church gave plenty of picnics over there. Good times, we had good times.

B: It is incredible that you pastored for 36 years because it seems like people do not do it that long. They have problems with churches and all that.

R: I have never, in the 74 years of my pastoring, I have never had a church ask me for my resignation. I leave a church because the spirit of God leads me. I would have been in Holy Trinity right now, but the Lord told me my work was done. I had brought them as far as I could. I put them up there in a church, paid for it. They are out of debt and everything. I think it would have been ignorant of me to stay there and tear it down. Let some young person come there and carry it higher. Get out of the way. When you have served your time, get out of the way. That is the way I see it, and that is what I have done.

B: Do you feel that there was a real strong black community when you came here?

R: Pretty strong. I know one thing, it was more together then than it is now. I am going to tell you the truth. It was more together, and they looked out for one another more than they do now. They protected one another more than they do now. They respected one another more.

B: There was more love in the churches?

R: Yeah. If I was going somewhere and saw your children doing something, I would correct it. Now, you had better not correct on nothing. You will get your head blown off.

B: Yes, that is true. In your life, you have seen a whole lot of different things and been through a whole lot.

R: Yes. I have seen four big changes in America. Was not any one of them for the good. Every one of them was for the bad. I have seen the change come from when we did not have change in clothes to change in clothes. I have seen the Negro come from being a puppet worked by other people to independence. I have seen boys that used to work for 75 cents a day now own the plantation that they used to work on. See what I am talking about? Down home, three boys, they used to call me Pa. They said, "You know what, Pa? You see that place over there? I am going to build me a house right here. I know the white man own it and all, but I am going to build me a house right there under that tree. Watch and see." I can get in my car and drive down there now, and that house is standing under that tree right now.

My philosophy is, your day will come. You should get prepared so when your day does come, you can accept it. But your day will come. You see, every person that is born in the world was born for a purpose. Now, you have to find your purpose. When you find your purpose, you have your living and you have your success and everything. Now if you do not find your purpose, you got to use the other man's purpose. That is how come these boys stand on this corner and sell drugs and stuff. That is the other man's purpose. That is not his purpose.

B: You are not supposed to be out there.

R: No, no. Do you think God let a person be born in the world to sell that sort of crack? That is the devil's stuff.

B: Do you think that is one of the biggest problems that we have in Youngstown right now?

R: That is the biggest problem. The biggest problem we have in Youngstown, especially among the blacks, is too much of blacks against the blacks.

B: So you think the solution is just coming together?

R: Coming together and respecting one another and go to protecting instead of destroying. Go to protecting one another.

B: I want to thank you for your time. It is really one of the best that I have done. I have really enjoyed it.

R: Well, I am glad I could help you.



B: Thank you.

End of Interview