

Black Liberations Movement Mosaic
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Oral History Interview
with
Mr. Benny Brown
By Kyle Coston, Max Paschall and Flosha Tejada
Jonestown, Mississippi, USA
November 3, 2008

Interview with Mr. Benny Brown

Interviewed on November 3, 2008

Location: Jonestown, Mississippi, USA

Interviewers: Kyle Coston, Max Paschall, Flosha Tejada

Language: English

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Transcript edited by narrator

Benny Brown: ...used to live, back in the day when you, you know, I'm thinking you guys are interested in. [inaudible] it was, he wanted to do. Your information is based on pre-civil rights area or civil rights era...

Max Paschall: Mhm.

Benny Brown: ...in the South, and some of the changes that have taken place?

Max Paschall: Yeah, exactly.

Benny Brown: [inaudible] I think it would be good to give you a visual from my perspective on what some of the changes that took place, as far as the landscape, you know. [inaudible] Help you out some.

Flosha Tejada: Today is November 5th, Benny Brown in Jonestown.

Benny Brown: You know when we ride through this area here you see, like, just land, you don't see any houses. But this area here, maybe from, it used to be dotted with houses [inaudible] across the field. Houses sitting here, you know, here down to the curve and you may have ten houses that were sitting out, because people were sharecroppers. Each family, these areas right here were communities, you know, because families had [inaudible], they farm maybe forty acres of land, before the farm became mechanized, and they moved to another system, you know, before people move out of these country areas. And so, you know, this why now you see no houses now. These some of the changes that've been made in this area here, because the farm [inaudible] mechanized now, so they don't have sharecroppers so, when I was in school, we had a house here, and a house there, next to each one of these poles, you know, probably had a row of houses right along here. I remember the row houses on this side that people lived in. Most of these people either moved into town or they just moved away after, during the 60s. There was a lot of people moving out of the Delta headed to, headed North to Chicago, Detroit, and other areas, you know, because there was the hope to build opportunities there.

Kyle Coston: What type of jobs did the people that stayed in Jonestown have?

Benny Brown: Well they worked on these farms. This cotton wasn't picked by machines, it was handpicked.

Kyle Coston: Well after, you said that mechanization... took over.

Benny Brown: After the mechanization, most of them still continued to work on the farm because they were involved in the, the still farming, you know. So the cotton kind of, they still used the cotton pickers, but the cotton was usually, well it was then it was packed. They would call and the picker would come and unload the cotton, and so they would pack it by foot and hang it, and so people were still used. And then they came up with another system where they had what they had modules, where they would put the cotton through a system like with those bales out there. See those things out there?

Max Paschall: Mhm.

Benny Brown: They would put the cotton in that, then they would pack the cotton, more bails into it, what they called bails into those, and then they would just leave it out there and then have truck to come pick it up. But until then they used trailers, which were... system by which the cotton pickers unloaded the cotton into the trailer, and they carried it back there to the gin. So you'd have these gins ginning all night, ginning cotton. And you had people working at the gins also. The oil mill in town has always hired a lot of people. The place, I don't know whether you guys saw the oil mill?

Max Paschall: Mhm.

Benny Brown: There've always been a lot of employment there, especially this time of

year. When they were picking cotton, a lot of the students who were 16 and over, we used to work at the oil mill at night, you know, to make an extra income during the schoolyear.

Max Paschall: When did mechanization take place here?

Benny Brown: It began to really take place after the... after '68, after Dr. King was killed. It was taking place slowly, but I think it came out of necessity after Dr. King was killed because of the increase in the minimum wage. People were making three dollars a day as for chopping cotton, as for as 19-, probably, -67, -65, '65 '67 I know. People made three dollars a day, twelve hours a day that's how we worked from six o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening, and we were paid three dollars a day, all day long, for just chopping cotton. And picking cotton you made something like 35 cent a hundred, or 35 cent a pound, [inaudible] 15 cent a pound I think is how much it was then, so you could make a little more, but it was still not comparable to having a minimum wage, and so... after Dr. King was killed in '68, and the minimum wage was made a law, then mechanization really began to pick up, because farmers didn't want to pay that minimum wage. It was cheaper for them to buy the machines that was necessary to do the work than to pay a minimum wage. So there was a house sitting there that a farmer used to have – a big farm he used to have – with houses sitting all around in these areas, and so, you know, you just, we haven't passed a house since we left Jonestown, but I guarantee you forty years we would have passed forty houses where families lived. Some families lived all in this area. You see, like, you could ride

through this area you see a church, you say well why is a church sitting there by itself? Because people still come out here to worship. And years ago all down in there were houses, so you had the population to support the church there. The church hasn't moved, but the people have. The population of people have moved.

Max Paschall: Did any of these communities have names? Or were they just, you know, rows of housing?

Benny Brown: Well [inaudible] recognized by the plantation. [inaudible] back there the area I pointed to was the Stewart Plantation. This area up here was known as the Longineaux (sp?) plantation. Now this area here, from this house, this brick house here, all the way back to this building over there, and on this side is known as Swan Lake Association. Now the Swan Lake Association is a Baptist association, which is made up of seventeen churches. These seventeen churches back in... this association was formed back in 1873, if I'm not mistaken I think it was eight years after the Emancipation Proclamation... and this association was formed by this group of black churches within this county here and Quitman County in order to put together scholarships to further help educate the newly free black children who were beginning to go to school and come off the farm. Now this land belongs to them here. All this land belongs to the association, on this side. If you look at an aerial view you see a little patch of land over in the middle of a whole lot of land, but this is black-owned land still. Now all of this land, some of this land back here we just passed used to be owned by black people, but it was taken away during the Depression, when black people couldn't afford to pay taxes and

some of them just absolutely run off of their land, you know, they were just given an ultimatum – either you leave or you die. And of a lot of people left land that they owned because, in order to save their lives, because back then, you know, if white people wanted your land they absolutely they just took it, and that's what happened. But we've been blessed to save this land here. This land here is still, we own 204 acres – Swan Lake Association owns 204 acres – this is our building here, this Swan Lake Missionary Baptist Association, this is our central building. We sold land back in the early '70s, as people began to need places to live. We began to sell land and a lot of people bought lots out here, they lotted it off, and people bought lots in order to build homes to sit their mobile homes, and so this is land that we sold because the white farmers don't sell land. They got plenty of us- plenty of land around us, but none of it's for sale. And so that's why you don't see people able to buy homes because nobody's selling any land. This is the building that we put on this particular property here. And that's Swan Lake central building. But all this land used to be farmland. In fact, this was my family's farm – my family farmed this land. I grew up in that house right there, but before it was changed around, somebody bought the property, but that's the house I grew up in. And all this used to be a area that we farmed, you know, I come from a family of fourteen, and we farmed this land here, this is what we farmed, this was our- we planted beans over here and cotton over here and we had a garden, we had a hog-pen where we raised our own meat, and we had a pasture for our cows, and we had our own milk. And so that's how people survived because a lot of things that they ate they produced them themselves, and they raise a lot of things themselves, you know you can go to the store for milk or stuff like that, you know, and up until, you know, to the time that we moved into

Jonestown, which was like 1968 probably, we lived there, and we had a outside toilet. That's what we had then, an outside bathroom and everything, even in '68. And see our houses was all out here, our neighbors, they [inaudible] in this area here. And so this is where we, this land, we were able to farm with this land, make a little a more than we did on the plantation because... you know, you rented land and you didn't, you weren't on the sharecropper system. You rented the land from Swan Lake Association and you paid them a quarter of the income that you made, and so this part of land and some right, some more over across that bayou there, so all that land through there belongs to Swan Lake Association. So this is, this church here, this is down here, this church here was established probably around 1856, [inaudible] farther back. I mean this is...

Max Paschall: Is this the same church or has it moved?

Benny Brown: It hasn't moved, I think it burned once, but it hasn't moved. When Swan Lake first started their association they had a school down here also. They used to have a school down here in which, and a dormitory that they were... if you went fourth to eighth grade back then they gave you a certificate, you were able to teach. That's the most education that a black person needs. And so the teachers when I started school most of them didn't have anything but an eighth grade education, because they come out of this school down here, and so this church was one of the founding churches in the Swan Lake Association. And so they...

Max Paschall: It was here before slavery ended?

Benny Brown: It was here before slavery ended. [inaudible] is not four times, but I mean four Sundays a month, but they do operate and meet maybe one Sunday around the month. People coming down here to worship, you know. And so this is where we came to church, because we lived up there we used to walk to church down here.

Max Paschall: So how many people were part of Swan Lake Association?

Benny Brown: How many people... well there were seventeen churches in the association.

Max Paschall: I mean how many people rented land?

Benny Brown: Really it was about, was always probably about ten families that rented the land on this side. There's 200 acres here, 204 acres here and before they built those houses there, there was like 255 acres. They used 51 acres to build those houses, and so it was like 255 acres, so it was about ten families that rented land.

Kyle Coston: When was the organization founded?

Benny Brown: The organization was founded around 1873 – about eight years after the end of slavery. And this land was bought. They bought land around us, I think they bought this land around 1932, but for years, from this point, that point back there where I

showed you this land was, all the way to where we going, the way we going now, all this land here used to be owned by black people. All of it. They own none of it now.

There's about 200 acres over in that area there that the guy who lives in that house there still owns, his family still owns it, they rented it out. [inaudible] Black people lost this land, or it was taken from them, back in the '30s, and this is according to some people I've talked to.

Kyle Coston: And why was there like this upsurge in the '30s of, I guess, whites taking land away?

Benny Brown: It had something to do with the Depression. Mortgage due, you know, money was due because people that borrowed money in order to farm, and then them not being able to pay the money back, or wasn't given the opportunity to pay the money back, you know. Relief didn't come, you know, like now how the bailout is going. Nobody was... even bailed them out. You know, once that land was mortgaged off then they couldn't come, then they went to the bank and they didn't have the money for that year's, when they had borrowed money to farm, and they didn't have the money the bank would just take the land. Or, like I said, some people just ran off of their land.

Max Paschall: So, I guess, Swan Lake Association was an alternative to sharecropping?

Benny Brown: Yeah, it was an alternative to sharecropping. We moved to the Swan Lake Association – my family did, my father – we moved there in '61. John Kennedy

was elected president I think in '60, and we moved there in '61, and it was always, you always felt like it was hope for better, for doing better once we moved there, because we moved off the plantation, you know, at that particular time in '61 we were staying on a plantation, which we're going to go by there and see it later. And, so it did give you more opportunity to make more money, it still was stressful I guess because you, now that you had your own, you had to produce, you know, to the point where you didn't have the equipment to work with, you know. Either you still too poor to buy a tractor, or other equipment you need to work with so it was always, you know, it's still stressed out trying to make it. Now this time of year when cotton was in the field, when I was fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade, maybe ninth grade, we wouldn't even go to school for this time of year between September and the end of the year, because most of the time, before the pickers came, it become mechanized, it would take people the whole fall season to get this cotton out of your field, you know just picking it by hand. And so I would miss something like four to five- three to four days a week out of school, in order to help on the farm. We would take turns going to school. You know, because we couldn't go to school every day, we had to be in the fields to get the cotton out. And so...

Kyle Coston: Around what time was this?

Benny Brown: This was always between... probably September 1st and the first of the year.

Kyle Coston: And what year was this?

Benny Brown: This was, like.... This lasted, this went on constantly until probably about 1968.

Kyle Coston: Oh okay.

Benny Brown: Probably about 1968.

Max Paschall: We passed a...

Benny Brown: Yearly. Huh?

Max Paschall: Sorry, go ahead.

Benny Brown: No what were you saying.

Max Paschall: We passed a little graveyard back there, do you what that was?

Benny Brown: No that's not a graveyard.

Max Paschall: I mean like way back, in the forest.

Benny Brown: Yeah, yeah, that graveyard back there is, you see the little farm we passed on the side? That's that family's graveyard. So every now and then you'll find a little patch of land that black people were able to hold on to. The house that sits over there – that family, the Jones family – I been knowing them. Their family has about 40 acres in there. Most of the time when you find black people with land in these areas it's about 40 acres. Now I don't know whether they had some way of originally got granted that 40 acres and a mule or what, but that's just about what most of them have. They got 40 acres, so you just look at 40 acres of land that belongs to a black person in the middle of all this land. And all this land used to be, used to belong to them, or one of the founders of the association by the name of Silas Kelly; and he not only started the association but he had a [inaudible], and a federal home also. He lost all of this land because of the Depression. All of this land here was part of it.

Max Paschall: So is there any land that's been passed down generation to generation by blacks?

Benny Brown: For instance that back there has been passed down generation to generation. The young man who stays there still [inaudible], he lives there, except most of his family has migrated earlier. Most children who came up during the time I came up, they left home when they were 18 years old. They'd had enough. Now you stayed to the point where you got to be 18, and you left because opportunity... opportunities for school came with affirmative action, and that happened after Dr. King, all this pre-civil rights. There was no opportunities, you know, and we were kind of forced to bring your

children out of school to make them work on the farm, because, you know, the Man wanna know why would you send your kids to school? They don't need school. It wasn't a necessity. Most white farmers didn't feel like you should send your kids to school. This cotton was more important than black children being educated. And so that's the sacrifice that families made for their children is to work farms, and a lot of them, you know, you wonder why some of the ignorance is still going on is because of that, you know, you got generations who still haven't had a college graduate in the family. Now I would say that the few that might not have a highschool graduate still around this area because, you know, that's how deeply it ran, education became unimportant, and so it was never stressed, and so it took some generations for children to break the cycle, and some families' cycles were never broken – the cycle of ignorance was never broken. But you see we haven't passed a house since we left down by the church and some of them white houses, you know, they [inaudible] over in there. And they built houses all in this area – all up and down the road there was houses.

Max Paschall: So did they all move to Jonestown or...?

Benny Brown: These people just... they moved to some of these small towns around, or they just left the area, [inaudible] the area, you know, that's what I'm saying the children were leaving all the time, and so since the children were leaving, most of the time they left mom and dad, their mom and dad died, nobody just... people just didn't come back.

Max Paschall: Did, when was the height of the migration from Mississippi?

Benny Brown: It was part of the migration from Mississippi.

Max Paschall: I mean but when was the height of that for this area?

Benny Brown: Well as far as I can tell, some people say it was in the early '50s, but I still saw a lot of it when I was going to school. I saw families moving away. Up until the time that I was... [inaudible] I finished highschool in '71, and that's when it began to really just stop after that. Everything began to slow down after '68, after the civil rights bill was passed. And the schools began to open up, and then more emphasis was put on education, affirmative action began to open doors for black students to get educated, and there were more scholarships available, you know, and that's when you a had a trend more or less that the children wouldn't be leaving home. And most of the time, you know, like in the summers, when I was in tenth grade, eleventh grade, twelfth grade, I went to Chicago to find summer work because I didn't want to be on the farm during those summers. Those years I rebelled against the farm, I no longer wanted to be on the farm during the summer, I no longer want to work in the fields. I had relatives in Chicago, so that's why I went, that's where I went... for the summer in order to find work.

Max Paschall: How much would it cost to go up to Chicago?

Benny Brown: You could to the train station over in this town Basefield, to the bus

stations, when the day where school was out the station would be full, people headed North to find work. And they would come back after the summer, you know, and so it would cost, I think then, twelve dollars for a ticket, you know, to ride the train. Maybe ten dollars for a ticket to ride the bus, you know, and you always had people who would come down for graduation. And you even had guys who would come down and get a load of people to take them back to Chicago, because they would get some type of incentive or bonus if they brought people back to the areas to work, you know, they would come down and get people, you know, so you had a lot of that going on. Well this little town here, Beland, this was the little area that we used to come to when I was a child, possibly between the ages of five to the age of six years old, that's where we'd come to do our trading for what things we did buy – sugar, and what clothing was available – you had your white store owners who would offer some type of credit to people who would go there and buy stuff, you know, and they would pay at the end of the year, when they sold the crops. So all these areas back here, now this is pretty close to the area that I was born and raised, back here. Like I said, all these areas, they had houses everywhere. When I ride through here I think about all of the houses that used to sit along here, this was like a road headed back and there were houses all along there in front of the bayou, and people used to go out here and fish and everything, you know... this is what they would do, they'd fish in that bayou. There's a spot down there where churches used to have baptism, where would be baptized, we'd baptize in these waters.

Max Paschall: How often did baptisms take place?

Benny Brown: Probably... most churches, they would have revival, and within a two week period all the churches in a certain area would have a revival, so they would do it together, you know, so it would be like maybe once a year – once or twice a year they would hold baptism. All along this area here were houses.

Max Paschall: When you were in Chicago over the summers, where would you stay?

Benny Brown: My sister had family in Chicago. My sisters and brothers would end up going, a couple of them at a time, think about what I said about people leaving. My sisters and brothers left home, even earlier than eighteen. And my oldest brother, he probably left home when he was sixteen years old, to just get away from the fields. And my sister, she probably left when she was sixteen; and my older sister and brother, they left when they were sixteen years old. The next group of sister and brother, they probably left after they finished high school. And then, the last group, I would say the ones from my age and down, when I left home I went into the service – I was in my second year of college – and I decided to join the airforce. Now my brother who's under me, he went on to finish at Alcorn; and my brother who was younger than him, he went on to finish at Ole Miss. See, they, things had really opened up then, you know, there was, when that window was open where the affirmative action was really doing the job that it was supposed to do. Children could get into school and, you know, they could kind of make up for the time that was lost; and my younger sister, she went to Delta State so... and one sister older than me, she finished at Jackson State. So doors they really began to open up, and were taking advantage of it.

Max Paschall: So how many people from this area joined the Air Force or the Army or something?

Benny Brown: Well most of them didn't – most of these people, most of the people I've known who, before Vietnam, when Vietnam started, you had the draft so a lot of them were being drafted out of school, my brother was drafted out of school. And so during the draft a lot of young guys from this area went in because you had a system even at the courthouse where they were giving deferments to white boys and black guys were being given 1A status – they were being shipped off to Vietnam, straight to Vietnam, within three months from the time they went into the service. I mean it was just set up like that, that's the way they had it. It was so unfair, you know. The way they did things, you know, where they played with people's lives but they... that's what they were able to do. And, you know, they were called on it, but nobody ever wanted to... I guess nobody ever had to answer for it as far as going to court. But you know they knew [inaudible], they knew what was happening; and they were being pulled out of school, [inaudible] people out of school, and that was because now the doors had opened up, so we have to have a way to kind of still not let you move too—far too fast. And so that was the way of doing it. A lot of other things began happening in the community that we didn't understand, and, you know, once the doors open a whole lot of things came to the doors, including drugs. This area here, this, you see that's what we call, that's a pecan orchard there. That was one of the ways that we made extra money, we would go out there, pick up pecans this time of year, and sell them back to the lady who had the

pecan orchard. We would go out there and just hustle and make some money.

Max Paschall: How much would you get paid for that?

Benny Brown: 25 cent a pound, I think we made on pecans. Maybe 10 cent a pound [inaudible], not very much [inaudible], not very much [inaudible], you made enough to kinda have you some extra money to walk to the store. And this was Peterson. And this is the area I was born in, this is my perspective, this is where my life began, in this area here, Peterson plantation. My father worked on this plantation, there's a house sitting right there over here, there's another house sitting right here, right here on this land. And there're houses all across there, you know, there's a tree that was sitting in front of a house. And there was houses down all of this area here... all over this area here. [inaudible] was a bayou.

Max Paschall: Did all these houses disappear?

Benny Brown: Most of these farms now are rent out to other farmers, so they have no need to keep people who sharecroppers. All the people who stay on these farms and these houses were sharecroppers. Cause there is no need for a sharecropper now so the houses are gone. These people don't need anybody on their plantation. This was a plantation. We lived, there was a house sitting right here that I was born in. Sitting right here in this spot right here. This is where we were born, another house was sitting back over behind here where my great grandmother lived. Houses over there near that

where those woods are, houses were all back in that area there. This county here, this is Quitman county. Quitman county was the poorest county in the nation at the time that I was born. Quitman and Tunica county up north were the poorest counties in the nation. There was no opportunities and the schools were just bad. They hadn't really, the case of Brown vs. the Board of Education had been to court, but it hadn't been legislated. So nobody had come to make sure that black children had equal access to the education and so nobody really cared. Now right thru there, there was a church sitting right over there, right thru there across that wood, there was a little bridge that we could go through. It was a church sitting over there and that's where I started school.

Kyle Coston: At the church?

Benny Brown: At the church...and it was a one room school. And that was in like sixty, I mean fifty, (inaudible)...so you say fifty nine, sixty, fifty seven, fifty eight, fifty nine, sixty, so I was six years old. It was a one room school and all the classes were here, it was two rooms. Two rooms down stairs and two rooms upstairs, it's the way the school was, it was a block school. These two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. And they housed grade one through eight. Eighth grades was in those four rooms. And that school burned one day, when I was about six years old. And I remember when it burned they moved the classes into the church and so it was like a open bay school after that. Until they changed, they finally changed it was mandated that the State of Mississippi had to come to par with the Brown vs. Board of Education decision and so

after that happen in 1960 they closed that school and we moved to a, we didn't move but the buses began to pick us up and take us to Marks, which is about fifteen miles away from here to school. And that was third grade, second grade the first year I went there. I stayed there until the middle of my third grade year before we moved to Jonestown. You can imagine what teachers had to deal with, some kids were nine years old in the second grade because there wasn't any mandatory kindergarten or pre education. And then they had to miss forty to fifty days out of school because they were working on the farm. Some of them never learned to read. Do you understand what I am saying? Some of them never learned to read.

Max Paschall: And what year was this?

Benny Brown: This was like, when they moved these schools to Marks, it was like 1960, it was mandated that they had to close all of these church schools and either integrate or make schools better for black children. And so what they did they put more money into building schools that were still, didn't come up to par you know, but this was satisfying the federal law. And bought us some time until you know, did what we wanted to do, at least we, because there was no pressure on them to do it. But Brown vs. Board of Education was in 53 or 55...So look how many years it took them to even try to do something...It was four years before they said we are going to obey the law. It took fours years, and they still fought against you know.

Max Paschall: Was there ever any kind of white on black violence?

Benny Brown: All of the time yea...I remember my daddy coming home in probably a year that Kennedy was elected and he had tears in his eyes because he wasn't allowed to vote. He wasn't allowed to vote and so...But I remember police coming to our house when my sister, we use to go to church, and she had gone to another church which is back there and a policeman, one of the policeman out of Marks had stopped her for driving on a gravel road now. He wanted to take her to jail but he was going to come and pick her up that night and so my daddy refused to let her go. He wanted to take her by force but my mother had slipped out the house and gone down to the plantation owner's house and let him know what was going on. He then came to the house and stopped this man from taking my sister away. But there was always the fear that you couldn't go to far away from home or you always had to be careful of what you said. Your parents were always afraid that something could happen to you so they always monitored where you were and that's why they didn't feel bad about a child leaving home at the age of sixteen because at least they knew that they might be safer, even in Chicago or in the city then they were in the South being rebellious or not working you know. If you wasn't working, you know like you see guys now not working and walking around? You couldn't get away with that because these folks would just, they were so crazy then that if you wasn't working and you walked around and they saw you a couple of times, then you might end up missing. There is so many people that end up missing in these areas that you know its hard to even probably keep count. People were just scared to say anything. Afraid to tell somebody what happen to them. The story would probably just stay within the confines of the plantation. You know, so many stories that just

never got out.

Max Paschall: Do you remember any examples?

Benny Brown: No, not personally, do I. But I have always heard, my father was real protective of us. We didn't go hunting, we didn't, we went fishing but we didn't go no further then right in the area that we lived. He was very protective of us and a he kind of kept us shielded from a lot of stuff. But you would hear of things happening in Marks. Somebody getting shot, police shot somebody on a Saturday night or something like that. You would always hear about it. People wouldn't discuss it as much in front of children because like I said my father was protective of us but if you were around other people you could get a, you could hear them talking about it. Like I said the church now, we will cross that Bayou, that churching sitting right over there in that area that's where its at. But a tornado came through, I think it was in 2002 and blew that church down. But all the children from these plantations went to school there. That's where we went to school. All these plantations from the time we passed the little town and turned off, all the way down in here. All back up that way, all these kids went to school right there and so you had one little four room school and at the peak when kids could come to school you might have two hundred children or more. You might have two hundred children or more. Some of these children in here like I said they never did finish. No more then eighth grade, ninth grade, and then they left home.

Max Paschall: You hear stories of disappearances and stuff like that, what would that

do to black psychologically, what would that do to you?

Benny Brown: Well you know, you still go through it because, I guess that's part of your orientation. And when it becomes part of your orientation sometimes you don't know what affect a thing have on you, until you do a self analysis. I noticed this morning for instance. I have a lot of white customers who come in there for dinner. And I noticed how subdued they were and how my joy was somewhat, I had to mask my joy, and I said why am I masking my joy, and that's what I'm saying. I began to think ok, this is still part of the orientation that I can't be joyful that Obama, that this country had it's first black qualified president. A man who is qualified to do the job because I don't want to offend people who are not as joyful about it as I am. You understand what I am saying. And so it's still there. Cause that's the way you are orientated so it don't leave. If you know what I am saying.

Max Paschall: oh yeah.

Benny Brown: The bus route, when I was in school, the bus would go across there, it's a whole nother plantation, Barksdale, that was a plantation. Now this land here my mother told me that my ah...we had relatives who use to own all of this land here. They we literally ran up off the land. They use to own all this land here. That's the house that they lived in.

Max Paschall: How/why/when were they ran off the land?

Benny Brown: This was before the fifties, the mother's use to always tell us a story about this, like I said I was born in fifty three and I always heard them stories. So it had to happen before I was born. Sometime in the late forties. You know when that happen.

Max Paschall: Do you remember the specifics of the story?

Benny Brown: She told me about...that umm...I don't really remember any specifics. She just told me that they got ran off you know. Sometime when you ask your parents a little more then that they kind of don't even want to talk about it. You know so they don't kind of discuss...I guess I just didn't pursue the specifics of what happen.....This was an area here that was a lot of the blacks, a lot of blacks use to own land back in this area to your right. And umm it always seemed like to me that they were more some of them had generations, maybe on generation of children that went to some of the earlier land grant colleges some of the colleges that were established during Reconstruction, like Jackson State. And so a lot of people down hear they have a little more education and so they (inaudible) and held on to there land even, its still in the family. One of these person's who own land back here were one of the men who donated land to the Swan Lake Association. All these blacks here own there own land, and it's probably been in the family for some years.

Max Paschall: Its all black out here?

Benny Brown: Oh yeah, oh yea....all black....(inaudible) a lot of land from here, on this side all the way back, not on this side.

Max Paschall: So considering that so many, I guess disappearances weren't even recorded, how many do you think were not recorded versus that were recorded?

Benny Brown: Umm...I would say for every, I just feel like for everyone that was reported there was probably three or four that was not recorded. I really feel like that.

Flosha Tejada, Max Paschall: wow.

Benny Brown: I don't think people started recording a lot of things that happened until after they felt safe enough to talk about it. You know even this morning I was talking to my brother in law and he was telling me about how his grand father back in one of the smaller towns, (inaudible) Jonestown, was taken away by these white people because when they went to this ladies house, this white ladies house she was laying on the floor and she had had a seizure and they thought that he had raped her. And they took him, because she was unconscious, and went straight to his house and got him and beat him up and he died two days later. And when she came too, I guess she went into a coma or something, she told them that he didn't touch her because he worked for her, and he did not touch her, but he was already dead.

Max Paschall: Why is there is such a fear that blacks would rape whites?

Benny Brown: This is what has been instilled in them. They were raised feeling like that. They were raised feeling that black people where beasts, that we were some type of inferior animal, that we really weren't human. And they even had science on their side as far as some scientists who had done studies and come up with this smaller brain and all this ole crazy stuff. And they taught this, this is what they taught their children. They raised them to be ignorant and prejudice. And that's the way they were raised. This is not a Southern thing, it was all over. It was just more prevalent in the South. And you know I guess the white lady in the South was always looked at as this gentile creature. That the black man desired and that her honor was to be protected above all things. I think that's the way it was.

Max Paschall: How much time do we have left?

Flosha Tejada: we have seven minutes left...

Max Paschall: Will switch the tape after that

Flosha Tejada: There is no more tape

Max Paschall: There is no more tape?

Flosha Tejada: No.

[End Tape 1, begin Tape 2]

Benny Brown: I saw that this was out of all these moves that were made and all the steps that came because of the non-violent movement. We can't point anything that was established by the Nation of Islam. Anything that was established by the Black Panther Party. But you look at the non-violent movement, all the laws that were passed, were passed because of the non-violent movement. And so you come to the conclusion that the nonviolent movement was more, if you listen to Dr. King's speeches, it's all about love. Love your enemy, love those who misuse you. You know. Pray for those who curse you. You know, it doesn't seem like there's no power in it but there is power there..... We left behind values because we didn't feel like they were necessary it became baggage, we should have held onto that baggage. I was just excited about going to school two days, more excited about going to school two days a week than these kids are going to school five days a week. I worked with books that didn't even have covers on them. I would walk a mile just to find out what the lesson was going to be the next day, then to go to school and sit there and feel dumb, I didn't want to do that. You know when I finished eighth grade I was an honor student, when I finished High School I was a honor student. You know I wanted to excel. And there was a desire to excel. And I just see something happening to that desire as parents begin to be upward mobile and not tell them about the struggle. Not to relieve the struggle but to let them know that these things aren't easy, and I think that is one of the things that our generation didn't do

enough of. I have a son and a daughter. My daughter is in Atlanta, my daughter is teaching school in Atlanta, she's twelve hours from finishing her doctorate. My son practices medicine in Tunica County. I didn't give them everything they wanted, my son, my daughter, they knew that I was going to take care of their needs in school. My son always knew that you are going to make it on your own. It's not that I didn't want to help him or wouldn't of help but I never want him to think I was going to make a way for you to go to school, there is money out here for you to have. If you are smart enough and you get the grades somebody is going to give you some money to go to school. You talk about well it's a loan, well you worry about how you will pay it back. And that's what he did, he went to school in Tougaloo, he's was the president of the student body, he went there to Jackson State for a year and a half, and got a degree in Chemistry. He got accepted into Michigan State and he finished med school. And he did this on his own. He did this on his own because he knew he had to have the drive, he had to reach on down there and get it. And so he was on his own, its not that I wanted him to be a man.....You paying for what you get and you leave and so that's the same thing I expect. Why should not expect that out of you also? I have one store, Walmart has thousands of stores, they can operate on that principal and expand, why shouldn't I be able to operate on the same principal, why you got to feel like I 'm not helping you because I am not giving you stuff. And that's the thing that bothers me most of all.

Max Paschall: Where does that mentality come from?

Benny Brown: I think it comes from those years and years of paternalism. On plantations the people they actually took care of you and made you feel like you stay here free on the plantation, you don't have to pay rent even though the house was raggedy and you could see straight through it. You don't have to pay rent.I think and plus it's unknown, people don't know.

[End of Transcript]