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Interview with Darren Brown, Youth Project, June 23, 1982, 
Interviewer-Barry Meiners

Just for the record, why don't you say how old you are and what year 
of school you are.
I'm 17 years old and in the 12th grade as of today.
Darren, have you given much thought about when school's through 
and you go out to get a job, what kind of job do you think you would 
get, what kind of career plans you have?
I really haven't thought about it but when it comes down to simplifying it, I haven't thought of what I want to do. I know I would like to 
go to college and maybe as I'm in college I'll find a field that will 
really arouse my interest.
Going to college—is that something that's an important thing to do from 
your family's viewpoint?
Yes in a way because all the members in my family, they've gone to 
college and they're still going. My mother goes to college at night 
after she gets home from work and my brother he goes to Morgan and 
his girlfriend goes to Morgan and he works a part-time job too. I 
would like to get a scholarship to go to college.
Now have you lived all your life in Baltimore? 
(Couldn't hear).
You've lived with your mother, right? What does your mother do? 
She works in the Department of Social Services for elderly people— 
say if somebody's elderly and can't help themselves, she's like an 
aid, she goes to their houses and do thing for them.
Has she always worked there?
Uh-huh.
Do you have any people in your family or neighbors or friends that 
are involved in the unions?
Relatives as far as age wise, like '60's, I don't have any that I 
can recall. Maybe down the line I'll have some but neighbor-wise, 
I don't think there are any.
Do you think you'd ever consider doing a job in heavy industry, say 
say the steelworkers? What do you think of that industry? 
I think it's a vast industry that has progressed throughout the years 
and in the future I really can't predict where that industry is going 
to be because of the new technology that's ( ). I would like to 
( ), I really would. When I was young, I wanted to be an 
engineer, steel or anything, as long as it dealt with getting dirty 
and wearing a hard hat.
Meiners/Brown, pg. 2

Why did you like that?
I had a vision of me leaving my house in the morning with my yellow hat and my lunch box, getting in the car and driving to work. I don't know where it was but as long as I went out and did my ( ). I think I would like skyscraper—you know that type of construction.
Do you still have that ( )?
Yeah, but I do think you need a college education to achieve that kind of a job.
Why do you think that?
Because in my opinion from what I've heard and people telling me, you have to have more than just a diploma to get a job these days so I said I'll finish high school, get my diploma, go to college and get maybe 4 more years—a job shouldn't be that hard.
Let's look at that—I agree with you that you should get some kind of higher training—but why?
Maybe to make sure you're skilled, I really couldn't tell you.
Well, things are changing so fast that you've got to—there's just a lot more to know it seems like. In all the reading and the films and the touring that you have done, can you come up with an idea about what kinds of things the union is doing for people?
One main thing I see the union doing—they hold people's jobs—they can't just get fired for no reason. I think it's a bond between the union and the job and the people are in the middle, the workers are in the middle and they can't split apart because if the job ( ), they have the union to fall back on to try to get the job back.
What did you think about going through the sewing plant the other day?
Well, I was sort of tired but it was nice. It was a change from seeing all the people in sweat shops. I went to the—not the Harbor Master-down on ( ) Street—Misty Harbor—I was looking around—that was a sweat shop. It had all the aspects of it. They would ( ) the women and cut off the fans(?) and they would just crowd up.
You could see the result of the union working in that ( ).
Did you notice back where they were pressing all that stuff, that's where you saw all the union stickers?
Yes, I did.
What did you think of the pace the people worked?
It was a continuous pace. They couldn't slack. I think if you got tired, you should call for a break. If you just stopped, you would get stacked and when I mean stacked—all the garments would just be falling, you would just be way behind so I think you just had to keep moving until your break came. And when you do that, time would just fly.

Well, put yourself inside one of the people working there, maybe one of the guys doing the service jobs—you asked if you could get a service job there—do you think that would be a place you would seek work?

Only if I really needed a job for money then I would refer to that service just on the job. That's the reason I asked—could anybody or was it an experienced thing. What was the response I got from him? Oh, yeah, he said I couldn't be hired because there was a shut-down—they weren't hiring.

That's an interesting point. We're reading and seeing a real high youth unemployment now; have you been out looking for other kinds of work?

Not really. I have gone to numerous around the area from time to time and asked if they needed anyone but recently they haven't so I've been staying with this job doing research.

How about people you know—are they trying to find work?

When you say people I know—People your age, friends.

Most of them work down at Harbor Place. Unfortunately, I couldn't get a job down there so I have a friend who works down the street in a restaurant called Lake Trout—I live down the street—I was trying to get in—they pay real well. If I could work there I'd have it made.

How about opportunity—do you think opportunity is out there for people coming into the job market?

Yes, it's just the way you present yourself maybe to the management or maybe your skills. All my buddies that have jobs, they dropped out of high school. Sometimes they been getting on my back—they got their GED—they got a nice secure job—you still don't have a job. It'll pay off maybe 4 years later. I don't let it get to me.

I used to let that having a job get to me because I was going to school and never had any money, they are out of school and they bring home big money. Then my mother would talk to me and straighten
me up.

What would she say?
She'd say 'those fellas—she called them fools—they may have a job now but what if ( ) go out of business—they aren't qualified— they don't even have a high school diploma.' Only one of my buddies have a GED, the rest of them don't. She'd be saying as long as you get your education and go to college, you can get a job and get paid well.

What did she talk about in things that she didn't have?
She had twins at the age of 14 and I think career-wise, it was gone. Then 3 years later, she had my other brother and 7 years later, she had me. She wanted to go in service, make a career out of service but she said she couldn't do it.

It sounds like she's done awful well for herself.
Oh, she has. She brought her sons up just like that—if you don't have, do without and don't pout about it.

Is that really a value that you have been taught?
Yes. I've learned over the years ( ); my father, he's deceased, I never really knew him, matter of fact, I don't even remember his face and it was like I don't have a father and I used to ( ) about not having a father because what my mother couldn't give me, I'd be saying I wish I had a father I could go to. It always used to get me down and then I used to say well, I just have my mother and she's my mother and father. She takes care of us well.

Do you have grandparents around the area? ( ). My grandfather died recently, he was 80 years old.

What did he do?
I think he was a steelworker.

Do you remember him talking about work?
The only thing I remember him talking about was the Baltimore Orioles. He loved them. He used to always take me to baseball games.

Did he ever give you any kind of advice?
When it came down to it, he really didn't have to because I was growing up so well; he used to always say no one is going to give you anything and if they do, just beware of it. I took into consideration and I noticed nobody's going to give me anything so I'll just try to get it on my own.
That's a value that came down from your grandfather—is that your mother's father?
Uh-huh.
How about your grandmother on that side—did she work?
She worked in domestics—cleaning homes.
Well, let's say if you were a steelworker—and this is theoretical—and you were a member of that union, what kinds of things would you expect your union to do for you?
Keep the hostilities out of the shop. I don't know if they do that or not but the tensions that build up—I would expect them to ease that so it would just be a fine day. I feel that if you go to work, you shouldn't have to put up with all that hostility—you're there to apply your ability as best you can and then you can leave. I don't think you should go to work where you have to have a foreman that's always down your back, a work site that ( ), they make it dangerous for you because they're negligent. I think I would want the union to just eradicate all that.
Do you think that having your employer be fair to you—is that a right? Yes, I think it's a right because if your employer is fair to you in time you have to be fair to him. I think if you treat somebody right, they will treat you right. If my employer treats me right, I'm going to treat him right about doing my job the best I can and making him be proud of my job.
Do you think—knowing yourself and your background—if you were in the union, do you think you would be an active member in that union?
Yeah.
Why?
Because my background consists of voicing my opinion—I always like to voice my opinion, I don't care if nobody likes it. Now in the union, I would be very active. I would be telling them things that I would be noticing on the job, I would get them changed or I would try to get them changed, I would always offer my opinion.
Why is that important to you—to offer your opinion?
Because nobody knows what you're thinking unless you voice yourself.
What do you think about Ronald Reagan in terms of how he's affecting you and your family and your friends?
How do I feel about Ronald Reagan? Some people say I can't stand the man because he's doing this to the economy. I think he's doing
this to the economy for one reason—because the recent presidents, they somewhat degraded the economy and all I think he's trying to do is get the economy back on its feet. Therefore he's making cuts that the recent presidents never would have thought of making and I think he's just trying to get the laziness out of people. I think he's stopping the U.S. from being lax. It's just a plan that he had that he thought would work. If it don't work, then we have to get a new president. If it did work, then I think he'll be president for a long time.

Do you see, just from the world that you operate in, do you see some people being cut down, some programs being cut that are affecting you?

I have see it affecting our jobs—youth's jobs—welfare, in turn, has cut off some of my friends. Talk about my family, Ronald Reagan has hurt badly because my brother worked for Sinai Hospital and he got laid off and my mother, she has bills up to her neck, and with this one job, she has to pay rent, gas and electric company and we just can't do it. The money I'm money, it really helps. He has affected our family because the money we used to have, it isn't there, therefore we have to make sacrifices and cuts.

Is that a reason why education is important to you—to find that training?

Yes. If we have a president that wants to re-program the economy, I'll have a job where I know I won't get cut and I'll have money coming in continuously, I'll have a secure job.

If I said we hear a lot of talk about the rights and privileges of being an American citizen, what does that mean to you?

I don't really know what citizens do but to become a citizen—you are a citizen when you're born, right?. I think I would just expect to be treated as a citizen, not being discriminated against because he was here longer than anybody else or he just happened to take somebody else's job; I would just want to be treated say, if I was to turn white, I think advantages are there, and as me being black, I would want the advantages still to be there.

What kinds of advantages do you see that are there?

Opportunities, jobs, schooling, it's just there; I can't really say what opportunities. A well-off white person has it made because he'll go to school, probably a private school, I'll go to a public
school can't afford to go to a private school. And you'd get a better education in a private school? A much better education. What kinds of thing do you think you'd get that you wouldn't get in public school? I think they're much stricter than public schools, with private schools, they would force you to apply yourself and if not, they would throw you out. Some public schools, they care, some don't care—if you do the work, you do, if you don't, you don't. The school I go to now—Northwestern High—I don't like it. Do you think it's preparing you to go out and get a job? No. What do you think you're missing? I really can't say but I know I'm missing out on something. I can feel it because when I was going to Mergenthaler, it was like everything was there, I was in a trade; if I had stayed there, I could have had me a job making say $10.00/hour bricklaying. Going to Northwestern, I'm just getting general curriculum classes. I would like to have college prep classes, but they don't have them. Why did you transfer from Mergenthaler? Because when I first went to Mergenthaler, I did a lot of crazy things that the school wouldn't allow and in turn, I knew that but I was just saying maybe I'll get over, but that didn't work, so I didn't want to stay there after I failed because I felt like I made a fool of myself. Like in Northwestern, the administration isn't anything. For instance, I had U.S. History and she kept saying that the class was an experiment class. This class was something you were supposed to do on your own? Right. She didn't lecture and I didn't learn anything in U.S. History. She shouldn't even be teaching and I say why would the administration hire somebody like that? And she won't get cut cause she has seniority. Do you think the system of seniority is fair? I think we should have another kind of system. What kinds of values do you think a good worker or somebody that gets promoted should have? That he teaches the students. I had an English teacher—I think he was the best teacher there because he made you apply yourself—he made you read novels, if you didn't read the novels, he would throw
pop quizzes and if you didn't read, you would fail. He got terminated and I think that was a shame. What kinds of things make a good worker? This worker goes what he believes in. How would you show that? By the way he comes into a job, how he applies himself, a man who works right up until lunchtime doing his job, just constantly working. I think a person who applies himself to the best of his ability is the right man.

Do you feel that if you get the right education, that all opportunities are open for you in the great world beyond? Do you feel that there are restraints? I think so, depending on the field you go in. This opportunity-do you feel that in the city you can go where you want to go, do what you want to do-that's an American dream, that opportunity is open to everybody if you work hard. Is that really true? When you work hard, you create opportunities. They might not be the opportunities that you want but you're creating something. What is it that makes opportunity available to you? (answer unintelligible.)

Opportunity doesn't just come to you? You have to make opportunity. You have to bring it out. O.K., let's say you have this attitude and these values-is it important in the world that you're living in to organize groups of people? If altogether, you're voicing an opinion, somebody's got to listen. Do you belong to any groups, any organizations? The athletic club and sports. But groups-I don't know if it's because I don't have the time or I'm just not interested. Or maybe you haven't found the right groups? Yeah.

This is an opinion-thinking about yourself and knowing what kind of person you are, do you think if you were in a group, say a labor union or a political organization, do you think you would be a leader? I don't consider myself a leader but I can lead people. Let's just say I do not want to be a leader but I want my voice heard in that group. If I'm not the leader, I want to be second or third person closest to the top so if I say something, it will be heard. What kinds of things-if you were in a labor union—would you expect your leader to do for you?
For me or for the group?
Well, what should a leader do for you and your fellow workers?
Lead us in the right direction. Don't do anything that's going to hurt us as a group and just do things to help the people.
Where do you think leaders come from—do you think people are born to be leaders?
I've heard that expression. I think that if you're the type that wants to lead people somewhere, you will do it. If you make somebody listen to you, you are very influential.
You've done one interview and maybe some outside talking to people in labor unions—have they expressed any observations about the leadership in their unions?
I've talked to a few people and all of them gave me the general idea that the unions could be better than what they are—that it's more or less of a money thing—that it's money they're after and not to help other people. I've talked to some people that were in unions and got out because the union wasn't doing anything.
Do you think that's a healthy thing for the labor movement—that the workers feel that way about their union?
I think it's bad. One of the talks I had, he was saying if they lay off 5,000 people and they are all paying members of the union, that's 5,000 times maybe $10 per head that the union isn't getting.
Are unions needed?
Yes.
What do you think that need is?
The need for a union—to make right what is wrong that you can't make right.
That the individual can't?
Yes. It's out of his hands. To say that this is way above my head and I need help. I don't think anything should be above the union's head.
Do you think one person can make change?
Maybe. In a shop, say someone has been there 30 years and has always done his job, and is very durable, I think if he said something, somebody would listen to him. They have no reason not to.
You said earlier that if you're a white person, you're going to have more opportunities; is it a matter of race or economics?
Economics.
Is it true that those that have money get and those that don't have money don't get?
I might be saying this because I'm young but I think so. If you have
money, you can get anything you want to a point but if you don't have it, you have to create your own.

More than anything else, what does money give you? Greediness and it makes you power hungry.

Is it important to have some kind of power in life? Not really. If you had power, it creates opportunity the easy way.

Do you think that labor unions are looking for some kind of power? I think they'd like to have some kind of political power if they don't already have some.

Do you think that would be good if labor unions had political power? If politicians felt the same way as presidents and labor unions, I think they would be very strong because they'd have the support of the politicians and politicians are powerful.

Is it true that if you work hard, are an honest person and keep your nose clean, that you'll get what you want out of life? You might need some help from other people but if you keep your nose clean, somebody still won't trust you? Why not?

Because I think people expect the world to be so corrupt these days that the person that's minding his business is going to get hurt because he's minding his business, because he's trusting someone. Do you think that's good? That's not good.

Do you see that in your own-

In my neighborhood, yes. I have a friend that's about 20, he's real timid, he dropped out in the 9th grade, he works up the street, he had his own apartment, he was trying to be on his own. My friends, they treated him bad, they broke in his house, they used to stay all night even when he had to work, he let them spend the night but they ripped him off. I know in his mind, he's saying why.

Is the system corrupt?

When you say system-

Well, what's wrong with people that would happen? I think there's something wrong but I don't know what it is. If we had neighborhood organizations where let's say people who are timid could come together in a group, would that be good? Yes, I think so.

If you could change the world in any way, what would you do? I think I'd give the power to the people.
Do you think people would know what to do with that power?
When I say power to the people, I mean years of experimenting to find the right people; people who didn't have and knew what to do with it once they got it. Then again, after they get the power, they could go corrupt. But I think I would give the power to the people just so they could have the experience.
It's 10:30 and it's the end of the interview.