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**UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

ORAL HISTORY DEED OF GIFT

The University of Baltimore's Oral History Collection is comprised of taped interviews of people giving first-hand accounts of some aspect of Baltimore history which might otherwise go unrecorded.

You have been asked to give an interview. A tape recording of your interview will be made. The tapes, along with an abstract of their content and, in some cases, a verbatim transcript, will be deposited in the University of Baltimore Archives, 1420 Maryland Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21201. These materials will be made available for research by qualified scholars, for educational use, for scholarly publications, and other related purposes.

I, FRANCIS M. BROWN, have read the above and, in view of the historical value of this information, agree to the recording of my voice and my stories. I grant the University of Baltimore the full use of this information in all media known and unknown. I grant and assign all my rights pertaining to this information to the University of Baltimore.

Signed: Francis M. Brown

Name (print) FRANCIS M. BROWN

Address 1827 W. Wolfe St.

Telephone 410-563-1626

Date 12, 5, 97 Interviewer Karen T. Pears

<u>INFORMATION SHEET</u>			
Interviewer:	Karen T. Peairs		
Project:	East Baltimore Oral History		
General Topic of Interview(s)	Growing up as an African-American man during the 1940's and 50's in East Baltimore; living and working in a segregated Baltimore; Serving in the armed forces during the Korean Conflict; white men's attempt to lynch his father; East Side/West Side rivalry; interracial color conflict		
Date(s) of Interview:	12/5/1997 12/11/1997	Place(s) of Interview:	Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition headquarters
Number of tapes:	2 (4 sides)	Total length of tapes:	90 minutes
<u>INFORMANT'S BIOGRAPHICAL DATA</u>			
Name:	Francis H. Brown		
Address:			
Today's Date:	12/5/1997	Phone number:	
Date of Birth:	1937	Place of Birth:	Baltimore – Johns Hopkins Hospital

BIOGRAPHY

Francis Brown, at the time of this oral history recording, has been retired from Bethlehem Steel for five years. He is very active in the community, serving in leadership positions with the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC) and a variety of other neighborhood improvement organizations. He is an active member in St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church. Mr. Brown consented to conduct this interview which fulfills a partial requirement for History 496, Seminar in Public History class at the University of Baltimore.

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Brown, the narrator in this recording, provides a very detailed look at what it was like to grow up in East Baltimore as an African American during the 1940's and 1950's. He describes a life circumscribed by racism, and its concomitant, segregation. This segregation permeated job opportunities, choices in housing, and treatment while serving in the Armed Forces. Mr. Brown also shares the experiences of his father's escape from an attempted lynching in Darlington, South Carolina. Mr. Brown clearly wanted to document many aspects of his personal history that had long been a part of his family's oral tradition. He was also a very entertaining narrator. This made rapport easier to establish, though the interviewer and the narrator had no previous relationship

KP: ...Francis Brown. Today is the 5th of December, 1997 and we are at a part of HEBCAC Headquarters. My name is Karen Peairs and we are going to get started with preliminary demographic information from Mr. Brown. Let's start with the demographic stuff and get it out of the way.. It will pick up if you just talk. Why don't we just start with the demographic stuff and get it out of the way.

FB: Well, my name is Francis Haywood Brown. I was born in east Baltimore just about a half a mile from here in back of Johns Hopkins Hospital on (237) Bond Street. And at the age of six months no more than seven months my mother had me baptized in St. Francis Xavier church, the oldest black Catholic church in the United States, and as I grew up in the neighborhood totally segregated even though it had white people living in and around it, it was still segregated. I didn't recognize it at first until I got to be around eleven or twelve years of age. Some of the Jewish and Italian and German kids that I used to play with sometimes, started steering away from me when we got to be about eleven years old, we no longer played together did anything together and I wanted to know why did they leave me. . .but it passed me by and started to play with other black children started to move into the neighborhood at that particular time it was into the forties. I was born in (1937) and when 1941 the war started, a lot of people came up from the Southlands to work in the defense plants. And at that time, I didn't know that A. Phillip Randolph had been to the President of the United States and pushed him into the posture of open defense plants for all people not just for white people. Not knowing about A. Phillip Randolph and who he was, I didn't know that he was working hard at integration at that time. As I grew older, I got drafted in the service when I was twenty years of age not knowing that how segregated the Armed Forces were, and they were. When I got drafted, I did some time in the service Beveridge Kentucky it was an all black unit except for cadre who were your sergeants

and officers were all white and we had a rough time. They would talk to us like something we were something different than people. . .they would say 'Pick up your steps or get in step or they would pull a boot out of your tail,' things of that nature to get in step. We finally got through it... .Most of us had a problem I would get angry but somehow I was always thinking about the things I'd been taught by my parents, I could hold it. Because my father came out of Darlington, South Carolina and he told me his history about how he had to run when he tried to stand up like a man against white men. That the thing would happen, you'd get chased, run or killed and so I wouldn't do that so I would stand differently, I wouldn't get into it, I would hold my peace, do the time in the service and get out of there. In about 1951 I went to Korea and when I went to Korea, I went into the 24th Infantry because you know Korea you asked me some history about the 24th Infantry division was an all black.. . and yet they were thrown on the frontline And here are people were taught that you couldn't fight as good as a white man....

KP: Uh-hmm.

FB: And you can shoot as well as they can, you don't have enough knowledge to be a good soldier when it came time to fight... .McArthur was general at that time and he wanted to go to Yalou river which is North Korea, it divides North Korea from China and the Chinese and they ran us off at that particular time, just before (inaudible) I was called by officers to take me out of the 24th Infantry Division and move me to an all white unit. Because a' that man I mentioned again. A. Phillip Randolph had gone to the President of the United States and got the Executive Order signed to integrate the Armed Forces. They took twelve of us and posted us in an all white unit, the Tenth Corps Field Artillery and we were up against it because the Corp Field Artillery at the particular time was all white. And it was from Ft. Sill, Oklahoma and we had nothing but

so-called rednecks and Indians and people didn't know us and we didn't know them, it was a problem at this particular time I remember what my father always told me, watch closely, watch these people because a lot of them don't understand. They're raised to be racist, they're raised like they are better than you and that if you step out of line, they are supposed to hurt you or possibly kill you. I didn't understand that so what I did was stay in line, and in less than seven months, I come from a private up to a staff sergeant in that outfit and I'm a high school dropout. Doing things like that, I could drill my little bottom off and I could talk and things like that and when I finally come out of Korea after nine months and some days, coming back home I still didn't recognize the things that Asa Phillip Randolph had done to protect people like us. Because half of the 24th Infantry Division got wiped out because MacArthur wouldn't take orders from the President of the United States. President. . .MacArthur wanted to fight a different fight and Truman told him no. . .and here's top leader in the Armed Forces that had trained us and taught us that any man. . .this is army talk, this is exactly what they teach us. . . that any soldier that can't take orders, ain't worth giving them and shouldn't give them. MacArthur was a General, he wouldn't take orders from the President the commanding officer when it came to him and he should never have done that and President Truman was exactly right. I appreciate a leader like Truman, he stood up. So when I got back to Baltimore and got out of the service, I got , I had a job at Comfort Springs. Now a business man by the name of R.J. Rial (pause) what I did was standing up like I always do. I got the job assembling bed springs and you were paid by the amount that you assemble. And I was making twenty-five cents per bedspring.

KP: Now when you say assembling bedsprings..., you mean like individual....

FB: Individual...

KP: Oh, ok so you mean like a mattress. . .

FB: you can get one like and big screen like a bedframe and. . .

KP: And you got twenty-five cents per individual spring or . . .oh, o.k. so you would get like a mattress:

FB: It was a spring like a bedspring and you'd put it together

KP: O.K. so you got twenty-five cents per spring.

FB: Per individual spring and you would just get the parts and together and hang it on a rack.

And I would get twenty-five cents spring and at that particular time because I did the job before I went in service, at that particular time I could make four bedsprings per hour so a dollar an hour.

At that particular time, wasn't bad according to the cost of living

KP: Well I guess...

FB: so when I got the point that getting married when I was twenty years old and went in the service, I tried as hard as I could to raise my family. My wife had my daughter while I was in the service, and started making five bedsprings per hour, then six bedsprings per hour, then seven bedsprings per hour to make more money. And I was making, on this particular job I was making (pause) the average laborer was making in Baltimore, guys who worked at places like Bethlehem Steel and places like that, they were a lot of them were doing that. I was called into office by management and told that they were going to take 25 cents down and start paying me eighteen cents because I got so good at it, so I said I thought that you want good employees....

KP: (Humph)

FB: 'Yes, but we wanted you to learn the job now that you know and you can do it so well, we take that amount from you.

KP: Yeah, right.

FB: I said you can't do that, are you going to take from all of the employees? He said 'no,

because the other employees are not as fast as you are, so those employees will still make twenty-five cents per unit, but you, we're going to pay you eighteen cents' I said no you're not, if I can't get the same amount of money, the same amount of money as the other employees are getting, I'm going to see why I can't. I didn't know where to go to do that though, but I was going to do something. So I, this was around Thanksgiving, Christmas was on the way, I had a family trying to look out for Christmas (inaudible) I had been organizing some people then to let's get a union, get it started, and some people from the union came down and talked to me about it. We were pushing hard for that union...

KP: Now what union would that be?

FB: That would be like Steelworkers Union, Steelworkers Union, United Steelworkers.

KP: O.K.

FB: Steelworkers Union and I believed, so when the manager of the job came over just before Christmas and said to us he cut everyone's according to their speed; some were cut five cents a unit, three cents a unit and they complained all the fellows that group complained and they asked me to be a spokesperson so down to the office we went. When we got there we told the manager who was the son of the owner our problems he said 'he didn't care, that the amount that we received on our check that week was the amount we were going to be paid per week.' I said no, you're going to pay me what you promised me and that's twenty-five cents per week. And he said 'you going to shut up and go back to work (inaudible).' I said yes I going back to work but I am going to the Labor Department when I get off from work. He fired me and that was the best thing that he could have done because I left there and went to Bethlehem Steel and that was a much better job. At that particular time there was no place where you couldn't because I went to the Labor Department and in the Municipal Building in the City of Baltimore when I got there

I looked up on the wall and his father was over the Labor Department. See when black people made moves to do certain things you would run into white representatives where you would go to and try to get something done and you would run into family members, and things like that. . .

KP&FB: Yeah, right. (simultaneously).

FB: . . .not knowing they were family members, they would talk to you nice, telling you that they were doing something for you and they're doing you in. . .

KP: Um-hmm.

FB: so I went to Bethlehem Steel I say I'm never going to fool with unions again based on not getting any help because I went to the union after they fired me and talked to them and they just wanted to get me a job trying to quiet me up. so I went to Bethlehem Steel and when I got to Bethlehem Steel thinking I'm not going to be in a union I kept talking about things around other men, like saying we shouldn't have to do this. . .like sometimes we be in places where there was only one restroom, and it was a man's restroom but it was for white men and we couldn't use those. Sometimes the restrooms were like a mile apart, if we had to use the restrooms you had to go a whole mile to it. . .

KP: A mile?

FB: A mile. To the next black restroom because this restroom happens to be a white man's restroom. They had it on the door "white." And it was rough, so we said sometimes we would be working in a group of men and that they were real old men and that's a long way to go but no one cared, except the people like myself. And I talked alot, always getting in discussions and arguments, cause I like that and a fellow named Louis Nixon, Louis Nixon said to me "why don't you become shop steward?" So he talked alot also. I said "you been here. . .

KP: (laughter)

FB: why aren't you the shop steward," cause I thought he was trying to push me into the same

thing I was into before, speaking up for men and I would get fired. And I got a family to raise and I hadn't decided I want to get fired. But he pushed and then the elections for shop stewards came around and so I said o.k. and I won the position and I became the shop steward for that department and that department had about six shop stewards and a department chairman. And getting involved with that I got to be very outspoken. It wasn't two years I became department chairman. In doing so, I got transferred up to a unit where I could make enough money; from a job class II making about eighty dollars a week, I went to a job class 6 making about 90-100 dollars a week, I don't remember the exact figures. But in getting to this other area I didn't know that by talking up for men, I had been sighted by management at Bethlehem Steel to 'watch him.'

KP: Hmm.

FB: '...to keep your eye on him' that kind of thing. So in getting there I went into an office, and I won't ever forget it because people you really have to watch when the devil comes in and anytime you are doing something to a brother or sister that's not right, that's, that's the devil, I don't care how anyone calls it, when you're doing something wrong, you're doing devilish things and I ran into a. . .I think Bernie King was either, German or Irish and I ran into him one morning when I didn't have my assignment right; and all the foremen had their names on their hats, his name was King. And I said, "King, may I speak to you?" And he turned around and said, "Mr. King to you." And I said, I don't see that on your hat. . .

KP: (chuckle)

FB: if it was on the hat I might have said "Mr. King" but I didn't see it on the hat. And I had been talking to foremans ever since I been to Sparrows Point and when I was talking to a

foreman who was a lot older than myself regardless to his color. . .

KP: Right.

FB: I called him “Mr.”, that’s how my mother and father brought me up, but when I was talking to men in my age group they were like whatever their names were, wasn’t no “Mr.” applied. He was in my age group. And he when he said “Mr.”, that I had to call him “Mr.” I said well what I’ll do, based on my training as a shop steward ‘cause I had been going to classes, “Well, what I’ll do is check to see if I’m supposed to call you ‘Mr.’ and Ill go to some higher level to see about that and if they say everyone on your level is supposed to be called ‘Mr.’ then I’ll do that.” He said “you’re smart.” I said “now, how did I get smart because I want to find out just what I’m supposed to call you? And I tell you what should do, I think I’ll file a complaint and make sure you get this right ‘cause, I can’t trust you. And you don’t want me to even check to see if I’m right or wrong, I don’t think I can trust you.” I don’t trust people too far and I would always want something put in writing so the person can’t say that they didn’t say that or didn’t do that and so on. He said “go in the office and see Mr. Rice better still come with me.” He said “Harry, he wants a grievance.” He said “what do you want a grievance for Francis” and I told him, “Bernie King wants me to call him ‘Mr.’ and I told him I didn’t have a problem with that if that’s what I’m supposed to call all you foreman, that I want to ask somebody about that, make sure that you (inaudible). I don’t understand.” This fellow King went off: “oh, yeah give him a grievance, he’s so smart.” I said, o.k., I have to have a grievance now because its getting to be a fight, I’ve got another foreman now, plus their both white and one black man standing here knowing there’s nobody on his side, better get something in writing. So Harry Rice told me he would get the papers to me later on and I left the office. In getting them back, all the white foreman, ‘cause all the foremen in the department were white and all the workers were black, the whites were

upset with me and the blacks were upset with me, because a lot of them were getting jumped on and thrown hard jobs because you got a young black man over here that's getting into things he shouldn't. Things were going along smooth 'til he showed up. Anyway I got the grievance and I filed it and grievances go by steps. Step one the shop steward talks along with the foreman on that level; you got step two where the shop steward talks to the superintendent; then you got step three where you go to the main office with the grievance committee and the main office representative; step four you go before arbitrator. So we went to the foreman of the office, Harry Rice, talked to him and Harry asked me what did I want, and I said "I just want to know am I supposed to call you 'Mr.?'?" And Harry Rice said, "no you don't have to call me 'Mr.' but Bernie King's the foreman who wanted to be called 'Mr.'" But then Bernie King spoke up and said, "yeah he wants to be different he's a little smarty he comes up here, everybody else calls me 'Mr.' but him." I said "am I supposed to call him 'Mr.?'?" I asked Harry Rice that. Harry Rice said "I don't know. I'm not going to handle... I'll process this grievance," this, so he processed this grievance up to the superintendent. The superintendent has to set a date then for the end of the week. Between that time when he set a date, the grievance committee went (*inaudible*) and the department chair came over out on the job where I was working one day to talk to me about withdrawing the complaint. So it gets upsetting sometimes to think about it. Why should I withdraw a grievance that I put in (*inaudible*) he said about whether I'm wrong or right so these two older men at the time, both white, said they would handle it and "we've already talked to Mr. King and see what he's going to do," said "he's not going to bother you anymore." I said I don't think I want that go too far. I didn't know where it was coming from. Sometimes with people like me, sometimes we have guardian angels if you want to call it that, said "don't do that, don't step out there because that's the devil, it's not the Father, its the devil." Mr. King was not fully right in his

position and I was fully right in mine, when we get to the superintendent so we get it straight “cause if he says now that I don’t have to ‘Mr.’ him, he shouldn’t have jumped me at first about this mister thing.” So that day we went to the superintendent, had a German name on his uniform. I’ll never forget it, the superintendent, I forgot his name (pause) either Carl Haines or Carl Besson, both were German, old German, but within the German, some would stand up for you but some of them slick. And I got in front of ‘em and the superintendent said “what are ya’ll bringing things like this into me here for please?” In came Carl Hanson, the superintendent, and he said “come out in my office.” Well we hadn’t discussed anything to do with the grievance, all the superintendents did was read it. They called him out in the hall (inaudible) came back Carl and Bernie King both, their faces are red; I don’t know what he said to them, but both faces were red. They were setting down. “Mr. Brown from now after I finished calling you mister in this meeting no one from myself down will be mister, and I’ll put that in writing, is that satisfactory?” I said, “if you put it in writing and sign it, that will be satisfactory” and he came out of that office. That put me in a posture for lot of black males to have the highest respect for me (pause). They didn’t call any of us “Mr.” from that day on. Unless they just wanted to. Some of the old men couldn’t get out of the habit and would say something like, “Mr. King, oh, I ain’t got to call you Mr. King no more” and everybody would just laugh And after awhile, Bernie King, he got he would look down; they would say that to him and laugh; he got over it, though. And years later, when we organized a club going through the process of having a place for men to meet, drink and have a good time. One night the phone rang Someone said, “this is Bernie King on the phone” and he said to me, “Francis, I would like to come down to that club ya’ll put together,” and this was an all black club he’s talking about and I said well o.k. and he said, “can I bring my wife with me?” I said yes you can, he said “well, I want to come; how about you coming to get me, I don’t have

a car” and I said, “if I can’t get there, I’ll send someone” so there was a fellow named Luther Ford, he’s deceased now, that liked Bernie King, they got along well, so I told Luther Ford, “Bernie wants to come down.” He said, “I’ll go get him.” And in this process of working this out I found out that he was Irish, I found out we both had the same religion, we were Roman Catholic, his father was a priest, I knew his father also. We got him turned around completely; we got him turned around to a point, not completely to the point that we worked well because we had a basic understanding that he’s no more man than I am; and he’s no better than I am; and I made him understand that, not beating on him, just standing up. And I didn’t know that at the time, that that’s what it takes. Because if you are born in a city like Baltimore that is as racist as Baltimore is, but you’ve got to know what you’re looking at. Baltimore is further north and a lot slicker. See when you from the Deep South you can’t see it that way, because you’re in the Deep South and you’ve been getting hit hard, but in up here in Baltimore you don’t get hit, you get hurt by the things they do. They tell you that you have more freedom up here; that’s not true. They say they treat you better, that’s not true. Some people say that Alabama’s bad, no, Baltimore Maryland’s bad. . .

KP: (laughter)

FB: . . .but you have to know what you’re looking for and when you hear a Baltimore boy like myself say that about Baltimore, most of the Baltimoreans say, “that’s not true Francis”. . .oh yes it is, you’re not looking at it. . .anytime a man like me comes for a job and they put a white man on the job ahead of me who can’t read and write. . .

KP: Umm

FB: can’t even sign his name and make, and put him over me at Bethlehem Steel plant in a job making more money; a job with about fifty men involved and he’s got about twenty or thirty

men in that group that could do twice as good, something is wrong with the people who do the hiring, firing and running of the plant. They're in the plant to make money. If they really want to make money, they would forget that racism because in racism you lose money, you lose money and some plants are coming around and some are still (inaudible) at Bethlehem Steel at Sparrows Point where I worked, the racism is still there, it hasn't left. Each time I look around black men coming through Sparrows Point, since I've retired tell me about the problems they have. I said you're going to continue to have them, if you don't stand up. And today at Bethlehem Steel, I've had about, in the last year I've had about five or six meetings down at the club and trying to talk to them about things they're up against. Because at Bethlehem Steel, most of the things that came about up at Bethlehem Steel out of my time were started by black men. I can talk about it 'cause I can back it up. We've got one of the best credit unions on the Eastern Seaboard, Steelworkers Credit Union. That wasn't started by the whites that were down there, that was started by the blacks. The whites tried to block it, because they didn't have a problem we had. We needed a credit union; we couldn't go to banks in the city of Baltimore and borrow money we had white people in the city of Baltimore could borrow money with bad credit; we couldn't borrow money sometimes with good credit. The first time I recognized that, I didn't know the (inaudible) helped me (inaudible), they helped me with a white kid. I call him a kid, but I was young as he was at the time, We had a strike, we were on strike for about 16 days so I went to Baltimore Federal Bank, Fayette & St. Paul Street and I'll never forget it. I like it, I thought it was nice, I thought they were looking out for me 'cause I bought my house in that bank, the GI Bill did it, wasn't for the GI bill, I don't think that Baltimore Federal would have let me have that house from that bank. Anyway, I went down there that day I got a letter from (inaudible) saying that they were going to foreclose on my property 'cause I couldn't pay for it. I had been on strike for 116 days and I didn't have no money.

So they told me how much time I had before this would happen. So I went to the. . .ah. . .the Army people, to the Veteran's outfit. I was sitting there and this young white fellow was sitting beside me and he heard what I was talking about and he said to me now, this is a kid about a year or two younger than I am, "why don't you go and ask them for an extension?"

KP: Hmm.

FB: I said "what is an extension?" He said "an extension is something you get on the tail end of your loan and you won't have to pay it until you've paid the whole contract. . .

KP: Um-hmm

FB: . . .then you pick that up." I said I didn't know that, he said "you go back there and ask them for an extension and he'll let you have it." Then he said "you get three of these things in the course of the life of the agreement." So, I'm looking at him now right in those days, I didn't have much trust for white people based on how I'd been treated. I looked at him back there and I said well, I'm going to go over there and try it and I hope he's still there when I get back. . .

KP: (chuckle)

FB: 'cause if he sends me over here and I get embarrassed I'm gonna come back and punch him in his mouth. So I went over to the bank right back to manager who told me when I was up against it that they were going to take the house and I asked him about this extension and he said "yes, you can get an extension." I said, "why you didn't tell me that explain that to me before I left here today?" He said, "you didn't ask" and I said "you tell me, here I am trying to beg you to give me some more time and I didn't have no money and told you about the strike at Bethlehem Steel and you didn't tell me that so a young white boy across the street that knows all of this and I didn't know any of it." I said, "well give me the extension." So I signed the extension and it really

saved me cause it helps you to, the extension helps you to not have to pick up all the payments you have not made had I not got that extension I probably would have lost the house (*pause*) cause I couldn't pick up those 116 days that I had. When I went back to work I had to come up with shoes for my children, gas and electric bills, stuff like that; I wouldn't be able to pay that money.

KP: Now the extension, was that a term of the GI Bill or was that just what they should have been doing in the first place.

FB: They should have been doing it in the first place. Extensions, all banks just about, when you get an extension that if you can't pay, you go to the bank and let them know and ask them for an extension. Should be in all contracts (*pause*) and what happens is that they will extend the time, me and that 116 days they will give me that and I'm going back to work and they will I'll just start my payments back on a regular basis like I always pay. And the 116 day extension will go on the tail end

KP: Um-hmm.

FB: and when I paid those twenty years out for the house I have twenty years

KP&FB: plus the 116 days. (simultaneously)

FB: So that's what happened. I said we have to do something about the way we've been treated financially. We heard about another A. Phillip Randolph group, we heard about credit unions and that's when we pushed for credit unions doing that we wind up getting a credit union at Bethlehem Steel so a lot of the problems with money, we no longer had. But all the things they've come up with in my time in Baltimore was done by black people with very little, hardly any from white people, hardly any. Now there are some white fellows who stand up but they're afraid, they're fearful that "I want to help Francis. I know he's right but if I help Francis, I got to

watch how I do it, because I might get hurt worse than Francis, if I do that.” And at Sparrows Point, we had some people, some white guys that really stood up, got hurt for it. We had, when we marched on Washington in Steelworkers for Equality for our civil rights at Bethlehem Steel, we had one white man, one, and Bethlehem Steel had about 55 or 60% white and we had one white man. We may have had a lot down there, I know we did. They agree with us, but they (*pause*) they know what they face if they do. Because you got a group of white men in America, they will kill you. They don’t think that you’re any more than an animal and I’m serious. They treat you like one, they joke about you. They don’t have no respect for your women. I’ve heard some fellows say some things, just terrible. I wonder how you could do that about black women. I’ve had the president of 2610 say things of that nature. Of course, he said it when there were about five or six other white men there, ‘cause he wouldn’t have said that with me by himself. Most times it’s groups. But when we put the credit union on board, and it was running, once we got the credit union on board, once we got it going, we relaxed. Because we are now in the hands of majority whites. We’re about the easiest-going people a lot of times. If we get a million dollars, the first thoughts that come in get a nice home for my children, buy, buy your wife a pretty dress, earrings, things like that you know, take a trip buy a beautiful car

KP: (Laughter)

FB: donate some money to the church, put on the pretty clothes and go to church that Sunday try to put them in a better school. What do most other people do--investment. Some people say “why are black folks far behind?” That’s why we are behind. The majority of us don’t want it all, we want to live nice, good (*pause*). I look at groups that are brought up differently than we are, they’ll come together to work as hard as they can to get ahead and to go ahead. I don’t know where they’re going ‘cause you gonna die. I don’t know where they are going with that going

ahead bit and I don't know how much you need to go out there and buy homes that got twenty rooms in it. what are you going to do with twenty rooms?

KP: Not a whole lot.

FB: And, and, and right now, my wife, she doesn't want anyone else to cook for me. What some people do when they get money, they hire a maid and a cook. My wife said if we got a million dollars, she'd still cook want to cook for me and of course she'd want to cook for me because that's how she was taught by her mother and my mother when she married me. 'Cause I remember one time when me and my mother had it. My wife and I had a little spout and she got upset and said she wouldn't cook that day cause she was upset with me. She was fixing me up. And my mother got in from work and she seen I was mad, and she said "what's wrong?" I said, "I'm just hungry." She said, "just sit right there." She started cooking and my wife told my mother, first time she ever talked back to her and she said, "Mrs. Brown, I'm not cooking for Francis 'cause I'm lazy or anything like that; I'm not cooking for Francis because he made me mad," she said and "I hate to tell you this, when I don't cook for Francis, I don't want anyone to cook for Francis." And if someone else had said that to my mother other than my wife, I don't know what my mother might have done; my mother loved her boys, but she looked at my wife and put up the cooking tools, put them all up and my mother didn't cook for me that night. She did not cook.

KP: (laughter)

FB: Well, I was mad with both of them.

KP: (laughter)

FB: But I couldn't say nothing because it was my mother and my wife. That's the teachings that we get.

KP: Well, let me ask you a question. Actually, I have several questions and you've given me so much information now it's like where do I even start. Let's start back with your family, now you said about your mother and your father and you've mentioned both of them. You said that your father was from South Carolina....

FB: Um-hmm.

KP: Was your mother from here in Baltimore?

FB: Mother from St. Mary's County...

KP: That's Eastern Shore?

FB: Eastern Shore.

KP: How many, and you said that....

FB: Mother had ten children, she had five boys and five girls.

My father was from Darlington, South Carolina. Geechee they called him. . .

KP: Oh he's from south, South Carolina....

FB: Darlington, South Carolina.

KP: And now you and your wife, you said you got married right before you went in the service, so you would have been about what?

FB: Twenty.

KP: O.K. so you married at twenty. Had your first daughter at?

FB: Twenty-one.

KP: Then went off to the service. Now you were in the service during World War II but you didn't fight in World War II..

FB: Well I wasn't in the service in World War II. I was in the service during the Korean conflict, they say the Korean conflict, it was war to me.

KP: Um, let me think, what else was I going to ask about to get all of the demographic stuff out of the way. You kind of alluded to what your father had experienced being raised in South Carolina, but how, based on what you lived...

FB: In South Carolina at that time it was real rough. And my father was raised only to the age of fourteen, so I'm told. I think that's where I got most of it from, from the Geechee. He had a. . .at fourteen he was sent out to work, "loaned out" they talk about. He was sent with this white family and he stayed on the premises. And he worked for them at fourteen years of age and my uncle told the story, my father never talked about it, never did.*(pause)* It gets to me too. My father at fourteen, he was told by the man he worked, the white man he worked for to go in town cause his wife was dead and he had two or three daughters, the daughters were courting and told my father to let the girls know at a time when they were to come home. So my father, my uncle said, my father went around to the side window and said, "it's time, your father says it's time." Said one of the young white men who came to court said, "who is that out there," so one of the girls said, "that's Lee," that's my father's name "that's Lee." He said "well, what's the problem?" She said "well, Lee is supposed to let us know when it's, that it's time to leave. He works for my father, he's supposed to run things for my father" and so he said "nigger, don't tell nobody what to do" so that night when my father was going somewhere back there through the woods (*emotional pause*), My grandmother told me this part, she said "Lee came home and he didn't have no shirt on, his back was blistered, his head was busted, he was crying" and he told (*cough*) my grandmother that he had to get away. And uh...he grabbed the rifle that belonged to my grandfather and he ran out in the woods. My grandmother said she had just had another child and she couldn't hold him. When he came back, he no longer had the rifle and uh, he told my grandmother that uh that he had used the rifle and my grandmother. . . (*end of side one*)

FB: My grandmother was more Indian than African through her daddy. She gave Fer son at fourteen years old, a hunk of hoe bread (*pause*) and a jar of molasses and a nickel. (*whew*) And he headed from the woods. The only thing that saved him, because after he left, a group of white men came looking for him and they looked everywhere and they couldn't catch him. My father had no education; he didn't know which way north was, but he had heard about the north. He thought was going north, but he was going south all the time. He headed south and ended up in Florida. They looked for him in the north too; that's why they didn't catch him when they came. He never went back.

KP: Not even to visit your grandmother?

FB: He didn't go back to bury her. My uncle came to the house to talk to my father when my grandmother died, knowing that my father had ten children and my uncle had none. He was trying to help him with money to get back home for the funeral. My father said "no," he was not going back. My uncle said "why?" My father said, "I'm not going back because I've promised I wouldn't." I wanted to know, who did he promise? Because the only two out of my mother's thirteen or eighteen children of that were here was my father (*pause*). The only thing I can come up with is that my father coming back, he was simply afraid at the time that they were going to kill him, that he promised God; 'if I get out of here safe, I'll never go back.' Every summer when northern kids would be sent south to their grandmother's and grandfather's house, whichever, we would cry 'cause we couldn't go. Children in old raggedy trucks and buses headed for the South. We'd get mad with the Geechee cause he would say, 'not none of mine.' And he raised us in a fashion where we came about based on not ever holding back (*inaudible*). I used to watch my father beat people pretty bad, especially white men. They couldn't step out of line, not one inch.

We used to wonder why he would do that. He wouldn't bother them but if they got out of line an inch, they had to stay out of line from now on. We had a Jewish man that messed up the books they used to write in the store. My father found out he was cheating my mother; he went down there. And if it wasn't for my brothers who stopped him, he would have beat that man pretty bad. And two or three other times I've seen it happen. They say he was mean, 'Geechee Just mean.' We found those books that had been working in the stores and what not were taking money from (*inaudible*) Well, when Daddy found out, Geechee never ducked no (*inaudible*). And he had another brother to come up here and he took that brother to that store and he got his brother a job and he told him how to get a house so he could bring his family up. And I guess he was hurt 'cause when I thought about it, I said, "Daddy, you take your brother Uncle Cree in the same thing you were involved if he had a problem with it?" And he said "I took you there before I knew they was cheating," I thought I was being helped by the merchant who was cheating me. That's what was going on in Baltimore, years ago with the store books some of them will tell you about it, some of them won't. And today, in Baltimore, today, we got Oriental; that got books in the store. Had books in the stores. I know some of them personally, that place you were in the other day, that man has a book. Nothing you can do about it, because the people want to do that. They want some form of credit and in getting that kind of credit, you have to first find out is it good and true credit or is someone upping the ante. That's what you have. But my father, he got over that fast, he got out of that because he was really high intelligent man, he had no basic education, my grandfather was that way. He couldn't even count. He never wanted to count anymore than he needed to count. I heard him once say that "if I was to take things up to a fashion of counting like a banker, what would the need be?" And I didn't understand it at the time but, if we could count all the things (*inaudible*)

I needed to know if you couldn't work things to your benefit, you needed to put it to some use like take an accountant or somebody after that fashion, to strive higher because you going to use it. To pick something up you're not going to use will be a waste of time. It's like being a carpenter and you are going to build houses; if you going to only do the carpentry work and that's all you need. If you are going to build the whole house, then you got to have the electrician, the carpenter, that's what my grandfather meant. My grandfather, my grandfather the one I'm talking about it was a (*inaudible*) in St. Mary's County. From South Carolina, the Geechee's father, I never saw him. My father, my father never sent us to the South. Because of things they would do there, those things they would do more in the South than they would in a place like Baltimore. South Lands. They're probably so many people here you don't know about the South Lands, isn't just, like I say, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia or Florida. The South Lands is my mother's home, St. Mary's County. If you want to go up against the racism, St. Mary's County. But Baltimore is slightly different 'cause when it came to like out and out killing, but they had methods of doing it with the police. Today, certain forms of police, you have to watch how you conduct yourself. Because they are just like that. Like with Lexington Market the other day.

KP: I Just want to clarify for the record. You said your father went in the woods with a rifle....

FB: um-hmm...

KP: I can infer what I think might have happened, but I just want to be clear that I'm not misunderstanding....

FB: He came and took the rifle and my grandmother couldn't stop him. He ran to the woods with a rifle and shot as they say a rifle and shot. And then after with the rifle and shot later, he came back nor had the shots. My grandmother didn't know exactly what he did but he just told her in their form of talking, he said "I got to get away" and he said that, she understood it. And she

gave him a nickel, a hunk of hoe bread and sent him on his way. And she didn't see him from that day until he was fourteen at the time, until she came to Baltimore. . .

KP: Umm.

FB: When I was about eleven years old. She had to come here to see her son; he would not come back. And she came here about three times to see him. And it was something to really see her. Really something nice to see her, but those were some of the stories about the things that would go on.

KP: It seems like, progressively, though, after I listen to what you've gone through. . .

FB: But had he not gone through what he went through, then I wouldn't have been in a position to go through what I went through and now its better for my family. Because they're rot going through what I went through, they're going through something, maybe not as well as it should be, but it's a lot better than it was when I was going through. Like right now, Bethlehem Steel, there are black men at Bethlehem Steel that got top jobs. Well, when we went to Bethlehem Steel, didn't have top jobs. So we are like ladders that they're climbing to get there, and the only way to do that we insure is that we push and shove. I retired, I retired in 1992, 1992 and for the last five years I've been active. I don't intend to be anything other than active.

KP: Yes, I know you've been active.

FB: I have to hang in there because if I don't something going to go like the country boys say, something's gonna go lacking. I love that kind of so-called English but I listen to you talk; you don't carry it too far. A lot of people that's got education stretch it and you wonder, "who you talking to." Get so far away, when you go back home, people won't even know what you are talking about. You got to hang in there, and that's what we did in East Baltimore, the things that are happening now in East Baltimore is happening because of the pushing and shoving of people.

Because most people, when we are trying to get some of the things that we should get the first thing they want to do is get away from him, try to stop him, say we don't need it. It's not for any one group to come in and it's not fair. We've come up with white people who will speak loud; they find that they're up against it worse than we are. And they try to back up slightly, try to do it differently and they might help us get the job done. But they have to do it in a fashion where they don't get hurt 'cause I don't want to see them get hurt either. Based on the Devil, I have to say that. When you're doing something wrong, I tell my children that, that's devilish. Wrong is devilish, it's no other way. When you doing it wrong trying to hurt somebody or do some stuff like that, that's devilish. Don't do that. When we push on civil rights and things of that nature, we're talking about rights for people, not just for black people. We're not the only people to get mistreated by a devil. Devil mistreated everybody and. . . Like when a politician makes a bad move, something he know he shouldn't do, when a preacher, when our preacher in St. Francis church, Catholic church (*inaudible*) I said "no." Because the leader that speaks out today, in the leader that speaks out today, more to a point than any other people today is Louis Farrakhan, religious (*pause*) not my Pope. John ain't speaking out like he should. John need to speak out clear so I hear him and understand him, he should speak out clear like God told him to. He's a man that's got more people in his religion than anybody else, that's got more money to deal with and everything to deal with it in a fashion, that it helps people, all people of all tribes, but he won't do it and he's fearful.

KP: How can the Pope be fearful?

FB: You seen him riding around in that car...

KP: O.K. I understand security for his personal safety. I'm saying but on the other half of what you are saying. To make the moves, he is the Pope to make the moves I mean, he's, he's not

subject to any government. You know what I'm saying...

FB: He should come right out and say it like it is. For instance when he's talking about abortion. Speak right out about it. Don't tell us you're either for it or you're against t. He is saying like a we will leave it up to the individual. No,no,no; pro or con. It's no middle of the road for a religious leader. Maybe a middle of the road for doctors, lawyers and Indian Chiefs but not a religious leader. He's supposed to take a stand, this is what God wants (*inaudible*) when the religious leaders, not just the Pope, here in East Baltimore, I work with a lot of ministers. Our ministers are trips, they are really trips. . .I don't want to go on the record with our disagreements...

KP: Right, right

FB: Right now, if we could get them together, and I love them, some of them I really like, they could do a job for us, if they would come together they could do a job. Most times our religious leaders are the ones that we will look to for those things because as far as civil rights was concerned, A. Phillip Randolph did more fighting for rights of people than any black leader that I know of. And the history, if you check it you'll find that's true. We've had leaders like Martin, that was a great leader, more religious than most leaders and the greatest speaker we ever had. But talk about what was done, the work, get down on you knees and work, you talking about quite a few other people like Rosa Parks. She didn't, she wasn't preaching, she set there on the bus and said, "I ain't going no where." Now that's a job done. Edgar Nixon, the man who went and bailed Rosa Parks out of jail. . .

KP: Umm...

FB: . .now you talking someone who went to bail him, now he went to bail Rosa Parks out of jail. Martin was there. (*inaudible*) I can't go and say he know she got arrested but Edgar Nixon

knew she got locked up. Urn, Martin's father was there...

KP: Umm...

FB: I can't say that he knew Rosa got locked up or not. But Edgar Nixon was there and asked them to use their church for a meeting and see what they were going to do about how they were treating our lady. Well, that tell me something, and I'm not like any difference in the men except some of us are going to move harder, faster than the others and I watched the jobs that they did, and in my book, A. Phillip Randolph was the one who challenged the President. And he did that back in the fifties and the forties. He threatened a march on Washington back in those days, when Martin and I was little boys, little teenage boys, he was threatening a march on Washington. Now how is that black man to walk into Franklin Delano Roosevelt's office and tell him we were going to march on Washington back in those days; knowing what could happen to a black man, but he did. Look at the jobs that opened up for black people. We have doctors, lawyers and Indian Chiefs now that wound up going to college now and they have good jobs, based on him making a *(inaudible)*

KP: Well let me ask you a question here, because that leads into something I was curious about. From where you sit, born and raised in Baltimore, born and raised in East Baltimore, I've learned that you have to make that distinction for people in Baltimore, what was it like when you were younger, when you were that teenaged boy and didn't know anything about this high-faluting political stuff and then how would you compare that with what you see now in East Baltimore.

FB: The East Baltimore I knew then was mostly a playground. I worked at Johns Hopkins Hospital. I got a job over there at fourteen years of age, and I worked there for about three years and months.

KP: Doing what?

FB: Uh...I was a cook's helper. What we did was push food trucks around to the wards throughout Hopkins. And what I did was work with the different cooks, Sometimes I'd work with the vegetable cook, sometimes I'd work with the meat cook, sometimes I'd work the chef cook but that's the job I did, it was more of a plaything for me, it's not work to me even though I was working, it was a plaything. And I first worked in the summer time forty hours a week, 48 hours a week. And in the winter time I worked part-time because I was in school. I went to Dunbar and Carver and in doing that during the time, I learned a lot about people, jobs, how to work and play. My play was at the Royal Theatre (*inaudible*). Kept the Royal once a week, because at that time the Royal Theatre was one of the best things we knew. And we didn't recognize, none of the Baltimoreans including East and West recognized what we had in the Royal Theatre, we should never have let it get away. The Royal Theatre gave us, every week, we would have one of the top, new, best entertainers in the United States would come through that Royal Theatre. Like we had Lionel Hampton coming through this week and next week we would have somebody like Nat King Cole coming through. Next week, another singer or dancer coming through and every week we would go to the Royal Theatre and see some of our best entertainers. Today, these young children, they don't have that. They don't have the Royal Theatre or any kind of area where every week you have top entertainers. You got some of the best entertainers in the world today, but the young children of Baltimore don't have a way of getting to them. Now you got some of the kids whose parents got good money, the doctors, lawyers and Indian Chiefs, they can send their children to where the entertainers are but among most of the children in East Baltimore, they don't get to see them unless they see them on television somewhere. They don't get to see them. And a lot of kids that want to become musicians or entertainers themselves, they don't get to see them personally so the can that feeling about, you know (*pause*)

How they are going to East Baltimore, growing up with work? I didn't know that most of the jobs we got, it didn't help us to learn really. Some of our Jewish friends, I used to watch them and how they were getting ahead of me as far as counting and math. They worked in their father's store and when their father was busy or had to go somewhere, they would wind up pushing the cash register. They were going further in math than what I was going because I would go in the store with him, I would never be ringing the cash register and things like that, they had me scrubbing the floor, things of that nature. They didn't even have me stocking the material could stocking would pick you up too in terms of getting some education. Most jobs they had were like clean-up, wash steps, scrub steps, the young girls used to scrub steps (*pause*) And today I see it, a great deal of young men. When I look around today.. I see most of the jobs are white. Most of the people who are doing the, like say carpentry, electrical work, things of that nature are mostly white. What are the black men doing now? They're mostly cleaning up. Today, after school close up in the summer time, they want to put young kids out of school cleaning up trash. There's a man named Lee Douglass talking to me once, talk to.... we wound up getting jobs over at Hopkins. I don't remember exactly, two young men wound up working at Hopkins, one was white, one was black they wanted to be pharmacists, and the white fellow was getting so far ahead, his grades in school they couldn't understand why he got so far ahead. The black man wanted to become a pharmacist also. The reason being in the summertime, or in the evening after school, when they went over to Hopkins to work, the black guy was an orderly and the white guy was working in the pharmacy.

KP: Hmm...

FB: So if you are working in a position where you are looking forward to later in life, of course you're gonna make better grades than a man going around, let's say doing something a little

above labor. When you asked could this be done where you put a young man who wants to become a pharmacist in the pharmacy even if he's doing nothing but stocking or just moving around put him in there where the work is being done. The reason why we come up with things like that is because at Bethlehem Steel, that's what they did. Put a man in a job where you know that he can learn. They keep saying we can't learn, they always give that stuff about (*inaudible*) There's nothing we can't learn, there's no level we can't hit, if we put along with the job. The Germans were famous for that. If you want to learn a job they would put you with the man. That's where you got your apprenticeship. If a carpenter, if a man wanted to be a carpenter, they

KP: Hmm . . .

FB: And after carrying his tools and living with him, he'd not only be just like him but he'd talk like him, look like him

KP: (*chuckle*)

FB: Yeah, he'd have to have a mental problem or something not to pick it up something wrong with him not to pick it up. And today, they come up with paperwork on you, they got paperwork saying that you have to qualify by passing this test and sometimes the test has nothing to do with the job. We had them ask a religious question at Bethlehem Steel and we making steel. What did that have to do with it?

KP: (*chuckle*)

FB: . . . East Baltimore is made up of light steelworkers, especially east Baltimore and the people in here, except myself, most of the steelworkers came out of the South. They came here to get jobs during the war, and they stayed. Then they sent home for their sisters and brothers because most of their sisters and brothers were working on farms, sharecropping and things like that and they said hey, why should I leave my brother down there sharecropping when I can get him a job here, making a lot more, for the betterment of our families. And that's what they did. Right now

in East Baltimore, East Baltimoreans like me is a minority. If you want to start something, start talking about Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina. Them boys, they'll beat you up. Say "what you say?"

KP: *(chuckle)*

FB: When I came out of high school...

KP: And don't say that about Mississippi either or I'll get you. . .

FB: I like that. I was saying, it don't work with me. I can do it; the average black in East Baltimore can't talk about, let's say, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia or Florida, but I can. The department I worked in as a shop steward, there were only two Baltimoreans in a department of 380 employees, black employees; only two of them were Baltimoreans and I was one of them and I was the leader.

KP: Now, let me ask you a question, 'cause I've not worked in steel. What was it like to work in steel. 'Cause I don't know anything about it, I mean you've mentioned things that I've heard of before, but I'm not sure what they are. First of all, can you describe what your job was like as just a steelworker; what you actually did when you went to work?

FB: Well, steelworkers make steel to sell. Now, what I was doing at that particular time, I was cutting scrap. They sold scrap material, all kinds of scrap material. They made tin cans out of cars, we cut those things up to fit in the furnace to be melted down and they add different kind of materials to that to come out steel. Then that steel is sent into a thing that squares it off to make it about thick as about six inches thick, sometimes a little thicker and it's about four feet wide and they're as long as about sixty feet long. That's sort of fit on a car like, its called a car

it really fits on a car-like thing to run on tracks to take it from that mill over to a mill where they cut it down in sizes as small as a buyer would want. Meaning that if you wanted tin for your car you were going to make they would cut it to about 1/16th of an inch thick.

KP: Umm...

FB: They would send it to a place called the rolling mill, and it would roll with this roller till it smooths it down to a level at the buyer wants; it comes from scrap into that area.

KP: So this plant has got to be huge then if you need to have

FB: It's an island. Bethlehem Steel Sparrows Point, Sparrows Point that is the plant. That's Sparrows Point. Sparrows Point is about, I think, about, an eighth as big as Baltimore

KP: Man. . .

FB: Yes, it's a big plant. They used to live down there, people, they had homes down there, lived....

KP: They don't live over there now?

FB: No, uh, Bethlehem Steel had a area where blacks lived and an area where whites lived. Then it had a main street (pause) It had a two lunch rooms, stores where you bought clothes, had school down there, pharmacy...

KP: Sounds like a town unto itself.

FB: You got it. It was a town and it was a man by the name of Francis Jones that set in that lunchroom one time they had down there to eat. Blacks couldn't eat in those lunchrooms; had to carryout.

KP: So you said there were two lunchrooms. It wasn't like one a black one and one a white one? (pause) Just like....

FB: No, no, no, no. Two lunchrooms, both were for white people. You had carry-out, the other

lunchroom was in the drug store. And this fellow, Jones, sat down and refused to get up and that started it and that started it. He was our Rosa Parks. As you know, who showed up the day that he did that but me. . .

KP&FB: (laughter)

FB: . . .and he jumped on me and told me about my big mouth and that he'd set in that lunchroom. I told him I didn't think he sat in that lunchroom (*pause*). He said "yes I did." Now I also have to tell his history; I didn't know that he was high on coke, not coke, marijuana at the time. He was a great marijuana smoker, a great marijuana smoker. I wondered where he got his nerve. Anyway, he got close to me after that. Jones, he wanted me to go back to that lunchroom and set down. And me having a big mouth, I got to back it up. I wondered where Jones was getting his nerve from. Jones was angry at the time: he was losing his wife; she was going to kick him out. So he got him some marijuana, got high and said he was going to sit down in that lunchroom.

KP: What happened to him? Did anybody say anything or do anything or move him or beat him up?

FB: No, he said to me though when he was in the lunchroom the manager came over and asked him to leave, he said "no." The manager called the police. The police, he asked him to move so he did. Then he went to work that day; worked in the mill with us and that's when I ran into him and he told me what he had done. So among the men I had to stand up and he said he was going back in the lunchroom tomorrow. All he wanted to know was was I going to come over there with him since I got such a big mouth. I told him I would. I didn't want to, so the next day (*inaudible*) And that's how civil rights started in Bethlehem Steel. Before then, Sparrow's Point was cut into pieces, white on one side black on the other, blacks in one area, whites in the other. And after we made those moves, were able to eat in the lunchroom, blacks started moving into the better

homes that were white. (*inaudible*) No longer is there a city, the mill's there; that city's gone. That happened to a lot of homes. It's the same thing like that that happens here in Baltimore, when a man, black man like myself moves into the neighborhood. Most neighbors don't wait to see what kind of neighbor I'll be. They look at my face and say "oh Lord, here they come." What do they mean, "here they come." People don't even know you. That's what hurts and its got to stop. I don't want anybody to look at me and say anything when I come in there (*pause*). If you've got somebody who comes in like me, I'm a community rep. When a man moves in my neighborhood, I shouldn't try to judge what kind of man he is. I should try to lend him a hand to show him what kind of people we are in that neighborhood. And show him not only that thing of what we're about, but also can we make him come into the kind of living we do here and ask him can he help us make it better. That ain't what they do with a lot of black people. When you move in the neighborhood the first three days, "oh, I'm going to move out" of here.

KP: Let me ask you a question. You hit on the topic of community, and 'that's something we've been studying about in a class. And the sense of community you've described sounds very familiar to the book. The book that we read was talking about people who migrated from the South and went to Los Angeles, this time, during the forties, during the whole war industry thing and they established their own sense of community. Was there already a sense of community here in East Baltimore? If there was, how has that changed either for the better or the worse you know, up until this day?

FB: What happened really, everything was, it was; well the community as I knew it was all black. It was a difference as to what kind of black you were. If you were a person of stature, a person of means like a teacher, you moved to the west side of town, or if you were light of color,

you were considered the leader of the neighborhood, you were considered the best looking and the whole bit in that particular neighborhood. They would pick you first, say like a community rep like myself, if things were like they were back then, it would be a light man sitting here. Not based on your ability or your love for your people or to do a good job and we got a history about that. We got a lady in at Dunbar right now, telling you one of the smartest things we've ever had. Short lady, dark of complexion, she was considered not attractive. In the block, there was a girl light of complexion, straight hair, the whole bit. They pick the lightest, long hair, they didn't pick the smartest one, her name was Loretta Johnson. They didn't pick her. They picked Margaret, Margaret Reynolds. I was a young fellow under all of them. They were all older than I am and I used to wonder, when they first started off the Clean Block Campaign. (*inaudible*) years. most of the number writers and, I wish they could hear me, your doctors and things and people that made good money, got light wives. Now how does that work that all of y'all wives just about light wives? Just about 99% of you have light wives and some today, some people raised in black families or brown families don't pick their own women, now I wonder how that's done. I, I know how it's done because there's a song that the Irish boys sing that, the Irish boys sing a song "I want a girl like the girl that married dear old dad." Any Irish people can sing that song. Now why shouldn't our people want someone just like mom. But that ain't what they're doing, that's not what they are doing here in East Baltimore. East Baltimore has color problems; I don't mean white--black, I mean just color problems period. The darker you are the less you are, the lighter you are the better in East Baltimore.

KP: Is that why, now I can kind of understand it, is that why there's such an animosity between East Side, West Side. I came here not knowing anything about this...

FB: Yes, you got it. Douglass, that's where you would go; years ago when my brother came

along, there wasn't high school in East Baltimore. Dunbar I think, my sister went, finished hers at Dunbar and they finished it in 1939-'40, something like that. And Dunbar was considered not, Dunbar was "Dumbar," like we were dumb. Whenever we had any kind of sports, we'd wind up fighting based on the way they were treating us. We've had officials in the games call some terrible bad plays against Dunbar, in favor of Douglass. We've had some people born and raised in West Baltimore never came to East Baltimore in their lives, wouldn't come down here. Said bad people were down here; they said terrible people. Well we did fight, but we were no worse than Sandtown. (*inaudible*) run back across Charles Street but wasn't no killing like there is today. But that went on and today, it's coming to be that people like me talk about it. . .discuss it, we don't keep it hidden because it really shouldn't be any difference. If we don't get together (*WHOO*). We had my daughters, right now, they were going to move from where they were born and raised; move into another area because 'I don't wan'a. . .(*pause*) You know what? Out there on the corners, these are the people you grew up with, the people you went to school with who got hung on drugs. Why ain't you gonna come back? "I don't want no part of those kind of people." Got my kids saying that. That's terrible, but they're not going away from here and I beat on them all the time, but that's what used to happen in East Baltimore, not only East Baltimore; East Baltimore, West Baltimore and South Baltimore. When we were young men, you couldn't go to another area. If a guy from South Baltimore, we didn't have North Baltimore cause we couldn't go up there, a young man who met a young lady who lived in East Baltimore, if he lived in West Baltimore or South Baltimore, wanted to visit her, he couldn't see her.

KP: Now how would they know, you have a sign on your shirt saying you're from the East side or the South side?

FB: Your clothes.