

An Interview with

MR. LEONARD BROWN

September 20, 1978

Interviewed by

Daisy M. Greene

Mississippi
Department of Archives and History
and the
Washington County Library System
Oral History Project:
Greenville and Vicinity

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

AU 316

OH 1979.1.015

Interviewee: Leonard Brown

Interviewer: Daisy Greene

Title: An interview with Leonard Brown, September 20, 1978 /
interviewed by Daisy Greene

Collection Title: Washington County Oral History Project

Scope Note: The Washington County Library System, with assistance from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, conducted oral history interviews with local citizens. The project interviews took place between 1976 and 1978. The interviewees included long-term residents of the Greenville-Washington County area in their late 50's and older.

September 20, 1978. This is Daisy Greene interviewing Mr. Leonard Brown, 1012 Redbud Street, Greenville, Mississippi.

Mr. Brown, tell me about your mother and your father - that is, give me their names.

BROWN: My mother was named Laura Brown, my daddy was named Leonard.

GREENE: What was your mother's name before she married?

BROWN: Laura Burks.

GREENE: B-u-r-k-s.

BROWN: Yes, ma'am. My mother, she was born in Utica. I was born in Washington County, July 12, 1896.

GREENE: I understand you worked at the County Jail. Tell me some of your experiences there, Mr. Brown.

BROWN: Well, ---

GREENE: About the sheriffs under whom you worked.

BROWN: I worked at the Court House as janitor, and whenever they wouldn't have a cook, I'd go there and fill out for the cook. That's right. And, what my job was supposed to do, was to keep the offices clean ---

GREENE: At the Court House?

BROWN: At the Court House, and I did that, and worked in the yard - mowed the lawn. The mower then was a push mower, they didn't have an electric mower like they've

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

got now. I used to go fishing and used to take insane people to Jackson ---

GREENE: On the bus?

BROWN: On the bus. Well, most of the time it was on the "Ben" train. Ben trains were running then to Vicksburg, and go by train to Vicksburg and go over to Jackson, and then when I'd get to Jackson I'd take a taxi and take them on.

GREENE: You mean you carried insane people to Jackson on the bus? What protection did you have?

BROWN: Well, these folks had spells. They didn't know what they were doing and they weren't no trouble to you, just at times they'd want to get up and walk, you know, and you'd just have to put your hand on them and then they'd set back down. They were no trouble. I used to go to Jackson with Mr. D. P. Shannahan, the Jailor at that time. I used to go with him when he'd have more than one to handle. I'd go down to Jackson with him, and we never had no trouble with them. The only thing when we'd get to Jackson we'd have trouble getting them in a taxi, you know, and get them out to the hospital.

GREENE: How you mean you'd have trouble getting them into a taxi?

BROWN: They wouldn't want to ride in a cab, you know, just pull back against you. You almost had to force them to get in - pick them up almost and put them in there.

GREENE: Mostly men or women?

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

BROWN: Women and men. You might know one of the women I carried down there. She was named Lovie Cross. She had a daughter named Anna. They used to live on Central Street down there, and the mother died and I understand since that time her daughter died. I don't know whether that's true or not, but I heard it.

GREENE: How long would it take you to make the trip to Jackson on the Bigleben?

BROWN: Bigleben train. Yes.

GREENE: How long would it take you to make that trip?

BROWN: We'd go down in the morning and we'd come back to Greenville at night.

GREENE: You'd leave here at seven in the morning?

BROWN: In the morning - that's right.

GREENE: You'd get to Jackson when?

BROWN: Oh, I don't know exactly what time it'd be, but we'd get to Vicksburg first and that's where we'd change trains and go over to Jackson, and we'd get right on out to the hospital. We didn't have nothing to do but turn them over to the people at the hospital and make our arrangements to get back to our station in Jackson and we'd get home that night.

GREENE: Do you remember what the fare was to go to Jackson on the train?

BROWN: I - later on -- At that particular time I didn't pay no fare so I didn't worry about the fare, but later on when I started to going to Jackson myself, I used to pay

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

five dollars and some cents on the train.

GREENE: Did you ever carry prisoners on the bus?

BROWN: No, ma'am. You didn't have a bus from here then.

GREENE: You didn't have a Greyhound then?

BROWN: No, we didn't have a Greyhound then. We didn't have nothing but "Ben" train, and right where the bus station is on Washington Avenue. The man who run the train was named Ben and that's why they called the train "Ben". His name was Bigleben. I guess you've heard of him.

GREENE: Yes, I have.

BROWN: Yes, well, his name was Bigleben ---

GREENE: He was the fireman?

BROWN: He was the engineer. He ran that train - that's right.

GREENE: That train would come in about what time in the evening?

BROWN: The time - between four and seven, or unless something happened and it's be a little later.

GREENE: What was your favorite dish you'd cook for the prisoners, Mr. Brown?

BROWN: What would --- ?

GREENE: Your favorite dish?

BROWN: Well, we'd cook beans, greens, potatoes and you know, all kinds of greens - not one kind - cabbage, turnips and mustard, blackeyed peas and sometimes what we call

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

"whippoorwill" field peas and things like that. That's right, and cornbread, and they bought all their lightbread from these bakeries. We didn't have to cook nothing but cornbread and the lightbread was furnished by the bakery shops.

Cabbage, tomatoes, okra and all kinds of greens was raised in the garden, and they fed them off of some of that stuff. Some of all that stuff that you can call, it was in the garden.

GREENE: What about the milk?

BROWN: Milk - they got that from ---

GREENE: They didn't have cows?

BROWN: No, they didn't have no cows. They got that from the dairy. Back at that time it was Blocker Dairy and Adrian Dairy ---

GREENE: What other Dairy?

BROWN: Adrian.

GREENE: Adrian Dairy. Where was that dairy?

BROWN: Well, I'll tell you what. He lived in the country and he would bring his milk and turn it over to Blocker Dairy. Now he didn't have a dairy in the country. He had these cows and he would put it in aluminum cans - about that high - I know you've seen them.

GREENE: Yes.

What about the inside of the jail, how did it look?

BROWN: Well, the inside of the Jail was - just what I thought, was pretty clean to be a jail because they didn't

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

have no hired help. The prisoners would just take it on themselves and clean it up. They used to wash the blankets in a big kettle thing outside, they'd make a fire under it, you know. They would wash the blankets that they slept on. A way back there we didn't have no sheets. They didn't have no sheets, just had blankets.

GREENE: They slept on blankets?

BROWN: They slept on blankets. That's right. They didn't have no sheets. Many persons in the colored jail had some daughter or some son there who would bring them a sheet and pillow slips and things like that. That's the way they got those kind of things.

GREENE: What about the visiting?

BROWN: Visitors--- They let them visit them on Sunday, unless it was business matters - they visited on Sunday. They'd meet them on Sunday - Oh, I reckon around nine or ten o'clock until three or four o'clock in the evening.

GREENE: Did you cook a little extra dish for them on Sunday?

BROWN: Oh, they got stew meat and stuff like that.

GREENE: No sweets?

BROWN: No, sweets. No sweets. People brought all the sweets.

GREENE: What about the bathroom?

BROWN: Well, the bathroom. It wasn't kept exactly like it ought to have been kept, but they had a bathroom and

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

running water and everything. They used to have a lot of trouble with them. The prisoners would stop them up, you know, for meanness and things like that.

GREENE: Is that right?

BROWN: That's right.

GREENE: They never could find out who did it?

BROWN: No. One wouldn't tell on the other.

GREENE: Did they ever have any prison fights?

BROWN: What?

GREENE: Did the prisoners ever get to fighting?

BROWN: Some prisoners, some inmates, got to fighting.

It wasn't nothing serious, it never was like out at Parchman where they kill one another. They'd fight there and then somebody else in the cage with them would stop them, or something like that.

GREENE: Now, what was required of a prisoner before he could be named a "Trusty"?

BROWN: Well, he'd have to behave himself and take care of whatever they tell him to take care of there, and things like that, and he had to abide by the rule since he was in jail, you know. If he made a pretty good prisoner, they let him downstairs as a Trusty. He stayed outside. He slept in the jail but he stayed outside all during the day.

GREENE: So he could sit on the porch and wander around in the yard.

BROWN: Yes, he could do that.

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

GREENE: I see. The bad guys had to stay behind locked bars, locked doors.

BROWN: Yes.

GREENE: Were there many of those that had to stay locked up all day?

BROWN: Oh, yes. There was a lot of them that was over there that were locked up from the time they was put in jail until they got out or died.

GREENE: I suppose those were mean fellows, weren't they?

BROWN: Oh, yes. They would do anything. They sure would, but it wasn't nothing then like it is now. The people in jail now are killing one another in the jail. People at Parchman--- killing one another at Parchman, right now. I don't mean just this moment but I mean during these times. Here it hasn't been too long ago where I was reading in the paper about one stabbing one to death up there at Parchman.

GREENE: Are the visitors searched when they go in?

BROWN: Yes.

GREENE: To see that they don't have any guns.

BROWN: Yes, and it's been more of that in these later years than there ever was. You find in a lot of places where they saw out - people smuggling saws in to them, you know, and they cut the bars and saw out.

GREENE: If you remember the different sheriffs under whom you worked, I'd like for you to name them and make a few

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

remarks about each sheriff.

BROWN: Well, George B. Alexander was the first old sheriff that I worked under. I used to work over at the jail under him and used to do some work at his house.

GREENE: Was he related to the Alexanders of the Alexander Lumber Company?

BROWN: Not that I know of. He had a son named Grant and that's the only one I know, his son, Grant, and him. George B. Alexander, he was sheriff here for about four years, I think. He lived on South Broadway, and the next sheriff was John Sterling ---

GREENE: John what?

BROWN: Sterling.

BROWN: The next sheriff was R. P. Chaney, and the next sheriff was Ben H. Gildart. Yes, I worked under all of them over there. I got along mighty nice with all of them, and everyone of them, so far as I know, concerning the prisoners, made a good sheriff. I never know'd anything that they would mistreat them about or things like that, and the kind of food that they was giving them, they was given plenty of it. I don't say it was cooked to death, or nothing like that, but they had a plenty of it.

GREENE: Have you finished naming the sheriffs?

BROWN: Yes.

GREENE: Did you work under deputy sheriff Robert Stutton?

BROWN: No, he come after that.

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

GREENE: Since you left.

BROWN: I was working at the Police Station when he came there.

GREENE: Now, let's talk about the new Jail.

BROWN: The new Jail - you mean the County Jail?

GREENE: Yes.

BROWN: The old jail used to sit just about where the parking lot out in front of the new jail. I used to be at the old jail first there, and they tore it down and built this jail here to face Alexander Street. The old jail faced that little alley through there. It was two-story. It had women and men's cells and they had a place for confinement, where they had to keep them away from anybody else. When they'd bring what we'd call a "crazy" person there, they had a place to lock them up by theyselves. I've seen a lady there, I'd say she was "mindless", I've seen her just tear her clothes off of her, and get just as naked as anything. They'd get them women prisoners up there and they'd go put clothes on her. Ten minutes after they was out, she'd done torn them off of her. That's right.

GREENE: How long would they keep people in that condition?

BROWN: They'd get them in like that and immediately find out if they could take them down to Jackson, and they'd soon carry that kind to Jackson. You'd have to put what you call a "bucking-jacket" on them - sleeves run out into leather and

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

you tie that behind them to keep them from fighting. It was buttoned from behind, and they'd carry them to Jackson that way. They didn't like to keep them like that in the jail. That's the reason they'd carry them away from there so quick.

GREENE: Now, let's talk about the hangings at the Jail.

BROWN: Well, I never witnessed but one, and that was under Louis Nicholson. He was the sheriff then. I think this man - I'm not too sure, but I think he killed his son-in-law, I believe, about his daughter. I think that was the way it was. I'm not real positive, but I think that's the way it was. They tried him, and they found him guilty. He was sentenced to be hanged on a certain day, and he stayed in jail until that time. Before that time they built a scaffold right out in the corner of the jail like this. The day of the hanging we wanted to go in where we could see it, but they wouldn't let us go in. We had to stand out. The thing we saw was the body when it was going out. You could hear the trap when it would fall. It was a plank to sit on - no wider than my hand but that's what he stood on and the thing went under there, and the sheriff pulled that out, that board dropped there and he went through the hole by his neck on a rope. We could see that afterwards. When the man raised him up so they could loosen the rope around his neck, that's when we saw him. They put him in a basket and brought him out to the place.

GREENE: Do you remember who was the undertaker at

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

that time?

BROWN: I think Ripley was working in an undertaking parlor. That's long, many years ago.

GREENE: Was there many curiosity seekers standing around the jail?

BROWN: Oh, outside the fence, outside the garden fence, looking to see what they could see. There wasn't nothing they could see but the hearse driving away from there, after they put him in that basket and shoved him up in there.

GREENE: That was a horse-drawn hearse then?

BROWN: No,

GREENE: It was motorized?

BROWN: It was motorized.

GREENE: Is that the only hanging that happened while you were working there?

BROWN: That's the only one that happened while I was working there.

GREENE: And you worked under five sheriffs.

BROWN: That was the only time there was a hanging over there, the only time.

GREENE: Were you a World War I veteran?

BROWN: I was.

GREENE: After you were drafted, you went to Camp Shelby?

BROWN: I went to Camp Shelby and from Camp Shelby to Camp Fulson, and the day the Armistice was signed then I was

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

discharged. I was discharged and come home.

GREENE: How did you fare in the Army?

BROWN: I fared fine.

GREENE: What was your rank?

BROWN: I was a private for a long time and then I got to be a sergeant. Yes, indeed, a long time.

GREENE: Do you get any benefits from the Army now?

BROWN: I draw Social Security, and I draw a Veterans' check.

GREENE: You do? Two checks a month.

BROWN: Yes, I draw Social Security and I draw a Veterans' check, and where I worked for the City I draw a retirement.

GREENE: And in addition, you draw some money for cutting grass, don't you?

BROWN: Oh, yes.

GREENE: How much grass do you cut a day?

BROWN: Well, I have when I was here, made \$35.00 in one day.

GREENE: You work in the heat of the day?

BROWN: I work every time of the day and no stopping.

GREENE: Well, you seem pretty hale and hearty. How do you account for that? You are eighty --- ?

BROWN: Eighty-two years old, and I don't drink and I don't smoke, and I eats well. I sleeps well, and so I guess that accounts for it. I stay here, I don't do no running around

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

at night. I had a wife, a second wife, and both of them are dead. My first wife -- that's my daughter up there on Edison, that's just the other side of where you live.

GREENE: Well, tell me this - do you remember when they paved Edison Street?

BROWN: When they paved it?

GREENE: Yes.

BROWN: I don't remember exactly when it was paved.

GREENE: How wide was the first street that they paved?

BROWN: It was - it was just a one-way street.

GREENE: How was the street out in front of you?

BROWN: It was a mud-hole.

GREENE: And you've been living here a long time?

BROWN: I've been living here ever since the 1927 flood. That's about 51 years.

GREENE: Well, tell me this. Where were you during the flood?

BROWN: Here in the house on Cleveland Street until it got so deep in there, then I moved out. You see I was working at the Court House, and I moved out of there and went to the Court House. That's where I stayed all during the flood.

GREENE: Do you want to tell me something about the flood?

BROWN: Well, during the flood time I was at home

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

and I heard folks running by saying the levee had broke somewhere up here near Scott, somewhere up there. I didn't know much about up there, and I went out to the door at my house, and I could see people running down the street. Some had children, carrying them, you know running to high places. So I left home and come on up here, like the people was going to the Court House, and right out there on the corner a car hit a boy running that night going to high ground. It didn't kill him, it hit him and hurt him and I went back home, and I went back home and a lady named - what was that lady named? - she lived next door to me --- but, anyhow, she wanted to go to a higher spot. I said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll carry you all up to the Court House and probably I can get you a place up there to stay." So I carried them up there, she and her daughter, and they stayed in the Circuit Clerk's office - stayed in the Circuit Clerk's office until some of her kinfolks - I don't know who it was - found a two-story building on Nelson Street. And I used to go to Armour & Company for food stuff. That's where I used to go there and buy it. I used to take a boat and run over the fence at Broadway Coal Yard over there. It was Mosby Coal Yard then, and I used to take the boat and go over there and just get a sack of coal and take it to the Court House.

GREENE: Well, tell me this, People in the Circuit Clerk's office, did they just disturb the papers and records?

BROWN: Not in the Circuit's Clerk's office because there wasn't but three of us in there - me, this old lady and

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

her daughter. It wasn't her daughter, it was her niece but she raised her and supported her.

GREENE: The Court House must have been in a wreck after that.

BROWN: Oh, they had to move from there to the levee it was in such bad shape. That's right.

GREENE: You never worked on the levee?

BROWN: No. I worked on the protection levee when they was building up there.

GREENE: Was that forced labor or did you volunteer?

BROWN: No. They just went around and asked who would help and I volunteered and helped. Now, along at that time they tell me that some white fellow - I don't know what his name was - beat some fellow about saying that he wouldn't go to the levee. He lived down on Hinds Street, somewhere down there.

GREENE: Do you vote?

BROWN: I do.

GREENE: Did you have any trouble voting?

BROWN: No.

GREENE: What about the Jury?

BROWN: Well, on account of my hearing, they excused me every time I was called.

GREENE: Were you called many times?

BROWN: I think about three times. My hearing is - just like now - sometimes you can say something to me and I'll have to ask you a couple of times to repeat it again a little

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

louder so I can hear it. Some things I hear and I don't understand it. That's right. That's just the way my hearing is.

GREENE: Do you know of any signs that the old-time people believed in?

BROWN: Well, I don't know. My folks was kind of funny.

GREENE: Superstitious signs, you know.

BROWN: Yes, I know, but they didn't believe in any of that kind of stuff.

GREENE: Well, what about friends and neighbors?

BROWN: Oh, I've had people in the neighborhood tell me don't leave nothing out where somebody could put their hand on it, it would do this and that to it, but I never did believe it. I never did believe it.

GREENE: Do you know anything else that other people believed in?

BROWN: Oh, there is a lot of folks round in this neighborhood go to, what they call "Voodoo doctors". You know what I'm talking about, and they believe in whatever they tell them, or whatever they do. They take something planted around the house to ward off the enemy and things like that. I just never did believe in it. My folks never did and I come up on this and I never did believe it.

GREENE: You don't believe in this "horse shoe" business on your house?

BROWN: No. I don't.

(End of Side One, Tape One)

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

GREENE:

BROWN: Yes, but I never did believe it.

GREENE: You don't know what they did.

BROWN: No, and one thing I don't try to find out. I don't be interested in that. No, indeed! My daddy used to live here with me, before he died, and me and him would be sitting out there talking and sometime he would bring up that mind of stuff. He said, "But, don't ever believe it. If God is for you, the devil will never do you no harm", and I just come up like that. I pay no attention to it, and I never pay that no attention.

GREENE: Can you think of anything else about World War I?

BROWN: Well, no more than I know that I was in World War I.

GREENE: Did you go overseas?

BROWN: No, I did not, and I got along fine in World War I and ---

GREENE: Oh, how were the soldiers treated when they came back to Greenville?

BROWN: Well, some of them was treated mighty nice, some of them wasn't.

GREENE: Do you know why?

BROWN: No. No, I don't know why.

GREENE: Were they permitted to wear their uniforms on the street?

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

BROWN: I don't know this to be a fact, but they tell me that they made a lot of them get out of them. I've heard that many times since I've been home. I wore mine whenever I got ready, and nobody bothered me, nobody bothered me.

GREENE: What do you think about houses they are building now compared to houses they used to build for black people.

BROWN: Well, in a way they are much better. They've got so much improvement in them, but they cost you about twice as much as one cost you back there. Of course everything is up, and one thing I don't like about it. I don't like the way they make the arrangements for you to buy it. Now they tell me - I don't know this to be the fact - they tell me if I buy a house and something - I've done paid my half of it. If something happens to me, if I die or something like that, my daughter can't step in and finish paying it out. She's got to go back to the beginning, and make another down payment, and go through all that stuff before she can get in that house, and I'd done paid half on it. I don't know whether that is true but I've had people tell me that. I had one lady to come in and tell me that she was living in that house on the south end, somewhere down there - a brand new house, and something happened to her husband. I don't know whether they separated or not, but anyway, he left there, and she went down to some of the companies where they were buying this house from, to take up the payment and change it into her name because he wasn't

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

going to be there no more. They wouldn't let her do it. They said, "Now, the only way you can do it, is to pay so much down payment and sign up these papers like he signed and stuff", and that's what they said. I never had went through that and I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's what they tell me.

GREENE: How did the white and black prisoners get along together in jail? Was it separated?

BROWN: Well, it was separated. They were separated.

GREENE: Are they separated now?

BROWN: I don't know about now. I see a lot of them working together but I don't know about up in the jail. But, anyhow, at that time white people were on one side and colored people were on the other side. They were separated, even buses and streetcars were separated. They had drawn a line - white folks in front and the colored people behind. I know that to be a fact because I done rode on many a streetcar here, sitting on the rear, when they used to come around on Nelson Street.

GREENE: Why do people call you the "key man"?

BROWN: I don't know, just because I worked over there so long I reckon and around.

GREENE: Well, tell me what is a "key man"?

BROWN: He is the man - just like you visit, you go over there and visit her. He'd have the lady search you, to see what you've got on. Then they give you the privilege

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

to go up and visit her. Then, he'd have to take you up and let her out of her cell into what was called a waiting room, where you all could sit and talk. Everybody that would come down, he'd have to go up and bring them down, even those that is getting out. He'd have to go upstairs and turn that key and bring them out of the cell and bring them down before the jailer, before a lawyer and things like that, and that's what they called the "key man".

GREENE: Were prisoners allowed visits from ministers? Were they allowed to have church services?

BROWN: They used to, I don't know about now. In the old days it used to be a bunch of colored folks come from the south end, they used to have church right over there.

GREENE: Did the prisoners seem to appreciate it?

BROWN: Some of them did and some of them didn't. I'd say that much and I believe I'm telling the truth - some of them did and some of them didn't. Some of them just passed it off as nothing, you know.

BROWN: Did you ever see any Catholic sisters over there visiting the jail?

BROWN: I used to see the Catholic sisters go over there pretty regular sometime back, but I don't see them now passing unless they go in a car.

GREENE: How long have you been away from the jail house?

BROWN: From over there? Whooo, I've been away from

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

over there about twenty-nine or thirty years, and since I've been away from over there I used to see the Catholic sisters pass. Sometimes they would have five or six children with them, carrying them over there.

GREENE: I hope you will continue to have good health.

BROWN: Well, I hope so, so I'll tell you. I made it up in my mind to try to do as near right as I can. I don't mean to do nothing to nobody. I don't want to mistreat nobody, and everybody in this neighborhood when they miss me they come looking for me. "Well, where you been?" I say, "I've been down in the country where my kinfolks are at." "We sure missed you. How come you didn't tell us you were going. We didn't know what had happened to you." That's just the way it is.

GREENE: Well, don't cut grass in the heat.

BROWN: Well, I'll tell you. Sometimes when I've just started at it, it will be the heat of the day before I finish it and I just go ahead and finish it.

GREENE: You don't have arthritis?

BROWN: No, but I have high blood pressure. Don't nothing hurt me.

GREENE: One more thing. What do you think about integration?

BROWN: Well, I think integration is one thing that oughta been. It was so many things that we weren't receiving and neither getting hold of and since integration, we are getting it. We're getting it. I remember times right here,

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

I used to go up and down Washington Avenue and if there was something in those cafes that I really wanted to eat, I had to get some white person that I knowed to get it and bring it out to me, but now I can go busting in there and sit down to the biggest table they've got in there, see?

GREENE: Your money accepted.

BROWN: Yes. That's right. I was here to this motel out on the highway ---

GREENE: Holliday Inn?

BROWN: Holliday Inn. A friend come down here and he come by to see me and he said he had to find him a place to sleep. He'd be here for a week. I said, "You can go out to the Holliday Inn and get you a room. I don't know what it will cost you. I know it's going to cost you some money." He said, "Well, I don't care about the money just so I've got a comfortable and nice place to sleep." I taken him in my old car out there and I carried him out there. He walked right on up to the office and the man told him what kind of rooms they had, whether it was double or single, bath and all that stuff. So he got a single room, with bath, and he was going to eat his meals there. They taken him right on in, some white fellow come and got his luggage and he didn't seem that dumb. No, he come and got his luggage and carried him on up to his room, and give him a key with a big tag on it about that big. That's right. And he stayed out there until he left here and went to Florida. That's right. He come from Indianapolis, Indiana and he was on his way

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

to some place in Florida where all of his people out there had bought there in Florida. He was going to try to make it home because his mother was old and his daddy was old and they needed him to come and take over. They run some kind of business down there, and that's the reason he was trying to make it down there.

Other than that, at times here you'd go in a store right on Washington Avenue to buy something, if five or six white folks were in there, they waited on those white folks before they got to you. They'd say, "I'll be with you in a minute," just to get to wait on them white folks. But they don't do that now. They take them as they come, because they know the Negro will walk out. You see, a Negro will walk out. That's right.

So I'd say integration had made a change in a lot of things. I'm telling you just right. I remember the time when a white person would croak to death before he would say, "Yes, sir" or "No, sir" to you. You remember that yourself. Before he would say "Yes, sir" or "No, sir" to you, he would call you uncle. He'd call you "uncle" before he'd say anything. "What you want, uncle?" That's right and he older than you. If he called you uncle he would keep from saying "mister" or something like that. Now you go in these stores, before you get in, if there's a woman at this store that is a clerk, she will say, "Can I help you, mister?" That's right. She don't know your name, she'll say, "Can I help you, Mister?", like that.

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

Well, you don't mind going in those places, but it used to be so that when you go in there, it looked like they'd turn their back on you and take your money too.

GREENE: Now, you stay out of that sun.

BROWN: I don't have to go out there in the sun. I don't have to work.

GREENE: No, not with three checks.

BROWN: But, I'll tell you what, I'm doing something in this house or out of this house all day, and don't nobody clean up here but me, and I haven't cleaned it this morning. I've got my vacuum cleaner, rug scrubbers and everything else. I run out there doing some work for different people and I let the house run away, but I actually keep my house clean. I do my own cooking. I've got a kitchen, bathroom complete, and two bedrooms.

GREENE: Did you add that to the house yourself?

BROWN: No, no. I told the man I wanted it and he gave it to me. This house --- I know you remember old Dr. Norton ---

GREENE: Veterinarian.

BROWN: Yes, well it's his daughter's property now since all the old ones died. A long time back after Dr. Norton died and his daughter was way up in yonder somewhere at a college somewhere a way up North, well I used to collect rent for her. She didn't have nothing to do but to come out here on a Sunday morning on the first of the month when a lot of people

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

paid their rent. A lot of them paid by the month - the first of the month and every Sunday morning and she'd collect her money. I've got a little bowl up yonder on that chifforobe - I was talking about some flowers one day. She said, "Leonard, you love flowers." I said, "I sure do." She said, "Well, the next time I come out here I'm going to bring you some." Of course, those are artificial, but she brought me a beautiful bunch of roses in that thing sitting up there, and I've been having it ever since. The old lady is dead now. Every time the daughter come here, come down from Baton Rouge, she'd say, "Leonard, I'll never forget how nice you were to mother, mother was crazy about you. When she's getting ready to leave, she say, "I'm going to put something under this cover, she'd leave me \$4.00 or \$10.00, and she'd say, "Buy you something that you like with it."

GREENE: You were nursing her mother while she was sick?

BROWN: No, no. I went out to see about her. She used to get me to cook pies for her. I used to cook for my living, and I worked at this motel and hotel, private families, and things like that.

GREENE: What hotel did you work in?

BROWN: In the hills. Up in the hills. I worked at the Hazlewood Hotel down at Hazlewood, Mississippi. That's below Jackson.

GREENE: You didn't work at any hotels here?

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

BROWN: No, ma'am. I didn't work in no hotels here. I worked for private families here.

GREENE: Did you know Kato Lang?

BROWN: Yes, indeed. He used to live right across there. He was a barber. Yes, I knowed him. I think Onett is in the house now, and Clarence was here yesterday. That's Onett's boy, and he was here about a month ago.

GREENE: Did Kato Lang go hunting with Teddy Roosevelt?

BROWN: I don't know about that. I know I've heard that just like you have, but I don't know whether it is so or not.

GREENE: These good people brought me and I don't want to keep them too long.

BROWN: Okay, okay. I'm glad you stopped.

(End of Interview)

FINAL COPY by V.B.

October 20, 1978

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code)

INDEX
OF LEONARD BROWN
BY SHERILYN D. ALLEN

Adrian Dairy, 5

Alexander, George B., sheriff, 9

Alexander, Grant, 9

Alexander Lumber Company, 9

Alexander Street, mentioned, 10

Alexanders, the, 9

Armistice, 12

Armour and Company, 15

Baton Rouge (Louisiana), mentioned, 26

"Ben" trains, 2, 4. See also Bingleben train

Bingleben, _____, engineer, Bingleben train, 4

Bingleben train, 3. See also Ben trains

Blocker Dairy, 5

Broadway (Street), mentioned, 9

Broadway Coal Yard, 15

Brown, Laura Burks, mother, 1

Brown, Leonard: employment (and experiences), County Jail,
1-11; janitor, Court House, 1, 4; veteran, World War
I, 12, 18; employment, City (of Greenville), 13;
life during the 1927 flood, 14, 15; views on integration,
22-24

Brown, Leonard, father, 1

NOTICE
This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code)

"Bucking-jacket", 10
Camp Fulson, 12
Camp Shelby, 12
Central Street, mentioned, 3
Chaney, R. P., Sheriff, 9
Court House, 1, 14-16
Cross, Lovie, 3
Edison Street, 14
Flood of 1927, 14
Florida, mentioned, 23, 24
Gildart, Ben H., Sheriff, 9
Greyhound, bus, 4
Hangings, 11, 12
Hazlewood Hotel (Hazlewood, Mississippi), 26
Hazlewood, Mississippi, mentioned, 26
Hearse, 12
Hinds Street, mentioned, 16
Holiday Inn, 23
Indianapolis, Indiana, mentioned, 23
Jackson (Miss.), mentioned, 2, 3, 10, 11, 26
Jail (County), 1, 10, 11, 20, 21
"Key man", 20, 21
Lang, Kato, 27
Mosby Coal Yard, 15

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.

Nelson Street, mentioned, 15, 20
Nicholson, Louis, Sheriff, 11
Norton, _____, Dr., veterinarian, 25
Parchman, 8
Police Station, 10
Redbud Street, mentioned, 1
Ripley, _____, undertaker, 12
Roosevelt, Teddy, President, U. S., 27
Scott (Miss.), mentioned, 15
Shannahan, D. P., jailer, 2
Social Security, 13
Sterling, John, sheriff, 9
Streetcars, 20
Stutton, Robert, deputy sheriff, 9
Superstitions, signs, 17
"Trusty", 7
Utica, mentioned, 1
Vicksburg (Miss.), mentioned, 2, 3
"Voodoo doctors", 17
Voting, mentioned, 16
Washington Avenue, mentioned, 4, 23, 24
Washington County, mentioned, 1
(Watson), Clarence, 27
(Watson), Onett, 27
World War I, 12, 18

NOTICE

This material may be
protected by copyright
law (Title 17 U.S. Code).