

*Civil Rights History Project*  
*Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program*  
*under contract to the*  
*Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture*  
*and the Library of Congress, 2011*

Interviewee: Wheeler Parker, Jr.  
Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.  
Videographer: John Bishop  
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Location: Fellowship Room of the Argo Temple Church of God in Christ,  
Summit Argo (Chicago area), IL  
Length: 1:07:09

Joe Mosnier: Monday, May 23. Uh, John, we didn't check out. Are we good?

John Bishop: Yeah, I'm good.

JM: Okay. This is Monday, May the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011. We're in, um, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois, with, uh, Reverend Wheeler Parker Jr. to do an oral history interview for the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress in their joint project entitled "The Civil Rights History Project." My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and I'm with videographer and filmmaker John Bishop. Again, Reverend Parker, thank you very much for joining us and fitting us into our – your schedule as we came here to Chicago.

Wheeler Parker: My pleasure.

JM: Thank you. Um, I wanted to start – maybe we'll – maybe we'll start with an event that's very recent and work our way back through the history. Um, you were just down in

Mississippi for the unveiling of a historical marker at the Bryant Store, and I wonder if you could maybe start there in our conversation today and talk about that experience and your thoughts and feelings about that.

WP: Um-hmm. Yes, uh, we were at the, uh, the Freedom Trail. They're going to do like twenty-five markers, and the Emmett Till marker at the Bryant Grocery Store is number one. And, uh, it was a very moving, overwhelming event, well put together. I was very pleased with the marker and the program that they had there. So, it brought back memories. I'm right down the road from where I used to live and across from where I went to school, and so it brought back a *lot* of memories. Of course, the event at the store that day, and that marker represented – um, the marker tells us where we were in 1955, where we are today, and what we need to do. So, it was a very, very moving event – well put together, well managed, and I give a lot of kudos to the people who did it.

JM: Yeah. Have you – have you traveled – well, how often have you traveled to Mississippi in recent years and decades?

WP: Um, I'm probably down there about twice a year.

JM: Um.

WP: Sometimes more, yeah.

JM: Um.

WP: I love to go to Mississippi. That's home, you know.

JM: Um.

WP: Nothing wrong with the land and the dirt. The people weren't too cool. [Laughter]  
But Mississippi's okay.

JM: You moved to, um, Chicago, I think, in '47.

WP: Moved to Summit Argo right outside Chicago in 1947.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Um, you just mentioned your memories of Mississippi. Can you maybe take us through what you saw and experienced when – paint a picture of the landscape when you got off the train back in '55 when you returned there for that summer visit? What did the house, the landscape, the little town of Money, what – how would you describe all of that –?

WP: Country. [Laughs]

JM: For someone who didn't know it.

WP: [Laughing] Country. That's all you could say. I think in Money, it may have been fifty people, fifty people or thereabout, give or take a little bit. And that's good, rich Delta soil. You don't want people on it. This is for growing crops, and it was ideal for that.

And that's what we did. When we got there, we got busy. Got our cotton sacks and went to the cotton field. I think I made about eight bucks that week. So, it was a fun time for me. It was swimming and, you know, sixteen-year – we did what sixteen-year-olds, teenagers, do – did. And we had a great time – until.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. Um, can you paint a picture of, um, of your, um, grandfather?

WP: Uh, my grandfather – what can I say about – what can I say about Papa? No nonsense. The way he carried himself, he carried himself with dignity and great respect, and he got great respect from people. Gentle man, always willing to help, but he carried himself in that kind of way that people really respected. They looked up to him. He was a man of means: Said what he meant, meant what he said.

JM: How about your grandmother?

WP: Grandma was easy-going. [Laughs] Grandma was so easy-going that her sons asked her once, said, "Mama, when are you going to whip us?" That's pretty easy-going. Now,

Mama I wouldn't dare ask that. [Laughs] She was a schoolteacher, very lovable lady, and just believed everything her boys said. [Laughs] And, uh, she was just a very likeable person and, you know, to know her was to love her.

JM: Um-hmm. How about the, um – can you say a little bit more just descriptively about the house, about the little town of Money, about the – about Dark Fear Road?

WP: Um-hmm. Going down Dark Fear Road, um, and I can't the directions right. Going Dark Fear Road from Bryant's Store, to the left was like a body of water. I can remember when I was like seven years old we lived there. [0:05:00]

And this – um, I forgot what we called it – it would just overflow. And our house was on the other side of the road. And water would run under the house all night, wash the bridges out, and you could – it was fun to us, you know, to see all this water, clear water, you could see fishes going. But it wouldn't build up because it was going back to the opening in the back. And we wanted to play in it, didn't know the seriousness of it, like, just what happened, you know.

But, uh, and where the water was running, that's where the crops grew. I mean, cotton would grow right up to the house. You could go right out the window and go to work, right there. Everything was right there.

And I remember when we lived there we lived next door to my grandparents. There was like a fruit orchard between. We lived next door in a shotgun house, brand new shotgun house. We lived there, and then next to us was a sawmill. I actually experienced lumber being made. Bringing these big logs in, and, man, this big saw, it would be screaming, you know, cutting that wood.

So, it was – right there was a congregation of – a clump of people right there. And, other than that, you've just got cotton fields. Not much in terms of corn or edible vegetables; cotton

was the main thing. Um, we had a train that ran not too far away. We had a church right nearby where I started school, one room; one teacher taught *everybody*, and she had much order.

I remember once, uh, my uncle made the teacher kind of angry, and he told her she laughed like a duck. So, she had him to go out and bring some switches in. And I was terrified. This lady's going to kill us. You know, back then, you was open – you're like open, just open to be had, you know. So, she had no trouble out of me. I was only about seven years old.

And, of course, the next year, I went uptown. [Laughs] I laugh because uptown is still very rural and very country. And I went to school up there, but we did have classrooms. So, it was a very wonderful experience, and I remember – and the cemetery was right by the church. I understand now, because they didn't have any hearse or anything to take you anywhere, so they buried you right outside the church, the same place they had planned to – they had dug a grave for Emmett Till. So, uh, that's what I remember.

And some people lived back down in the woods-like. They were all surrounded by farmland. Everything is farming. A few settlements, but everything related to the farming. And uptown we had three or four stores, but there were very few stores, and, um, that was the extent of it.

I mean, you didn't know anything about fast food. There was no fast food. So, they had to cook three times a day. I mean, you had to eat. You could not go into the cotton field with no corn flakes. We never heard of corn flakes and cold cereal like that. You had to eat some rabbit, some chicken and some cornbread to go out in that field, because that sun would zap that milk out of you real quick.

So, we had a wonderful – it was a wonderful time, you know. It was just – didn't know anything else. I tell people, I say, "I love picking cotton. I love the country." They say, "You

didn't know any better." [Laughs] Say I didn't stay there long enough. But they would brag on us!

And then, I can remember in the fall, come time – because you could only go to school after the cotton was in. So, my daddy was like eighteen years old when he graduated from eighth grade, because you have to, um, put in so many hours to finish a grade. So, you started after the cotton was in, maybe November, so you were always behind. And I think what's remarkable is that they held to the fact that you had to have so many quarters, or whatever it was in the past, and so he's eighteen [laughs] and getting out of eighth grade. But they held to the line.

I've got one of his history – got one of his schoolbooks from 19, I think 25, and he's telling about he met my mother and his heart was made happy that day. [Laughs] So, we have a lot of history there. And those are the things you kind of remember, the little things like that that happened around the farm.

JM: When you got on the train to head back down to – well, head down to, um, Mississippi in '55, did – was your mood just one of general enthusiasm and looking forward to the trip and all, or did you also carry with you some sense of it's not the place I now know? It's not Chicago. It's a different place. I need to shift my behavior a little. Was that in your mind at the time?

WP: For sure. See, I was born there, and you always look at the stories. Very much aware of where you're going. They say, "You're going down behind the Iron Curtain." They equated it with going to – at that time Russia was called the Iron Curtain. You knew exactly – at least I did – you knew exactly where you were going and what *could* happen, because they told you stories of things that *had* happened to people, and you knew that you had no protection

[0:10:00] under the law if anything happened while you were there. And when I went into that store, that's one thing that struck me – when I got down there, I was very much aware of it.

Ah, but your friends – we just had so much fun! Man, there should have been a law against it! You know, we just had good fun with nothing, you know, and swimming, and just – and most telling a lot of jokes and lies some people were telling. [Laughs]

So, it was, uh – yeah, you were very much aware of where you were going, at least I was. They made you – because they wanted you to survive and they *know* what could happen. They know what had happened, what was happening, and what could happen. And what *did* happen, that's what they was afraid of.

JM: Yeah. How long were you planning to stay that summer?

WP: Uh, I don't know! I think we were going to stay a few weeks, definitely longer than we had – than we stayed. We only stayed a week. Yeah, and we were only there three days before this incident happened, from Sunday to Wednesday, you know. Everything just got out of kilter right there.

JM: Tell me a little bit about how you remember those first couple of days before the Wednesday evening at the store.

WP: Picking cotton. And, man, I was right at home, you know. I think I picked about seventy – when I left at six years old, I could pick a hundred pounds of cotton. Right now I could have probably picked a hundred, but it was so hot. Cotton started blooming in late August. It's not the full bloom, and it's so hot you cannot stay out there all day. So, you picked a half a day.

And sometimes we'd go swimming. I remember, uh, they said snakes wouldn't bite in the water, so we beat the water and tried to run the snakes out, and you'd see the snake's little

head swimming. And we'd jump in there – didn't have good sense – jump in there with the snakes swimming. And, uh, go in somebody's watermelon patch and gather up – and jokes is the number one thing down South. I mean everybody just, seems like, knew jokes – but me, you know. And my uncle was driving a car. He's my age, and we riding around in a car. And he let me drive it! Man, it was a fun time! I was having a ball.

JM: Yeah.

WP: And the girls were around, and it was just a great time, you know, great time.

JM: Let me have you describe, um, that, that late Wednesday when I guess you all come home and have supper and then decide to –

JB: Joe, could we pause for a second?

JM: Sure.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're rolling.

JM: Okay. We're back on after a short pause just to check our equipment. Um, Reverend Parker, I was just about to raise this – now, we turn to things that are much less – memory is much more complicated and much less happy than the ones you were just describing. Um, can you talk about that, that second half of the day on Wednesday, um, of that, of that visit in August of '55?

WP: Um-hmm. We got there that Sunday.

JM: Yeah.

WP: And Wednesday was the first day that we rode to this little town. I guess it was about three miles down this gravel road. And, uh, still excitement – but teenagers got a car to yourself, so that was great. And, uh –

JM: It's the end of the day, correct?

WP: Yeah, near the end of the day, uh, dusk. It wasn't quite dusk but by the time we left – well, see, I can't remember how long we stayed there. So, we get to town, and people are gathering up from the little settlements there. And it's still a small town. It's not like Greenwood. And the guys out there playing checkers. And I decided to go into the store and purchase some things. I don't know what I purchased, but I went in there and purchased some things.

And while I was in the store, Emmett came in. And when Emmett came in, I felt, you know, this apprehension, because I knew how he was and I knew where we were. [Coughs] Excuse me. So, I left Emmett in the store, and Simeon came in right behind him. Then the both of them came out of the store. And after they came out and facing the store, Mrs. Bryant came out, and she was walking to – facing the store, to the right of the store.

And Emmett whistled. And we just could not believe, I mean, this – this is like something out of the sky blue, you know. Where did this come from? What's wrong with him? And, even now, we don't know what possessed him. He had no idea. He had no idea, didn't have any idea the danger. And so, she proceeded to go around. And somebody said that she's going to get a gun.

I think that's when we started rushing to the car. I don't know how many of us in the car; there was a lot of us in the car. We rushed to the car. By this time, Emmett is scared. We get in the car, and someone has dropped a cigarette on the floor. Too young to be smoking anyway, but anyway, someone dropped a cigarette. So, Emmett is telling my uncle, "Let's get going! Let's get going! Let's get going!" And they want to find that cigarette before we start pulling off.

So, my uncle finally takes off. He's younger than I am, uh, but he's sixteen. So, we finally take off, [0:15:00] and then we're going down this gravel road, across the railroad track, down the gravel road. We look behind, man, dust is flying every – and there's a car behind us! Oh, my goodness! Where did it come from? I mean this is country. We didn't see any car. All of a sudden, there's a car right there!

And so, my uncle sped up and pulled to the side. And, man, I don't know if we let it stop before we jumped out and running through the cotton field. I remember Emmett running and falling, and people falling over one another, and the cotton bolls that were not fresh – they were still – hadn't freshly opened up – they were beating our legs. And I went right by. Nothing to that! We regrouped at the edge of the road.

And Simeon – I don't know why – he's sitting up there. Simeon was twelve. Twelve was different from sixteen, you know. He's still sitting there in the car, you know. So, somewhere in between there we started talking, and Emmett asked us not to tell my grandfather. And, uh, of course, there was a girl that she said, "I know those people, and this is not over with. You're going to hear more about this."

JM: The girl was not with you at that time, though?

WP: No, no. She was –

JM: That came –

WP: We met up with some – uh, we stopped at someone's house before we got to our house.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. I think you –

WP: Of course, she says she was driving the car, huh? [Laughter]

JM: I should say for the record you're alluding to all the representations made about these circumstances by people who, in fact, were not there. And that's one of them, correct?

WP: [Laughs] Yeah, she said she was driving.

JM: Yeah.

WP: Imagination is powerful.

JM: Yeah.

JM: But anyway, we met and we talked. And at this point, we didn't take it serious. I felt relief. You know, the car went by. And it's like it's going to go away, you know. I didn't feel we were going to really hear anything more from this. I really didn't. You know, I knew what he did was a no-no.

And so, that night went by. I didn't tell my grandfather. I don't think anybody told him. I don't think he really ever heard. There've been questions about that, but – so, Wednesday went by, Thursday. Nothing. We didn't even talk about it again. I don't ever remember us talking about it again at all. We forgot about it, to some degree. Thursday went by, Friday went by, and Saturday.

And Saturday in the country, everybody goes to the big town. Man, we went to Greenwood, and people from *everywhere*, all the girls and the guys, and they're walking down Johnson Street, man, just – it was just excitement to see all these people coming. They were in their cars, their wagons. They were doing their shopping for the week, whatever. And we stayed there.

And then, about twelve or thereabout, we left. Stopped by a place called Four Fifths [Plantation], I believe. And, uh, it's still there – somebody was talking about it the other day.

And it's one of those they call juke joints, or, uh, somebody's house – they've got drinking and stuff. And we stayed there.

We got home, I guess – we left there, and on our way home, Maurice, Emmett, and myself – and my Uncle Maurice, he got a little high and he ran over a dog. And when he ran over the dog, Emmett started crying, you know. I mean, to me, the dog shouldn't have been in the street, you know. But, anyway, Emmett was very fond of animals. He had a sensitive side for animals. So, we got home and went to bed. Uh, I slept with Maurice, and Emmett slept with Simeon. And my cousin, Curtis [Jones], is here by now. [Laughs]

JM: But he hasn't been with you the last few days?

WP: No. Curtis just – when we get back home, Curtis is there. We hadn't seen him.

JM: Yeah.

WP: But he told the story of what happened at the store. [Laughs]

JM: Right. Again, another instance where somebody –

WP: Yeah. [Laughs]

JM: Before you go forward with that story, if I – forgive me for interrupting –

WP: No problem.

JM: I want to ask you, take you back just for a moment. You said a moment ago that, recalling the visit to the Bryant Store, you stepped in, and then Emmett came in behind you. You felt a little – just instinctive apprehension.

WP: Oh, yeah.

JM: That he might not know the rules and the informal rules.

WP: I know him.

JM: Yeah.

WP: I lived next door to him.

JM: Exactly. So, tell me – tell me about him.

WP: Well, I have to come back to Argo, where we lived, you know.

JM: Yes.

WP: He's the kind of guy he loved pranks, and what he thought was funny wasn't funny all the time. We'd go to visit him after he moved to Chicago, 64<sup>th</sup> and St. Lawrence. So, we're walking down the street. My cousin Sonny [Crosby] – we've got a cousin that lives over here – you probably should interview him, too. But anyway, we're walking down the street, and all of a sudden Emmett says, and he stuttered bad, he says, "I've got my two big cousins here from Argo, Illinois, and can't n-n-nobody beat them up." And we looked at him, "Have you lost your mind?" We grabbed him up real quick! Because the gangs were bad in Chicago, [0:20:00] and in the suburbs, you're not gang orientated. Those are the kinds of things he would do, and it was funny to him. It wasn't funny to us at all, because, as far as we were concerned, he could have got us killed.

So, I knew how he was. I knew the things he – and other things he'd done, you know, as we grew up, you know, just – just off-color stuff, you know. And I just knew when he came in, something could happen. I didn't think anything was going to happen, but I knew something *could* happen.

JM: And just to – just to say another word about this, it doesn't sound as if you're saying that these were in any way hard-edged or mean-spirited things. He was just playful and –

WP: Exactly.

JM: Provoked the attention of his friends in a playful way and that kind of thing.

WP: I never saw him angry or bitter at anybody. Never! Never. I lived next door to him. He was always doing something, though, because he was the center – if he was there, he was the center of attraction. It wasn't planned. It was just natural. [Laughing] I told him he's Leo the Lion. He was just a natural leader – [laughing] just needed some direction sometimes. But he's going to do something to get the attention.

JM: When you were sixteen and you were, say, in Greenwood that night, and I know you were both down from Chicago, and you guys knew each other well and all that, was there any part of you being sixteen, and he was fourteen, did you feel like, "I'm a little bigger and older. I wish I could kind of leave the younger guys behind and go do my thing," or was –?

WP: Well, Emmett didn't – he wasn't really – you're right. When you're earlier in age, every – you want to stay within your age.

JM: Yeah.

WP: It's not like, now, it could span from seventy to eighty, but when you're sixteen and fourteen, you're sixteen and you're fourteen, you know. [Laughs] And Simeon was twelve. He was – Simeon was –

JM: [Speaking about a mic] Just set that back up, please. No big deal.

WP: Simeon was like – didn't count, you know. [Laughs] Back then, he just didn't count, because he was not a – he was not – uh, he wouldn't be a player with us.

JB: Okay, let's take a pause now.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JM: I think it's good now.

JB: Okay.

JM: Let me go back and have you tell that again, just the age difference thing. Sorry about the mic.

WP: Yeah, the age difference thing. And, you know, it's kind of like when you're going to school. If you're nine, you're not going to have a girlfriend that's seven. [Laughing] She's got to be nine, too. She's got to be in your class. So, there was that age distinction. And Emmett, he wanted to – when his mother would take him places, she would take me, too, you know. So, he kind of like looked up to me, you know. And I'm not interested in being his leader, but, you know, he just kind of – I'm the upperclassman, I'm the older person, so I knew what the deal was, you know. But he wasn't going to listen to me or anything. But he looked up to me. And, uh, that age distinction definitely was there, and you knew it.

JM: Yeah. Um, let me have you – um, thank you for that, and let me have you turn again to Saturday, the twenty-seventh of August, 1955.

WP: Yeah, Saturday, uh, we got home I think about twelve o'clock. It was dark. And it's so dark down in there. I mean, you – if the moon is not shining, you just cannot see your hand before your face, just *dark*. And, uh, so we got in and went to bed. And like I say, Maurice – I got in bed with Maurice, and Simeon – Bobo – Emmett Till – got in bed with Simeon.

It was a big house. Everybody paints it as a shack. They insist on calling it a shack. It was a former landlord's home, not that it means anything. If you look at the house, that's a screened-in porch across the front – that's money! – a full screened-in porch all the way across the front of the house. Then you've got four big rooms, got a little space in between, and the kitchen is off to the back. So, it was a very large house.

And, uh, I guess about two – going forward – I guess about two, two-thirty in the morning, my grandfather said it was, I hear these guys talking.

JM: So you wake up?

WP: I woke up. And, man, I become alarmed, because they're talking about what happened at the store. And my mind is just racing. They say, "We're looking for a fat boy from Chicago." I said, "Man, I'm getting ready to die. These people are going to kill us."

Because I heard – Simeon and my uncles that lived there, they had a different take on the South than I did. I heard all these stories and I took everything literally. That was one of my problems in life: whatever you said – like my mother told me one day, she said, "I'm killing you. I'm going to kill you, boy." So I said, "You're going to kill me?" I took off! [Laughs] I took off running, you know. She had my uncle to catch me. I got a whipping in the cornfield; she beat me with the corn stalks.

So, when they said, "We're looking for a fat boy from Chicago," and I'd heard what they had done to people, killed people, and threw people in the river and all that, I said, "Man, I'm getting – we're getting ready to die in this house." [0:25:00] So, the first thing come back to me is my religious upbringing. I started praying. I literally started praying. And I just said, "God, if you just let me get out of this, I'm going to –" there's something about when you think you're getting ready to die, all the wrong things you've ever done, seem like, they come to your mind.

I was watching a World War II film the other day, and this man's ship had broke up. And he was out in this ocean and he said a shark was coming straight for him. He said, "God, if you let me live, I'm going to treat my little brother right." He said, "I'm going to marry a young girl and I'm going to treat her right." Your mind changes when death – you feel death is imminent. He said the shark went that way, and he saw his friend's leg go up in the air.

But what I'm trying to say it's something about when you think you're close to death – you don't have to be close, but you think you are – your whole demeanor and attitude and value

of life just change. Nothing else was important to me at that time but trying to survive. At sixteen, I was not ready to die. And, according to my religious upbringing, I wasn't fit to die. So, I prayed.

And, uh, and I could hear them coming, and they're coming toward my room. I'm the first room on the right. Facing the front of the house, I'm the first room on the right. My grandfather was the first room on the left. So, by the time they said, "We're looking for a fat boy from Chicago," my grandfather had no idea where he was. So, they start – he was starting around.

JM: Your grandfather had met them on the porch when they called him?

WP: Papa met them on the porch.

JM: And then came into your room.

WP: They came into my room. And, uh, and I can remember I'm scratching my eyes, I'm shaking like a leaf on a tree, and just – then, in walks this guy with a gun in one hand. And I was always afraid of guns. I was always afraid of guns. Emmett wasn't really afraid of guns, because there was a gun left in the house once, and he got it. He could have killed us, you know, playing with a gun in the house, you know. We had those little chifforobes and, uh, but I was afraid of guns.

So, they came in. And this guy had this pistol in one hand and a flashlight in the other one. It was pure terror! It's just like if you could just disappear and just go away. It's like a nightmare, and things are not ending fast enough, you know. And I'm waiting. Am I going to be shot? I remember closing my eyes. And they walked past me. They didn't say anything and they didn't do anything. I'm still scared.

They went to the next room. Curtis is there. He's there now. Curtis didn't wake up. They passed by my Uncle Robert. He didn't wake up. They went into the third room, where Uncle Simeon – so, I could hear them talking, and they aroused him out of the bed. He had no idea what was going on. Because, like I say, even Simeon and those guys, they didn't feel about it like I felt about it. Simeon didn't know what was going on.

And I could hear them talking, not a lot of audible or clear stuff, but they were mad at him. He wanted to put his socks on, his shoes, you know. He thinks he's at home, you know. He doesn't know who he's dealing with. And he's saying, "Yeah" and "No" – he's not saying the right words. And they were fierce. I think these guys – in hindsight, I think they had been drinking. I mean, you have to almost get drunk to do something like what they did, *I* feel. I just feel a human had to have some kind of assistance to do what they did to that kid.

So, they finally left, and it was dark.

JM: Can I ask – your, um – your grandmother tried to intercede and persuade these men not to take Emmett away.

WP: Um-hmm.

JM: Was that just part of the general conversation you heard in the other room? Did you make – did that come clearly to you?

WP: No, that didn't come clear to me. I was told what she was doing later.

JM: Got it.

WP: It was just conversation going on –

JM: Back of the house.

WP: And I know they was mad.

JM: Yeah.

WP: They were angry.

JM: Yeah.

WP: And I didn't hear anything anybody said, but they were angry. And they left. And when they left my grandmother left. And my grandfather left! And I'm sixteen, you know. And sixteen then is different from sixteen now. I mean – this is the protection! [Laughs] The protection is gone! And in my mind, they're coming back. I don't know why, but in my mind – so, I'm suffering from pure terror, you know, just hell on earth. So, I said – because grandmother would not stay, and she had my grandfather take her to her brother's house, Crosby, lives up in Sumner.

So, I got up. [0:30:00] I said, "Man, if they," I said, "They're coming back. I'm putting my shoes on." I didn't like bare feet, being bare – in the bare feet that much. So, when they come back, when they pull in the yard, I'm heading for the woods. In fact, I said, I'm heading for the woods. And the strange thing, my uncle in the bed with me never woke up. Maurice never woke up. Curtis never woke up. Robert never woke up. They woke Simeon up and told him to go back to sleep.

JM: When you say that, you mean the two men who came –?

WP: Milam and Bryant.

JM: Yeah.

WP: Yeah. They didn't just say, "Wake up, Simeon." They wakened – you know, the conversation – he was wakened by that. And I'm waiting for day. It seemed like daylight would never come, never, never come. It was just so long. Nobody talked to anybody. I didn't wake my uncle up. I didn't go to the next room. I just stayed right there. So, when the – my plan was as they come in the yard, I'm headed out the back. So, the daylight finally came.

JM: Was your father home by then – I mean, your grandfather home by then?

WP: No.

JM: No?

WP: Well, he came – I don't know exactly what time he got back, but he didn't – he never really brought us together to talk to us. And we just know that they had – I knew they had taken him. And there was calls being made. Curtis was very courageous. He went to the landowner's house and he called. He was that kind of kid. If Curtis had woke up, he'd probably been – a lot of us probably would have got killed, because he was going to probably try to do something or say something. That's the kind of person he was. And, as a matter of fact, he became a policeman and he was a bodyguard for Mayor Washington before he died.

So, Curtis did call, and then his mother called Emmett Till's mother. And my mother got involved, and my daddy had a brother lived there, and he came over. And, again, he come with his pistols, so here's more terror, you know. Man, this is real serious. So, he's going to take me from Money, Mississippi, up to Duck Hill. And somebody in the crowd – I was always a very serious-minded kid – somebody in the crowd said, "Look, we're going to send them up there to get you." Just like that. They did not believe that Emmett was going to be killed. They're still kind of joking about it, because the men told them they were going to take him, you know, and punish him and bring him back. Said, "We're going to send them up there to get you."

I didn't sleep a wink. From that time, two-thirty, for over twenty-four hours I did not sleep. Because I was up to my uncle's house, and every time a car would go by, I'm looking for him, you know, I'm looking. And eventually – my uncle, he took me to the train station a couple of times to get on, because I didn't have reservations – and eventually I caught a train, early that morning, took about five – it was dark. I caught a train.

Got to Memphis, thinking I'm in Chicago, and I'm going to a washroom. And everybody says, "You can't go inside! You can't go in there!" I'm scared all over again. I'm thinking – it's so big in this train station, I'm thinking I'm in Chicago. I'm in Memphis, and they've got the signs, "Colored," and it seemed like I was never going to get where I could just relax. So, that's the way it went that day that they took him from the house.

JB: Joe, let's pause for just one second.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JM: Ready whenever you give me a sign.

JB: Yeah, we're rolling.

JM: Reverend Parker, you thus found your way through all that incredibly difficult circumstance back up to Chicago. And, um, therefore, you were here and attended the funeral, and I want to ask about that. But I want to ask about what you recall for that – those few days when you arrived back to Chicago, and, uh, Mrs. Till, extended family, your parents – just what – what you can recall about those hours and those days.

WP: Umm, I arrived at the train station. I can't even remember who picked me up, but I know that they whisked me off to, uh, Mrs. Till's house on 64<sup>th</sup> and St. Lawrence. And when I – when I got upstairs, you know, everybody's sitting around, solemn, because they don't know what happened to Emmett and they had not found his body. And, um, they're looking at me, you know, and, um, Mrs. Till told me to go hug my mother, you know, and I did that. It wasn't too much said, because people were just in a grieving state. By now, they think that something has happened, and I understand they had been searching [0:35:00] around bridges and normal places that people are found.

Um, so, I got back to Argo. And, to me, it was like a nightmare, and my life kind of resumed as it was. People would ask me about it, and one day I was riding through town and I saw a guy. His name was J. P.; he had a jewelry store. And I saw him, and he looked just like Milam. And, man, my heart just – *Boom*, like it stopped beating. I said, “Man, he’s here!” Because I – I didn’t put it past him pursuing to do what – if they wanted to do something to me, so. And I got past that because I realized later that it was, uh, the jewelry – and I knew him. But he looked so much like him and all, so.

Uh, it changed my whole life, really. It changed me. I mean I could never forget it. And it’s like, since 1955, it’s a constant thing. I just learned how to handle – my religious upbringing taught me how to deal with negative situations. You know, you’ve got to exhale; you’ve got to let it go. And you have to – I tell people, “You’re full of trouble. It’s how you handle the trouble.”

One thing that always bothered me and – I don’t know if it bothered me, but I can’t understand, can’t explain, is that I went to the funeral. I said, “This is not Emmett.” I said, “It’s like it never happened.” And I said – some people asked me, they said, “Well, maybe you’re in a state of shock.” I said, “I’m going to see him again. I’m going to see him.” No remorse! No sadness whatsoever! And that’s what I lived during those times. And now I go and talk about it, or I see the video, and then I’m crying. I say, “I got too old to be crying now.” But, uh, during that time, that was not Emmett. It’s not the guy I knew. That was a monster in there, you know. And I always had it in here, I’m going to see him again, you know. That’s what I said. And, uh, and we believe in the hereafter, so we believe you *can* meet again, so I guess that’s what I was trying to say. I don’t know. But it changed my whole life. I could never be the same again.

Because it always came to my mind the promise that you made, and that was always brought to my attention.

JM: Can you describe the funeral?

WP: A lot of people. Just a conglomeration of people, you know. The solemn atmosphere there, you know, it's just – it's just unbelievable, I guess you could say. The air was filled with just, I guess, unbelief and how could it happen to a kid? People just felt helpless. Because the South is, even now, if you're going South around the Fourth of July, the highway is going to be packed all the way down, you know, because people love to go South. It's like – it's like going to Mecca, you know. And this happened. This happened. So, that atmosphere was just – lot of sadness and, you know, a lot of unbelief, because you hadn't – you don't – you didn't have history of too many kids suffering. There was one. I don't know if you've seen the book *Without Sanctuary* – the photos in there of a fifteen year-old-kid that was hung with his mother. But for the most part, children were kind of exempt.

JM: Did you see, um – did your family spend much time or have, um, frequent visits with Mrs. Till?

WP: After this?

JM: Yeah.

WP: After –

JM: Yeah.

WP: No, we didn't, because sixteen – then there were not many automobiles, like the South. Our transportation was by bus. And when I did go over there, we rode the bus to see him. So, and after – it changed her life, too. Her lifestyle changed, and not only was she working, she went back to college. And, uh, she got a college degree, so she's going on with her

life. She's, uh, she got married, and there was a lot of things happening in her life. So, we didn't have a whole lot of interaction with her, just kind of close. And my father had six kids, so couldn't afford, you know – we didn't have a car so we just didn't see her that much. We did see her. There was times we did see her, [0:40:00] but not that much.

JM: Yeah. Did you, um – did you find that the whole – that this whole episode was on your mind frequently as you, well, moved on through finishing high school and going on from there? Did you – was it something that took a conscious active place in your mind very often?

WP: Yes, for sure – very, very often. And, uh – because the promise that I made that night to God, I soon forgot about it. You know, “Trouble passed, all things righted, God is forgotten, and the soldier slighted,” the old saying, you know. But every now and then I would be reminded of that promise that I made. So, it was always there, [laughs] until I got it right. So, at age twenty-two – that was sixteen, so six years – it took me that long to keep my promise. And, uh, yes, it definitely – uh, I started feeling that if you didn't do it – and the Bible tells it's best not to make a promise than to make it and break it. So, I said that, uh, I've got to get this right.

So, one day I asked God to help me, and I just changed. Very few people in any church, in any denomination, in their twenties – you're not going to find it, because we're trying to get some gusto, we're trying to have what we call fun. But after I changed, I said, “This is the best life. I've got – I'm peaceful. [Laughs] This is what I'm looking for over here. So, I've got peace and I've got happiness.” So, I changed and I had no – I have no – I had no regrets, and this is my fiftieth year of change, and I still have no regrets. But it's a hard sell to the youngster, hard sell.

JB: Can we pause for a second? There's a helicopter outside.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, we're rolling again.

JM: Um, Reverend Parker, when would you say – well, a little earlier, say, you're in your twenties, did you travel to Mississippi then?

WP: It was ten years before I went back to Mississippi. Ten years, so I was sixteen – I was about twenty-six before I went back. And then I was conscientious of where I went and where I stopped.

JM: Where did you go?

WP: I had plenty of uncles. I got an uncle, the one they took me to his house – just died about two years ago. He was a hundred and five, and his wife – girlfriend was sixty-nine. He got divorced after being married fifty years, never been on any medicine, walked two miles every day, driving a car. [Laughs] Man, I loved to go – his daddy was a slave, so I heard those stories. He lived to see his – his granddaddy. His granddaddy was a slave, so his granddaddy – he was born in 1903, same year Ford Motor Co. started, and he lived to 1924, so he had a lot of history. So, we made sure that we go by and – and then, I had another uncle, he just died at a hundred – go by to see him, a lot of relatives. I just came, last week, still got a lot of relatives. Love to go south.

JM: Let me ask you about, um, Simeon Wright and his parents. Did you see them much after they came up to Chicago?

WP: Oh, yeah! [Laughing] We lived in the same house.

JM: Oh, excuse me. Of course, you did. That's right.

WP: Yeah, you know that extended family. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah.

WP: Yeah, my grandfather and my grandmother, they were characters. [Laughs] They were a lot of fun.

JM: How did you, um –? Let me ask this question in a careful way. Would you have thought at the time that they are different now because of this, what's happened, or did they seem that their personalities were largely intact?

WP: Who, Grandma and Papa after they came here?

JM: Um-hmm.

WP: To me, it seemed they went on with their life, and, uh, it seemed like they, uh – my grandfather had never planned to leave the South. He planned to die in the South. And, uh, I think he probably had to make an adjustment. He was sixty-some years old. But, even here, he started farming, a little farming right over here where the Till Center is. And, uh, he started a little farming and got a little job and he traveled. So, I think he made the adjustment okay. The kids, Maurice and Simeon and Robert, I think they were glad to leave. And Grandma's here with her family, so she's okay, so.

They had a good life down there. They had a nice house. And they were not sharecroppers; I think they rented their land. So, they – they had to make an adjustment. My grandfather just had no plans of leaving to move here. I think Grandma was okay, because all of her sisters and brothers were here.

JM: When did – when did the Emmett Till case come back into your life, say, in the form of a journalist or somebody else, a filmmaker, [0:45:00] a documentarian, being in touch with you to talk about these things for the first time? When did that begin to happen? Do you remember?

WP: 1985. Rich Samuels from NBC came out, and they did a, uh, documentary. Uh, he met Mrs. Till. There was a young basketball player had been killed, Ben Wilson – that was his name – in Chicago, and she was there for support. And he talked with her, and as a result, uh, he came and did the story on Emmett Till.

Up until that time, to me, it was like there was no interest in that kind of story. It was like he got what he deserved. Like, I was at a school speaking once, and a guy said, “Why are we talking about Emmett Till?” Said, “He was no hero. He was a managed [?] [nb: that word uncertain] boy that did something that he shouldn’t.” I said, “Well, he didn’t deserve to get killed, and we’re here to show you what this history was like back then.”

So, that’s pretty much, uh, the first time, Rich Samuels, and they did that. And, uh, then it was like an idea whose time has come, you know. It just started happening, you know. Others start coming – and, even now, sometimes people don’t want to talk about it, you know. We like to embellish our history. I tell people, “It’s not a nice – history is not all good. In your family, everything is not all good. But you’ve got to tell it like it is, you know. That’s the only way you can free yourself. That’s the only way you can deliver yourself, is exhale, let it go, get it out there and tell it like it is.”

So, I try to make people comfortable when I tell them about the story. I’m not here to stir up any ill will, animosity, but I’m here just to state the facts. And don’t hate, don’t – I tell them, “Don’t hate; appreciate, for hate destroys the hater.” And I’m not here to bring it up with – some of the teachers, they, uh, they don’t – I can tell they’d rather not – they’d rather for it to go away, you know. But it happened, and you’ve got to tell it.

JM: Did you, uh, have any special feelings or perspectives on, uh, [sighs] Reverend King’s visit to Chicago in the – what? ’66?

WP: I'd just – I had just started a business.

JM: Um-hmm.

WP: Uh, when a lot of the civil rights [activism] was going on I went I went into the Army in like '62 --

JM: Yeah.

WP: -- got out in '65, so I had just come back to my business. And, uh, I can remember the hate. Like, I remember the animosity, and they were saying that he needed to go back South. I can remember those times, you know, uh, the way things were then. And you wonder if things will ever change, you know. The law will make you behave, but the law can't legislate the heart. And that's what I was always conscientious of, you know: The law can make you treat people a certain way within a certain realm, but what's in your heart is deep in there. You can't legislate that. So, I definitely remember the King era.

JM: Umm. You worked with, um, Keith Beauchamp when he made the film.

WP: Um-hmm.

JM: And, um, as momentum grew out of that effort, and the federal – the, um, Justice Department and the Mississippi authorities jointly reopened the case, um, what were your thoughts and feelings? Did you – how did you evaluate the prospects for this new examination all these years later?

WP: Well, I've often thought of – what you're talking about is the, uh – all of a sudden, there's interest. All of a sudden, there's momentum, trying to do some things –

JM: Yeah, to reinvestigate and –

WP: Yeah, and players are coming onboard. You know, it's just like everything is falling – and I know one person – there's a whole lot of conglomeration of things coming

together. You've got players. You've got, um – which is not mentioned much – um, Alvin Sykes. You don't hear much about Alvin. Alvin played a pivotal role. And sometimes what I saw I didn't like, because some people act like they own the story. I said, "It's stupid, stupidity. I mean, it's a story that's out there, you know."

And Alvin Sykes was the one that really – he came here for specifically one reason: to get it opened, because he had done a case out there in Kansas. And, uh, so he pursued. And when we went – I went with Alvin when we met with [U.S. Attorney General] Eric Holder, and Eric Holder referred to him as "a legend in his own time." He pursued. Here's a kid that did not have a – I don't think he had a high school education, but he's well entrenched [0:50:00] in the language, and I guess he's studied it over and over – and he pursued these senators about the Till Bill [Emmett Till Unsolved Civil Rights Crime Act of 2008]. And, uh, and, uh, then they got – [President George W.] Bush signed the Till Bill that allowed eleven million dollars a year for ten years to be put toward pursuing cases dating back from 1970. Then he pursued the appropriations. I thought once a bill was passed, the money's automatic. I didn't know you got to – [laughs]. So, he pursued that.

Um, I have a lot of respect for Alvin, a lot of respect for him and the work he – and he's – he's so unpretentious. That's what I like about him. He's not an egotist. You know, he's not – whoever gets the credit, you know, he doesn't worry about that. So, I've been over there many times to support him. So, uh, that's [nb: unintelligible few words].

JM: Yeah. Let's pause for just one sec.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JM: Let me ask, um– let me ask you to talk a little bit more about the – what you – your thoughts and your perspective as the, as the case was reopened by the Justice Department and

officials in Mississippi, and how you looked at that process, what range of emotions and feelings were provoked, and your sense of how that was handled.

WP: Say that again.

JM: Sure. When the case was reopened, 2004, 2005, I m interested in your range of thoughts about that, as you watched the things that did happen in that process, including the exhumation of the body and, ultimately, the decision done by Mississippi officials and others not to move forward with any new indictment – the range of emotion you felt, the range of opinion you had about how all that was handled.

WP: When they first told me that it was going to be opened, I had a pessimistic view, or a negative view. I was saying, “No way in the world a white man in Mississippi will open this case against a white man.” That’s my first thought. Then they said, “Well, it’s a woman.” I said, “*Maybe* a white woman.” Then they said, “It’s a black woman. Her name is Ms. [Joyce] Chiles.” I said, “Well, [laughs] maybe, you know, it’ll be opened.” Uh, then I was concerned about *her*. Knowing Mississippi, knowing people, that you can’t legislate the heart, I was concerned about that. That was one of my concerns.

And how else did I feel? So, they gave her – the FBI did something that they wouldn’t do about fifty years ago: They did the investigation. I never expected a whole lot, because I know the attitude and atmosphere of the country. I know where I’m at. I’m a realist. I never expected an whole – awful lot happening quick, but – you know. I know that animosity [laughs] is going to be still here, you know. I don’t expect no jump-in-the-bed type thing happening, okay.

So, they gave her the information. I met with the FBI, we did all this stuff, and, you know, this is more progress than we ever made. So, you appreciate that. You respect that. Now

we've got the FBI, literally, and they're asking questions, seems like they may be kind of serious about getting to the bottom of this. So, she gave it to the grand jury. The grand jury came back and said – the FBI thought they had enough information to indict someone.

I'm not interested in anyone getting indicted. I'm not interested in anyone going to jail. I'm interested in knowing the facts, what happened. I still want to know what happened. I want to bring some closure to this here. Mrs. Bryant, I understand, she wanted some – wanted them to give her immunity. The FBI said, "We can't give you – we're not prosecuting. We're just investigating." Uh, Mr. – the man that was on the truck with them, uh, out of Ohio, I'm trying to think of his name [Henry Lee Loggins]. His son is now the mayor of Glendora [Johnny B. Thomas]. Uh, I understand that he wanted immunity. He said that he didn't know anything about it and he wasn't there. And, uh, I can't think of his name, but anyway.

JM: Um-hmm.

WP: So, all of these things are happening. And I'm just kind of going with the flow. And she said that they could not find enough information to indict, uh, Mrs. Bryant, so. Then Alvin comes with the, uh, Till Bill. That helps, you know, to pursue other cases. That has its place, you know. It's still not bringing the closure that I want.

I want to know what happened. Mrs. Bryant knows what happened. That's what I would love – that would do me a whole lot of good. Not going to bring Emmett back, but – I don't know if you understand what I'm saying – it would bring closure [0:55:00]. It would give you – to know is to have closure. And you can appreciate that. I don't want anything to happen to her. Leave the woman alone. Just – and I doubt, even if they gave her immunity, would she tell the truth like it really happened. It would be very difficult.

Um, I rode by her house with the Mississippi – University of Mississippi, uh, Literary Tour. Uh, we visited with Hodding Carter's – I think he's from there, William Faulkner, and we did the whole – I was – I was with a group of people I had no business with, but I was there – I was there because of Emmett Till. I'm not a literary person and don't claim to be. I don't try – I try – I am who I am, you know. But anyway, it was a very interesting, informative, enlightening thing to me.

So, those are some of the feelings that I had. And to meet with Eric Holder and going to the Justice Department, those are great experiences, talking to great minds. But you're dealing with human beings, and I know I'm dealing with human beings. I know they can only go so far and only do so much.

JM: Did you ever meet Joyce Chiles?

WP: No, I don't think so. I don't think I met Joyce. I don't think I met her. Maybe she did come to Chicago with the FBI. I can't remember. I wouldn't say for sure. I never went down – I never met her down there. But she was courageous to do what she did, you know, to – her and Mrs. Bryant living in the same town. So, that was quite a – you know, I had some questions about that, you know, because you're human – you're dealing with human beings, you know. You're doing this here, and – you know. What's going to happen? Uh, people are crazy. Some people's minds are not wrapped tight, [laughs] so. So, I had some concerns about her, but anyway, uh, she did a great job. I think she did.

JM: Yeah. Did you, um – did you have a – you were down in Mississippi recently, as we started our conversation a while back, at the Freedom Trail, inaugural plaque ceremony at the Bryant Store. And, um, are you able to find any sense of, um – well, let me ask the question this way: What meaning do you find in all of this all these years later?

WP: I probably find more meaning in terms of history, telling history. And – I was always like a little history buff, and this, it means more to me to see the children benefit from the history part of it than for me personally, you know. I do it because – I went – they let me know they didn't have enough money, and I said I could pay my own way, you know, because I wanted the history to get out there. So, I'm doing it from that perspective of – met down there with some kids from Dominican High School and a good friend of mine, Mike Small, over there – he was a pallbearer at Mrs. Till's funeral. He was the only white pallbearer there was there. So, I feel good that I'm able to contribute.

I don't let nobody try to make me a hero or something great, because all I did was survive, scared as I could be. I'm no hero. I just survived to tell the story. You know, so, that's my take on it. I don't take – I don't try to get any miles out of it for myself. I didn't do nothing. If I could have disappeared, I'd have disappeared. I wouldn't have been there, period, you know, so. And it means a lot. People are very appreciative when I come and talk, be an eyewitness. I guess I've just learned how much it means to them, you know, because you tell it over and over and you've survived it, and it's something that happened that you wish hadn't happened, and it was a tragic event. But people want to hear the story, and they want to hear the truth, especially children, more so than adults. Adults, they've got to – they're set in their ways and they have their own ideas [laughs] about things. So, that means a lot to me.

JM: Yeah. John, let's pause for just a sec.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay. Go ahead.

JM: Reverend Parker, let me ask, um, as we come here to kind of the conclusion of our conversation today, let me ask you a little bit about, um, the – some efforts in Mississippi, here in

more recent years, to memorialize Emmett Till. We talked about the Freedom Trail and that marker. They also, um – they also designated a stretch of highway as the Emmett Till Memorial Highway, and, um, I don't know if you know kind of the story on that coming to pass and your perspective on that and – [1:00:00]

WP: Yeah, I think, uh – I think Senator [David] Jordan had something to do with, uh, presenting that to the body, and, uh, I was there at the ceremony, just passed it a few days ago. I said, “That sign used to be – I thought the sign was taller.” They said, “It's been torn down a lot of times.” Not surprised. Uh, like I say, you can't legislate the heart. Some people die hard – they die hard – they're die-hards. Um, it's a stretch of highway and it's good for history.

Not only there – they have a marker – this is going away from the highway – uh, the Tallahatchie County, I don't know if you know about them. They, um, are very much interested in the Emmett Till story. A lot of things happened there, and they have a marker at the spot at the river where his body was pulled out. They have a marker by the funeral home that had his body. They have a marker at the courthouse in Sumner. They're trying to restore that to its original, uh, order. And they have a marker by the barn, the place where they, uh, actually tormented Emmett. Uh, these are things that are, you know, good for history. And, uh, to be able to, uh, go by and identify with it – it means a lot to, especially, history-concerned people. So, the highway and all of those things has its place, and some people use it and take advantage, and some really don't like it, you know. They just really don't like it.

JM: Those efforts, insofar as they've happened, in the cases we've just described – those efforts seem to you well-meaning and sincere, or are the motives more complicated than that?

WP: I think they are – the people who live there have a lot of – a lot of, I think, fire trying to right wrongs. But you can only go so far, you know. And I appreciate what they're

doing and, uh, I think sometimes they become frustrated because, again, they want to change people's heart. Those kinds of things don't change hearts. Believe me, they do not. And they never will. But it's good for history. Let it do what it's supposed to do, you know.

And I hope they don't get just discouraged because you do all of this, and this is 2011 – say, “This day and time,” yeah, this day and time. And the Bible says, “Evil men that seduce us will wax worse and worse.” There's a revival in this country on racism. [Laughs] I mean we're regressing fast, you know. But it was there all the time. It was there all the time, so I just hope they don't get too – uh, become too wrapped up in it, in the sense that they expect more than what they're going to get. Know where – know where you're at; know what you're doing. Keep doing it. Changes have been made and change is going to be made. It's going to go slow. And, uh, just hope to God he'll touch people's hearts.

JM: One last question. Um, [clears throat] at times you speak to children, schoolchildren and other younger people, about all of this history. Um, do you find that you can communicate successfully to them the true nature of all of what that history was back then, the nature of Mississippi society then, the – are they able to get a hold of all of that?

WP: They're much more, uh, receptive to it than the older – the older you get, the less receptive you are to it, from my experience of talking with people. I was just at the University of Missouri in, uh, Columbia, Missouri, about three weeks ago, and in the college level, you find less receptiveness [laughs] than you would at eighth grade, you know, the eighth-grader level.

And, uh, one thing I point out to both them and blacks, I say, “The progress and the success that black people made, there was always somebody white there to fight – start the cause. Otherwise, we would not be here.” I say, “Abraham Lincoln got a lot of criticism the way he tried to handle the race situation. Once he sent five hundred African Americans to Haiti, and he

had to go get them because they were starving. So, what he did for the time was very noble and courageous.” President Kennedy – President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Bill. Then I start them to thinking, and the progress we made in all areas, [1:05:00] the fire was in some white person’s belly to stand up. The Civil Rights – the Freedom Riders, what made it really successful is when the whites came down and joined in. And the white guy said, “I knew I was going to be more targeted than the blacks, because they’re going to hate me for coming to get with them.”

So, I tell them, I say, “Look, you guys are going to be senators or whatever you are.” I say, “You can make the difference. Do what’s right.” One white kid told me once – I said, “Well,” he said, “I’m going to do what’s right. I’m going to stand up.” I said, “You’re not going to be liked. If you stand too strong, you’re not going to be liked.”

And then, I want the blacks to appreciate how God touched hearts and how a lot of this came about. You didn’t fight your way to this, not with guns – that’s why King was so bitterly against violence, because you’re going to be – you’re going to be slaughtered, you know. So, you have to realize that you’ve got to work together. Together we stand and divided we fall.

JM: It all seems still very much, um – very much with us in a very present sense, Emmett Till’s case. It doesn’t seem – it’s hard to imagine, even, somehow that it’s fifty-six years ago and a few months.

WP: Um-hmm.

JM: Yeah.

WP: Because there’s so much revival, there’s so much just being done. He got killed fifty-some years ago, but all these changes are just coming about. And they’re still in the making, you know. You still hear Emmett speaking. For so many years it lay – it just lay

dormant. There was nothing. You know, you'd hear about it here and there, and – I tell people, to me, it was like the stuff I'd see, he got what he deserved, you know. And all of a sudden, all of these changes came about. I mean, people were interested, people are – there's so much being done, you know, and, uh, especially among the young people. The young people are going to have to make the changes. The old people ain't trying to change. Yeah, they ain't trying to change.

JM: Thank you, Reverend.

WP: For the most part.

JM: Yeah, yeah. It's been a real honor and pleasure to be with you. Thank you.

WP: Um-hmm. The pleasure is mine.

[Recording ends at 1:07:09]

END OF INTERVIEW