

Paul Ortiz: Mr. Johnson, when we spoke the first time you talked to me about your job at Louisville National Railroad, and mentioned that there was discrimination at that place.

Colonel Johnson: Oh yeah.

Paul Ortiz: Can you tell me a little bit about the job structure and what kind of discrimination existed there?

Colonel Johnson: Well, they had certain jobs that you got on them and you stayed. White would come along, you'd teach them the job. And then promotion time come, they would get promoted. And you been doing the teaching, you wouldn't get no promotion, until after Dr. King and Sherwood come along and we had a few cases. That's when we was getting promotion, but before then, uh-uh.

Paul Ortiz: Wow. Now you mentioned that there was a union there also?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah. But in my department, they didn't accept Blacks in the union up until we put in the complaint. After we put in a complaint, then they sent a man down to organize Black. But it still wasn't full fledged. Instead of being a full-fledged union member, you was in the auxiliary, which would kind of be like a stepchild.

Paul Ortiz: What was the name of that union?

Colonel Johnson: Brotherhood Railway Clerk. It's a different union now. You know what I'm saying? It's different. They don't go for discrimination anymore. They got a lot of benefits for everybody now. But they didn't back yesteryears.

Paul Ortiz: And do you remember what year that they started organizing Black workers? Was it after '63?

Colonel Johnson: No, it was in the 40s.

Paul Ortiz: It was in the 40s.

Colonel Johnson: Mm-hmm.

Paul Ortiz: Okay. Now, when you would get off of work and you had some spare time, say to do shopping or going out to eat or something like that, where would you go?

Colonel Johnson: Well, we had some nice Black restaurants. The most exclusive restaurant was Bob's Boy, fellow wanted to get a good steak you went to Bob's Boy. This guy, I think his name was William or

something, or Robert Williams, but they called him Bob. He runs the Boy restaurant. They had lounge and everything. You get anything from a Coca-Cola on up to gin or rum or you name it, any kind of mixed drink. But they had good food. They specialized in steak dinners. By being segregated like it was, the police just hung out there. They was White policemen. They hung out there and they eat free.

Paul Ortiz: Robert Williams was Black?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah, yeah. Robert Williams was a Black man. They took advantage of him, because it was hard to get liquor license like that. And police would go there, they would eat and they would pay for nothing.

Paul Ortiz: Ah. Were there other places on Fourth Avenue?

Colonel Johnson: Well, you had had Nasa's Cafe. I'm giving you the top places right now, but the only places I would go to somewhere. I didn't go to no greasy spoons, they call them.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, you didn't like the greasy spoons?

Colonel Johnson: No. He had a high class restaurant was Nasa's Cafe. And then you had one they called Fraternal Restaurant.

Paul Ortiz: Was that in the Mason's building?

Colonel Johnson: No, it was in the Pythians— in the Fraternal building, the Pythians owned it.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, okay.

Colonel Johnson: It was in the seven—sixteen hundred block of Fourth Avenue. They just tore it down last year. You can't see it from here, but it would be behind that building there.

Paul Ortiz: Okay.

Colonel Johnson: It was owned by Mrs. Eva Lou Russell. I guess she retired eight or ten years ago. You had a nice middle class eating shop. Folk wanted soul food they went to Jambos.

Paul Ortiz: And that was also on Fourth Avenue?

Colonel Johnson: It was right across the street then crossing sixteenth Street. It used to be a big building there where that parking lot is.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, okay.

Colonel Johnson: That was Jambos, and he specialized in soul food.

Paul Ortiz: Now you mentioned there were greasy spoon places, too. I don't suppose you remember the name of any of those places?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah. You had the famous restaurant right next to the famous theater and you had the Champion Theater and then you had the Champion Restaurant right next door. And down in the next block you had Idea Cafe. Now the Idea cafe was owned by a White, but Black and White ate there. They had one side for Black, one side for White.

Paul Ortiz: Did you ever go into that cafe?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah, when I was working for the packing company before I went to railroad shop, when my money wasn't as good as it was at the railroad I ate where the food was cheaper.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, it was cheaper there at the Idea Cafe?

Colonel Johnson: Mm-hmm.

Paul Ortiz: Yeah, because I was just thinking that since there were Black-owned businesses where you could sit down anywhere, then here's the Idea Cafe, it's segregated.

Colonel Johnson: Right.

Paul Ortiz: Would people tend to shy away from the Idea Cafe or it doesn't make any difference?

Colonel Johnson: The food was cheap and money was scarce. A lot of White come there because the food was cheap. It was a different side. In other words, they had partition between the Black and White in the restaurant. They had a lot of restaurant, but around town there was partition. And then they had some restaurants, Blacks had to go to the back and get, I call them a handout, but I didn't go there.

Paul Ortiz: Why not?

Colonel Johnson: Because if I wasn't welcome in the front door, I wasn't welcome period. In other words, if a man make his dollar half cent, he don't spend it where it don't seem like he's welcome.

Paul Ortiz: Okay. Was that kind of a militant stand at that time? Did other Black people take that kind of stand? Now this is in the 30s, right?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah. It's a few, a lot of folks went to a lot of places because they had good food and they would go to the back. They had a Chinese restaurant on Third Avenue. They didn't serve Blacks, you couldn't go in there and sit down and eat, but you could go to the back door through the alley and get a

meal. But you had to—it was carry out. I used to know the name of it. One of them was Joy Young. They moved out of Birmingham in Homewood. They're still over there. I guess some of the young folks got it. But it was nice for who they wanted to go. The Alabama Theater, Blacks could go there on up in the 50s, but you had to go around on the side. I figure if I couldn't go to the front, I didn't go.

Paul Ortiz: Did you talk to friends about this issue back then about whether you go to a place that's [indistinct 00:09:24]?

Colonel Johnson: Oh yeah. I can remember. Not just Birmingham. I've been to places working for undertakers, funeral home parlor they call. And funeral, go out in the country in little town, south and west Alabama. You want something to eat, you had a hole in the wall. You go there and you pay for it and they stick it out the window. But I'd rather wait until I got back home.

Paul Ortiz: Wow. What would you do when you would travel back in those days, like if you were visiting relatives?

Colonel Johnson: Well, a fellow just had to be careful because you couldn't go to a restroom, not even at the service stations. There's a rare few. Most are White service station, you couldn't go to the restroom. Three or four cars going the same direction, stopping to buy gas at one station and then they tell you, "We don't have no restroom for colored folks." So you'd have to stop on the road and go out in the woods. And then if you happen to didn't go far enough out in the woods, they'll arrest you for exposing yourself to the public. That's how segregation went back in those days. I seen Black go in a store and folk wouldn't sell them a Coca-Cola. You could buy RC Cola, Pepsi Cola, but Coca-Cola was something—and it was ignorant folk didn't know no better. Even the White, they didn't know no better. They wanted the money, but they said, "This drink for White folk, Coca-Colas."

Paul Ortiz: Why was that? You could buy RC but not Coke?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah.

Paul Ortiz: Why was that?

Colonel Johnson: Just custom. In other words, they thought it was right, but it wasn't. See when a person's ignorant to the fact a lot of folks lost money because they was going along with the system. That's the system.

Paul Ortiz: Do you remember any guidebooks that people could use, that Black people could use, back then to help them when they traveled?

Colonel Johnson: No.

Paul Ortiz: To help them stay away from places that might be very racist?

Colonel Johnson: No, but you could see signs. I've seen signs in Philly stations out on Highway seven, eight before we get in the house in Alabama. Not what somebody told me. I seen it with my own eyes. "We sell gas to White people only." So if you're out of gas, you couldn't get no gas there.

Paul Ortiz: Did you know people in the 40s and 50s who lived in Ensley?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah, I had an uncle who lived in Ensley. I used to walk from Birmingham to Ensley to Bar Hill [indistinct 00:12:46]. Drive on Sunday.

Paul Ortiz: What kind of neighborhood was Ensley?

Colonel Johnson: Ensley like back here. A lot like Birmingham. Other words, Ensley was a part of Birmingham. They had a little police station out there. It was on about Seventeenth Street and Avenue G. And the building's still there, and the city of Birmingham still owns it. Black guy got a carpenter shop there.

Paul Ortiz: Was Ensley a neighborhood that Black people would move into to buy a house?

Colonel Johnson: Well, yeah, Black and White. Other words, that was where the steel mill was. All kind of folk lived out there. Immigrants, Polish people, they call them Polack. Australian, Black, Italian, you name it. A person wanted a job, wasn't a lot of positions like it is now because it didn't have all this new technology. You'd be surprised how many folks was working. I mean, really hard work, manual work, pouring iron, and cutting sand and stuff like that. And that was really hard jobs. But you still had places for poor folk were down on the low end of the totem pole, but you didn't see a lot of folk around that wasn't working like you do now. Houses was built to accommodate poor folks. They built houses. They keep your mind thinking low. You could get a cheap house, a little shotgun house, five dollars a month rent.

Paul Ortiz: In Ensley?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah, and some place in Birmingham too. In certain places—now I have never seen any houses in the alley in Ensley around Birmingham on South side and North side, they had houses all in the alleys.

Paul Ortiz: For Black people?

Colonel Johnson: For Black. They was built for Black. And they was built to keep your mind low, where you wouldn't think you needed anymore than what you had. And they had neighborhoods for White. Even in Ensley, we got Highland. Didn't no Black live on end of Highland. White people lived there, and they had a lot of home houses around Highland. Got a little place between Birmingham and then they called Midway. And there was a doctor stayed in there. When Blacks come through there walking, sometime he shoot at them. I used to know his name. I forgot it now. But he done that so long he thought he was right. When his mind finally blanked out on him, when the police went out to arrest him after things got better, he still tried

to do it. And the house, they be still out there. Last time I was out that ways on Pike Road and Bush Boulevard. Excuse me.

Paul Ortiz: Do you remember a place called Dynamite Hill?

Colonel Johnson: Oh yeah.

Paul Ortiz: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Colonel Johnson: Well, on top of the hill, White folk lived up there. And down about Tenth Avenue Black lived from Tenth Avenue back. And Center Street go right over Dynamite Hill, down between Eighth and Tenth Avenue where the best Black houses was in Birmingham. The cream of the crop, they called it Smithfield. But on up on the hill there was White, and they had a lot of vacant land and let the trees grow up between the Blacks and the White. And finally, end of '59 and 60s Blacks went to buying up there. One young man had nine or ten lots up there, Black guy, his name was Forrest Hawkins. He bought nine or ten houses and lots and put houses on them. And all those, if they didn't bomb White folks set them on fire to clear the clutter.

Paul Ortiz: All ten?

Colonel Johnson: Every one of them. I'm thinking that's what encouraged him to leave Birmingham. He owned Deluxe Cab Company. He was doing good. He was the first Black cab company, and maybe been the first cab company that had radio dispatched cabs. I know he was the first Black and he might have been the first cab company, and he was a young fella. Him and his brother and daddy had a standard service station down in Smithfield out on Eighth Avenue between Fifth and Sixth Street North. They had a service station.

Colonel Johnson: He really progressed in life because I know when he was a paper boy carrying the Birmingham News. When he come out of school, his daddy had an old Whippet. They don't make that kind of automobile. Nash company made them. Oh, it was a Nash, Whippet Nash. They would throw papers out that car. They was making a good living doing it. But that car would be just packed with papers. His daddy would be driving, he would be throwing the papers out. And the next thing I know he went in the taxi business and bought him a couple of taxis. He drove one, his daddy drove one. And next he got another one. His brother drove one. From there they went to ten or twelve and on up. I don't know how many they had in all, but he really just went on up in life. And the name of the cab company with Deluxe Cab Company.

Paul Ortiz: Deluxe Cab Company?

Colonel Johnson: Mm-hmm.

Paul Ortiz: Now the last time that we talked, you told me about Bethel Baptist Church.

Colonel Johnson: Yeah.

Paul Ortiz: And about Reverend Shuttlesworth.

Colonel Johnson: Mm-hmm.

Paul Ortiz: And you mentioned that for a time you couldn't get into Sixteenth Street Baptist Church before—

Colonel Johnson: Right.

Paul Ortiz: Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

Colonel Johnson: Well see, Sherwood Pastor Bethel Baptist Church, that would be your headquarters. They had the movement there more than they did anywhere else.

Paul Ortiz: Okay.

Colonel Johnson: And your next headquarter church was—other words, it wasn't the headquarter, but the next liberal church was St. James Baptist, Eleventh Street and Sixth Avenue, four blocks down the street.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, okay.

Colonel Johnson: Right across from [indistinct 00:21:02] Hotel.

Paul Ortiz: Okay.

Colonel Johnson: And the next church was Thurgood C.M.E.

Paul Ortiz: Thurgood C.M.E.

Colonel Johnson: Methodist.

Paul Ortiz: Okay.

Colonel Johnson: And you had Sardis on [indistinct 00:21:22] Ridge. That's where the movement was organized, at Sardis.

Paul Ortiz: Now you didn't mention Sixteenth Street Baptist.

Colonel Johnson: Well, it hadn't come in.

Paul Ortiz: Oh.

Colonel Johnson: You had New Pilgrim. And every Monday night they would meet from one church to other one. Sixteenth Street come in there behind those churches. Sixteenth Street, Grant Chapel, Zion Star, Boys Baptist, Zion City, that's out in East Lake on east side of town. Then you had churches like—boy, I can't think of this church. Boys Baptist of Ensley. And there's another church in Ensley. I can think of the preacher's name, but I can't think of the church. The preacher was named LR Jackson. They made it a practice. They informed all the folks in town they'd have a meeting every Monday night. It'd be in a different section of town. And then when they started meeting at 16th Street under the Reverend Luke Bid. He was very aggressive, very intelligent. He mixed right in with the other preachers, civil right preachers. And then he got sick and he died. And then John Cross come to 16th Street, and that's where the bombing was under John Cross.

Paul Ortiz: Okay. And now the first group of churches that you named, these churches were like the trailblazers.

Colonel Johnson: Yeah.

Paul Ortiz: Bethel Baptist, St. James, Thurgood CME.

Colonel Johnson: Right.

Paul Ortiz: I'm curious though. I had heard before that 16th Street was one of the first churches. Basically you're saying that 16th Street came behind these other churches.

Colonel Johnson: It had to be behind Sherwood. Sherwoods Church, Sadas where they organized it. Reverend Oriel Afford was the pastor. Sherwood was Bethel. You couldn't go to Bethel on the south side. See a lot of Black churches wouldn't accept the meeting because those that weren't afraid of being bombed or intimidated, they're afraid they would get fired off the job. They use that for a reprisal against Blacks. If they caught you out working in the movement, you didn't have no job.

Paul Ortiz: I see. Was there any difference in the kinds of people that went to Bethel Baptist as say the kind of people that went to 16th Street Baptist Church in terms of maybe professions?

Colonel Johnson: Well, it was a few. But this church, he had a lot of professional folks.

Paul Ortiz: On the 16th Street?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah. And Bethal Baptist, most of the folks worked at US Pipe, railroad companies and medical radiator, Birmingham Stone Range, places like that. Bethal Baptist all mostly working class folks. You might have had maybe two or three school teachers, but over here you probably had three or four dozen.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, at 16 street?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah. A lot of principals, doctors, lawyers, you name it.

Paul Ortiz: After the bombing was 16th Street under Reverend Cross able to maintain the energy?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah. The bombing was under Cross. Cross was passed. Then when the bombing was and afterwards. Then after things cooled off, I don't know what happened to Cross. He went to Atlanta. But he comes over here when they have something big, they invite him.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, okay.

Colonel Johnson: And then they had Crutcher, James Crutcher, behind Cross. And behind Crutcher, the man over there now Hamlin, Chris William Hamlin.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, I have one more question. Was Bethel Baptist downtown or was it-

Colonel Johnson: No, it was out in Birmingham.

Paul Ortiz: North Birmingham?

Colonel Johnson: North Birmingham. 29, 32— Wait a minute. Hold a minute. 32, 29. 29th Avenue.

Paul Ortiz: Is that where Reverend Battle is?

Colonel Johnson: Sherwood. That's where Battle is now.

Paul Ortiz: Yeah. Okay.

Colonel Johnson: Battle is the system pastor. Battle had never pastored the church. He had been preaching a long time, but his sister pastor. The guy that pastored the church to now, that Battle works under, he's a young fella. I can't call his name, but Battle's not the pastor.

Paul Ortiz: I think that we were going to do an interview with him.

Colonel Johnson: With Battle?

Paul Ortiz: Yeah. Who else do you think would be good to talk with from Bethel that's human rights?

Colonel Johnson: Well, you see, everybody won't give your church a fair shake. You want a true story, now I got a man I know been out there a long time, but— Cut that off a minute. Some things you don't really— You know what I'm saying?

Paul Ortiz: Right.

Colonel Johnson: It just don't look right or sound right. This young man that really know the story about Beth Baptist Church is Reuben Davis, Commissioner Reuben Davis. He took a lot of pictures of the church when it was bombed and everything.

Paul Ortiz: Bethel?

Colonel Johnson: Bethel. Bethel was bombed at least three times that I can witness. Somebody says four times. I don't remember but three. Be as it may, it may be four times. Sometimes something you can forget.

Paul Ortiz: Do you know his number out there?

Colonel Johnson: His phone number? No. But you got a phone book, I can give it to you. His name's Reuben Davis. R-E-U-B-E-N. He lived way out now because after he got in the chips he bought him a mansion. He's the superintendent of Sunday School. His daddy was the superintendent of Sunday School for 50 years there. He come in under his daddy.

Paul Ortiz: Okay. Well, Mr. Johnson, I have one more question that I wanted to ask you.

Colonel Johnson: No problem.

Paul Ortiz: I've heard people from different churches, who were members of different churches in the '40s and '50, talk about voting rights and seminars before the founding of the Alabama Christian for Human Rights. Can you tell me a little bit about those voting rights seminars and where they would take place?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah. Other words, they had places, like they had voting rights seminars at 16th Street Church. They had them at the Masonic Temple. Not most all, but a lot of Black churches had voting rights seminars where the folks was aggressive enough to take on the responsibility. You see, you had so much odds against you after Bull Connor come in 1937. If somebody come in to teach you how to vote, they put him in jail. Senator Taylor from Utah, a United State Senator, come here to speak. And the little wooden church is a vacant corner on past 16th Street is a little wooden building. They put everybody in jail in there.

Colonel Johnson: I can remember just like it was yesterday. I lived full blocks down the street. Me and my wife were walking to town on Sunday evening and they had been advertising it, put fliers out. You're going to always have pimps. Somebody told Bull Connor about it. This guy was coming. He called it a mixed gathering. This one White man is going lecture to some Blacks. Senator Taylor is his name. I'm trying to think of his first name. He had been a movie star and he run for Senator and they got it just like that. He was going talk to those folk and learning them how they vote and all, and they didn't want Black to vote. So Bull Connor had the police there to put him in jail, and everybody else in the church.

Paul Ortiz: And which church? That was—

Colonel Johnson: That was a little offspring. I don't even remember the name of it. It wasn't a Baptist, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, Apostolic church. It was just some little way out name. I don't really remember, but it was a church. Oh boy, that guy was a cowboy actor. I remembered the name for years, but I really can't call it now.

Paul Ortiz: Did that incident happen in the '40s?

Colonel Johnson: No, that was in the '50s.

Paul Ortiz: In the '50s?

Colonel Johnson: Mm-hmm.

Paul Ortiz: When did the-

Colonel Johnson: And it could have been in the '40s now, but it had to be way up in the '40s, because I had married. I married in 1942 and lived right down the street there, four blocks.

Paul Ortiz: So when did the other voting rights seminars begin happening to your remembrance?

Colonel Johnson: Oh.

Paul Ortiz: Did they go back a ways?

Colonel Johnson: The NAACP always did have voting rights seminars back. I can remember hearing about them in the '30s. But now they really had them after— Oh, when Miss Geneva Lee was the executive secretary of the NAACP.

Paul Ortiz: Miss Gene-

Colonel Johnson: Geneva.

Paul Ortiz: Geneva.

Colonel Johnson: G-E-N-E-V-A.

Paul Ortiz: Okay. And what was her last name?

Colonel Johnson: Lee. L-E-E.

Paul Ortiz: Okay.

Colonel Johnson: Now she was a really aggressive business woman. Once they had a post office down in Smithfield in the Black community across from Parker High School. She had a lot of seminars, but it was through the NAACP. I don't remember who the president back in the old days was, but I know she was the executive secretary. That's who you paid your money to get your membership from.

Paul Ortiz: Okay. Okay. Did you notice in the '50s an increase in political activity by Black people?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah. It's a Black Democratic club they had, and I think they're still going on. But at that time, lawyer shows, AD shows. Lawyer David Hood was the head of it. David Hood lived in Bethlehem, that's 12 miles from Birmingham. But they was the head of it. And then come along behind them was Arthur Billingsley. Sure he's still living, David Hood. Sherwood up in his 80s, but he's still living.

Paul Ortiz: Okay. So you mentioned that there was the NAACP under Miss Lee, who was more aggressive. The Black Democratic Club came to being. Were there other kinds of grassroots organizations early [indistinct 00:35:58] the ground root groups?

Colonel Johnson: No, NAACP was really the thing. And this Democratic— I know the name was Charles Pilsen is the head of it, not Charlie Pilsen, is the head of it at the present time.

Paul Ortiz: How about World War II? Do you think that World War II had-

Colonel Johnson: I didn't understand.

Paul Ortiz: Did you think that World War II had an impact on political activism and Black people?

Colonel Johnson: Little bit. Little bit.

Paul Ortiz: Little bit?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah. You see, your laws already out there, it take somebody to implement them. When Reuben Davis went to the Army, the same guy I was telling you a member of the church. He worked for the railroad just like I did. And when it wasn't promote Blacks, you had a law, federal labor law. Any time you'd be drafted and go to the Army, wherever you was working that they're supposed to have your job reserved. Any promotion was due you, the law said they must promote you. And there wasn't no color line or nothing, just person. And Reuben Davis made them implement that law. And from then on, he was a [indistinct 00:37:36] guy until they fired him.

Paul Ortiz: Who fired him?

Colonel Johnson: The company.

Paul Ortiz: The company?

Colonel Johnson: But see now, I wouldn't brand it the company. It's the folks they had hired, the White people they had hired, the segregationist. See, that's what makes your law. When you put a fellow over your company, if he's not fair, then the law go to where he wanted to go. Most all companies, if a person's fair that owns it, he means for the law to be administrated like it's supposed to be. But he put somebody else over it, and then they turn and go the other way, you couldn't put it all on the company because a whole lot of time the man owned the company don't know what's going on.

Paul Ortiz: Right.

Colonel Johnson: And you'd be surprised. These big companies, big companies, a lot of folks they have that they furnish the money, but they don't know exactly what go on. And until a fellow riding up with somebody— I'm trying to think of what they call it. They blow the whistle.

Paul Ortiz: Ah, whistleblower? Yeah.

Colonel Johnson: Yeah, whistleblower. Until the whistleblower blow his whistle, then the folk don't know what's going on. You'd be surprised. Take when the United State Marshall come here in the '63s, they had seen how they been sicking the dogs on Black folks. He was more afraid than we were. I picked him up at the airport. But when people got a ego— Now when he came here, I didn't even get a chance to shake his hand. But all these big folks was asked to meet him wouldn't meet him. They was afraid. But I went out to the airport and got him.

Paul Ortiz: You were working in the SCLC?

Colonel Johnson: That was Alabama Christian Movement.

Paul Ortiz: Okay. You were working there?

Colonel Johnson: Other words, just like I volunteer here, I volunteered to watch Sherwood house. I was one of the guards at that time. I was doing free security work for the cause. I had a couple of fellas go with me. And the Assistant United State Attorney General, I'm trying to think of his name, he come right over here to this church. I sit right on the front seat. A lot of those fellas were afraid to even go look. Wouldn't even come in the church when you're having a meeting. But they were the one that greeted him. They were the one sitting on the roster and asked some questions. But that's immaterial with me. I don't have no ego. What I do, I do it for the cause.

Paul Ortiz: One last question.

Colonel Johnson: The guy was named Burt Marshall.

Paul Ortiz: Burt Marshall.

Colonel Johnson: He was Assistant United State Attorney General. And another guy was with him. I don't remember his name. Robert Kennedy sent him here.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, okay.

Colonel Johnson: To see what was really going on. They could see on the TV, but they wanted for his hand. They sent you guys here.

Paul Ortiz: And you picked him up?

Colonel Johnson: Yeah.

Paul Ortiz: Okay. Do you remember the Double V campaign?

Colonel Johnson: Double V?

Paul Ortiz: Okay. It was something— That's immaterial.

Colonel Johnson: No, that's one on me. Tell me about it.

Paul Ortiz: Well, that was a campaign that was during World War II. Stood for Victory Abroad, Victory at Home. And it was something that was talked about in Black newspapers. I was just curious if people remembered about it, if it had an impact?

Colonel Johnson: Maybe I forgot about it. I probably heard of it, because I always did try to be around where the voter registration was going on.

Paul Ortiz: That's okay. If you didn't hear about it then it probably wasn't that important. I think that's about all the questions that I had for you today. I know that you have a-

Colonel Johnson: Oh, I can give you about three more minutes.

Paul Ortiz: That's okay. Mr. Johnson, now you were a volunteer for the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Can you tell me a little bit about what that meant? What kinds of activities that you did there?

Colonel Johnson: Well, other words, we watched the churches keep them being bombing. See, they sent forth rounds to bomb a church. That was one reason a lot of churches you couldn't go to, because they was afraid they'd get bombed. And a lot of people didn't realize the church belonged to the community.

Paul Ortiz: And what did you see as a volunteer? What were your day to day activities?

Colonel Johnson: Well, number one, you would see what was going on and report it when you have a meeting. If it was necessary, you would report it. Then you're going to church and let the leaders know what was going on. The city of Birmingham, the folk in the office, they'd send the fire department to the church. Five or six fire wagons would come and the chief inspector would come and say the church is too crowded. Disturb your meeting. You can't sit in the aisle. You can't stand in the aisle. You couldn't stand around the wall. Then they'd go off, and folk come right back in. But they would do that to intimidate you. Put fright in a lot of folks' hearts.

Paul Ortiz: So what would you do? Would you try to alert the church that they were coming?

Colonel Johnson: Well, when you see them pull up out there, you just go in and let Sherwood, or whoever was the moderator, know that they was out there. And then they would tell the folks to be calm. Sometimes they'd tell them, say, "All y'all what's in the aisle, just go right out the side door." When they got in, there wasn't nobody in the aisle. Yeah, you'd be surprised. The police is our biggest enemy in this town. Police. It's like you been in a meeting in here, and the meeting turn out, and it's 9:00 on Monday night. You go to get in your car and the police go to write you a ticket. You say, "What did I do?" They say, "Your lights too damn bright." Give you a ticket for your lights being too bright, and you had to pay it. I mean, you hadn't cranked up or nothing, hadn't put the lights on. But anything they were charged with, everybody was cooperating that was in office. You had a judge named Judge Oliver Hall. He was tough.

Paul Ortiz: How would you do publicity to get people to come to the meetings?

Colonel Johnson: Well, you put out leaflets.

Paul Ortiz: Who would put out the leaflets?

Colonel Johnson: Anybody that was around. Well, we'd done some of that. There was that long [indistinct 00:45:24] security folks that we had a lot of fellows. Most fellow was union folks from different unions, different organizations. They would come in. This room wouldn't hold the security folk we had. The head of the Washington security was named George Walker, and he was a mine union executive. And you had a fellow was vice president named Will Hall. They called him John L. Lewis because he's the president of a minors union. And all those fellas would come. When they go to their union meeting, they would ask a volunteer. That's where we got our security there.

Paul Ortiz: Oh, okay.

Colonel Johnson: See, most people just ordinary folk member church was afraid. They watch their own church. But see, when your fella been in the union, been organized-