



Interview with Mandie Moore Johnson

August 4, 1995

Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
Greenwood (Miss.)

Interviewer: Doris Dixon

ID: btvct03030

Interview Number: 474

SUGGESTED CITATION

Interview with Mandie Moore Johnson (btvct03030), interviewed by Doris Dixon, Greenwood (Miss.), August 4, 1995, Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South Digital Collection, John Hope Franklin Research Center, Duke University Libraries.

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ORIGINAL PROJECT

Center for Documentary Studies at Duke
University (1993-1995)

COLLECTION LOCATION & RESEARCH ASSISTANCE

John Hope Franklin Research Center for African and African
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Center For Documentary Studies At Duke University
Behind The Veil: Documenting African American Life In The Jim Crow South

Interview With
Mandie Moore Johnson

Greenwood, Mississippi
August 4, 1995

Interviewed by
Doris Dixon

Unedited Transcript by

1. **Johnson:** Oh, my mother and father.
2. **Dixon:** Yeah.
3. **Johnson:** They had to work. Get up about sun up about six o'clock and go to the field.
They'd done be cooked breakfast and go to the field and they had bells that rang then at that time. Rang you in and rang you out. And they worked until six at night 'fore they come in. Then come in and they had to feed hogs and milk cows and feed the horses and cook supper.
4. **Dixon:** What was your birthday, Mrs. Johnson?
5. **Johnson:** My birthday? 1913. The 30th of August. My birthday is next month. I'll be 81 years old.
6. **Dixon:** This month is August, Miss Mandie. This is August. Today is August 4.
7. **Johnson:** I know it. I said last, next month. I was born in September.
8. **Dixon:** Oh, you said September 30.
9. **Johnson:** It shore is.
10. **Dixon:** September 30, 1913.
11. **Johnson:** Yes sir.
12. **Dixon:** Where were you born?

13. **Johnson:** In Holmes County.

14. **Dixon:** Cruger?

15. **Johnson:** Cruger!

16. **Dixon:** Okay. What is your early memories of growing up, did you grow up in Cruger?

17. **Johnson:** Did I grow up in?

18. **Dixon:** Did you grow up in Cruger? Were you a child in Cruger?

19. **Johnson:** Yes, 'mam. I was born in Cruger. On this Mon Archie plantation. Know where that at?

20. **Dixon:** No 'mam. What's the name again? Plantation called Mitchell's?

21. **Johnson:** 'Mam?

22. **Dixon:** What was the name of the plantation you said?

23. **Johnson:** Mon Archie. A. B. Archie. At Cruger. They know him.

24. **Dixon:** And your parents are sharecroppers?

25. **Johnson:** 'Mam?

26. **Dixon:** Did your parents sharecrop?

27. **Johnson:** Yes 'mam. They worked in the crop 32 years there and moved from Lexington.

That's before I was born, you know.

28. **Dixon:** You were born at where, in Lexington?

29. **Johnson:** No, I said they moved from Lexington to Cruger. That's the time I was born.

1913. The 30th of September.

30. **Dixon:** 'Mam, what sorts of things did you like to do when you were a little girl.

31. **Johnson:** 'Mam?

32. **Dixon:** What kind of things did you like to do, what kind of things did you like to do for fun? How did you have fun when you were a little girl?

33. **Johnson:** Well, I washed and ironed and cleaned up.

34. **Dixon:** And that was fun?

35. **Johnson:** Well, that was fun to me, cause we had to do that.

36. **Dixon:** Okay. Did you play games?

37. **Johnson:** No, I didn't have to play no games. Sure didn't.

38. **Dixon:** You never played any games.

39. **Johnson:** 'Mam?

40. **Dixon:** You never played any games.

41. **Johnson:** No 'mam. Never played no games.

42. **Dixon:** Why not?

43. **Johnson:** I just didn't like them.

44. **Dixon:** You liked to wash.

45. **Johnson:** Wash, iron, and cook, and clean up.

46. **Dixon:** You did that to help your mother.

47. **Johnson:** Yes, 'mam. My grandmother raised me. And I done that to help her out. I done it from about 12 years old. I wasn't 12, about 10 years old til I got 21. I married out.

48. **Dixon:** You married at 21?

49. **Johnson:** I married when I was 21 years old the 19th day of, of the 24th. Was December, 1938.

50. **Dixon:** You married in 1938.

51. **Johnson:** Yes 'mam. I was 21 years old.

52. **Dixon:** Mrs. Johnson, tell me about your grandmother please. Could you tell me about your grandmother?

53. **Johnson:** Oh, about how she tried to raise me.

54. **Dixon:** Yes 'mam.

55. **Johnson:** Yes 'mam. She tried to raise us. She didn't allow us to steal. Didn't allow us to lie. We had to tell the truth. When she asked us to do something, we had to do that. We couldn't talk back at them like us do now. We had to do what they asked us to do and I never did, see my grandmother drank nothing but coke cola and coffee. She was a Christian.

56. **Dixon:** What church did she belong to?

57. **Johnson:** Saint () Church in Cruger. That's where she belonged.

58. **Dixon:** Is that the church you went to?

59. **Johnson:** In Cruger?

60. **Dixon:** Uh huh.

61. **Johnson:** Yeah, then she went to Spring Valley Church. That's on Mr. Archer's plantation and before I was converted in. She was a member of Saint () Church about 30 some years.

62. **Dixon:** Then she went to Spring Valley.

63. **Johnson:** Yes sir. That's the church I was born, but she would visit both of them. Shore would. All them where she could visit.

64. **Dixon:** What did your grandmother look like?

65. **Johnson:** My grandmother looked like?

66. **Dixon:** Uh huh. What did she look like? Could you describe her to me?

67. **Johnson:** 'Mam?

68. **Dixon:** I said can you describe her to me. Can you tell me what she looked like.

69. **Johnson:** She looked alright. My grandmother. She was 76 when she died and that was in 1948. The 20th of October. That's the time she died. She was 76 years old then. My granddaddy, he was 104. He died the 19th day of September 1945.

70. **Dixon:** And he was 104?

71. **Johnson:** 'Mam?

72. **Dixon:** And he was 104?

73. **Johnson:** Yes 'mam. He was 104 when he died.

74. **Dixon:** What were your chores when you were a little girl? What did you have to do around the plantation?

75. **Johnson:** Plantation? Where I lived? Well, see, when I lived I was too young to work then, but 11 and 12 years old I was seeding cotton. Mama was chopping cotton and plowing, and pulling cotton, pulling (), loading cotton. Loading bales of cotton.

76. **Dixon:** Was that hard work?

77. **Johnson:** I did hard work every since I been big enough to do it, til I got blind and that's back here in '76. I lose my sight and then I couldn't do like I used to, but after I got blind I would wash and iron, and mop and do all that. Cook. Just like I always did do. Take my bath, comb my hair, wash my hair, put on my clothes, pull off my clothes, change clothes. Put on my clothes to go to church like I always did do.

78. **Dixon:** What happened in the different jobs you had. Tell me about your different jobs?

79. **Johnson:** The biggest jobs I had when I was working was cooking. They would want me to cook or whatever. I was a good cook.

80. **Dixon:** Was this on a plantation?

81. **Johnson:** Mam?

82. **Dixon:** Go ahead. I'm listening. I'm sorry.

83. **Johnson:** Keep the house, lawn and washed, and ironed.

84. **Dixon:** You were a housekeeper.

85. **Johnson:** Yes 'mam.

86. **Dixon:** For how many years.

87. **Johnson:** Oh, I can't tell you that. I worked a long time for different people, white people.

88. **Dixon:** Maybe 50, 60 years? In all?

89. **Johnson:** Yeah. Oh, a lot of that time. I worked for the white people all in Cruger. All that up here and across this river here.

90. **Dixon:** Across the Yazoo River?

91. **Johnson:** Yeah, the river. Greenwood. I worked for white people over there. Went on the other side too. Different white people. But everyone I worked for they wanted me to cook. They said I was a good cook, you see.

92. **Dixon:** How much did you get paid?

93. **Johnson:** 'Mam?

94. **Dixon:** How much would did you get paid? Say the first job you had. How much would you be paid?

95. **Johnson:** Well, wadn't get much then. Twenty some dollars a week back then. It wasn't much they were paying then when I was working like it is now. Just could live out of it if there was all you had to depend on. They wadn't paying that much. Sometimes \$17 a week. You know that wadn't nothing.

96. **Dixon:** You could hardly live out of it?

97. **Johnson:** Couldn't hardly live out of it.

98. **Dixon:** How did you make it?

99. **Johnson:** Well, you see when I was in the country like that I raised my stuff. The biggest I had to buy was sugar and coffee and like that. I didn't have to buy no meat and lard and meal and stuff like that. I raised peas and butter beans and okra and all that. I raised that. Sweet potatoes. Irish potatoes. Pop corn. I raised all that. Greens. Irish potatoes. I didn't never have to never buy nothing like that when I was in the country. Just had to buy some flour, and sugar, and rice, and coffee, salt and soda, and baking powder. I raised my hogs. I used to kill as much as eight hogs a winter. I'd get two 50-pound cans of lard and 2 25-pound cans of lard. That's enough lard to last me all the year.

100. **Dixon:** You bought coffee and lard.

101. **Johnson:** Yes, and sugar and rice back then. See I couldn't raise that, but I raised the other stuff. Shore did.

102. **Dixon:** You could make that last a long time.

103. **Johnson:** Oh yes, 'mam, cause see where they got dry like that that's what I supposed to been gathered up you see. I gathered it up for the winter. Like dried peas, peanuts, pop corn. See I gathered up all of that and sweet potatoes. Had that when winter time come. In my days they planted sorghum molasses, you know, and they would run, squeeze that juice out of them molasses, out of the cane and cook the molasses off. So we didn't have to buy no molasses. I done alright when I was a child because my grandmother and granddaddy raised me. I ain't never went through with no hard times. My mother died when I was 12. My daddy died when I was 8. I didn't never, you know, went through with no hard time. So my

granddaddy took care of us. He rented. Owned his mule and sold cotton for awhile. Shore did. I ain't never went through with no tough times in my young days.

104.**Dixon:** How about when you got older? Did you have tough times then?

105.**Johnson:** Well, I had a pretty tough time then because after I married I owned eight head of children to live and four dead. So I had kind of a tough time then, cause see, I had to work. I didn't have nobody to help me work for my eight head of children. My husband, he wouldn't help me. I've seen a harder time since I, but after I quit him I seen a good time. Yeah, I didn't suffer for nothing. I worked all the time and got my children up old enough to help me, you know, my boys. Had six boys and two girls. So they helped me.

106.**Dixon:** Were you still farming then?

107.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

108.**Dixon:** Were you still farming at this time?

109.**Johnson:** At that time? Yes 'mam.

110.**Dixon:** You quit your husband?

111.**Johnson:** Yeah, I had to quit him.

112.**Dixon:** What happened?

113.**Johnson:** He would sit up all night long and cuss and go on and see I was working. He wadn't working before he started drawing his check. So he wasn't working, you know. And

I was the one working and he just go across there in town there where the whiskey place was at. He drank whiskey and get drunk, you know. Sit up and cuss all night. I couldn't rest. Another thing, my nerves, you know, got bad. You can't put up with that and then got to work too. I had to work. Get up there at my house and cook breakfast. Clean up there and then go to the white folk house and cook. Clean up there. See what they had, you know, wanted me to do. Sometimes I had to cook three meals at their house. Breakfast, dinner and supper, and then come home and cook supper and that was hard on me. And I made it.

114.**Dixon:** They were hard on you?

115.**Johnson:** Yes 'mam. That was kind of tough. Then had to stay awoke all night with him, drunk. I just got tired of that. I just walked on out. Went to my brother's. Stayed with him awhile. Maurice. I left all the children with him.

116.**Dixon:** With your brother?

117.**Johnson:** No. With my husband. And the police come got me and told me to find me a house and take my kids. So I did. I moved down there in Sidon. He had done quit us. He quit first. Left the children naked and barefooted. And Mack Branch was down there Sidon. He the one helped me out. See, I didn't clear nothing. I come out \$235 behind, \$75. Picked out 22 bales and left one in the field. All of them went over 500. And come out just as much behind. I was staying with Miss Marie then and he sent me word, come up to the office. I went on up there and he told me what I had come out behind. I could borrow some money? I told him no. I wadn't going to borrow none. Wanted me to move down there to Sidon.

118.**Dixon:** When you were at McGrant's place when you quit your husband?

119.**Johnson:** Yeah 'mam. I was with him. He was gone.

120.**Dixon:** Oh, so your husband was gone by this time.

121.**Johnson:** Yeah 'mam. He was gone. Wadn't nobody in the home but me and my eight head of children.

122.**Dixon:** So you were all trying to make a crop by yourself.

123.**Johnson:** No. I moved to Sidon. I wouldn't make no crop then. But I was working by the day.

124.**Dixon:** So you worked at the white people's houses by the day.

125.**Johnson:** Yeah. Chopping cotton and picking cotton by the day. I cooked for Mrs. Branch awhile til cotton got up there. I went to the field with my children. I moved from down there in '60. I moved from Mr. Branch, Gayland then. I was helping him pick cotton. Me and my children.

126.**Dixon:** What was his name?

127.**Johnson:** Branch McGayland.

128.**Dixon:** And you left his place in '60?

129.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

130.**Dixon:** You left his place in '60?

131.**Johnson:** Yeah. In '60. I moved here in town. Down there on Avenue N in Greenwood.

Fall of '60. I left from his plantation then.

132.**Dixon:** So let me go back over this so, I don't know if, see if I got it straight. Okay. You started out at Cruger. Right?

133.**Johnson:** Shore was.

134.**Dixon:** And how long were you in Cruger?

135.**Johnson:** For years.

136.**Dixon:** Did you marry your husband in Cruger?

137.**Johnson:** No. My granddaddy had done moved. I was born on this, in 1913, and I left there when I was about 13 years old. My granddaddy moved from there.

138.**Dixon:** And then where did you go then?

139.**Johnson:** He moved on down to Baldwin plantation.

140.**Dixon:** On Baldwin plantation?

141.**Johnson:** Yeah. Over to Hooper plantation. He was on his plantation.

142.**Dixon:** And did you meet your husband there?

143.**Johnson:** No. He moved, my granddaddy and grandmother moved from there down to Tchlatrr on Mr. Guy Charles plantation. Buzzard's Roost plantation and that's where I married at.

144.**Dixon:** Did you and your husband stay there or did you move somewhere else?

145.**Johnson:** We moved back to, we come back to Cruger.

146.**Dixon:** Okay. After you got married, you returned to Cruger.

147.**Johnson:** Yeah, we moved back to Cruger.

148.**Dixon:** And then did you and your husband stay there. Did you quit your husband while you were in Cruger?

149.**Johnson:** No. I stayed with my husband when I was down there at out there from Sidon. My husband quit me first.

150.**Dixon:** Your husband quit you. You moved to Sidon.

151.**Johnson:** Shore did.

152.**Dixon:** And then you quit him. He followed you to Sidon.

153.**Johnson:** He followed me for awhile til he started drawing his check. Then he left us.

154.**Dixon:** You would have to get up, you probably had to get up before six to help get your family together to cook for the young 'uns and get them together before you went off to cook for other people.

155.**Johnson:** Yeah 'mam. I had to cook for them first. Sure did. Come home and cook for them. Leave the white folks kitchen and come home and cook for them.

156.**Dixon:** Did you sew for your family?

157.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

158.**Dixon:** Did you sew for your children?

159.**Johnson:** Yeah, 'mam. I sewed for them. Yeah. I used to sew them up. After I married my grandmother give me a machine and I used to sew for them. I used to make little shirts and little overalls for my boys and dresses for my girls. Slips and, I used to buy cloth and cut out the cloth and make the stuff on the machine. I used to quilt on the machine. Piece a quilt. Shore did. On a machine.

160.**Dixon:** Where did you get your cloth from?

161.**Johnson:** Cloth?

162.**Dixon:** Yes 'mam. Where did you get it from?

163.**Johnson:** Different places. From up there in Greenwood and down there at Cruger. Cloth was in then. You could buy, you know, pretty good cloth then. But just now and then you

can find the cloth what was made then, you know, in them times. You can't find a plum out cotton slip. You may find the tops, but the bottom of it cotton and the top part is rayon.

That's the way they is making cloths now. You can't get cloth.

164.**Dixon:** You can't get 100% cotton anymore.

165.**Johnson:** No. It ain't much cotton made. They done quit making cotton. There's some places you can run up on it and some places you can't.

166.**Dixon:** Now, Mrs. Johnson, you said you had to cook and sew for your children. What else did you do for your family? How else did you all survive.

167.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

168.**Dixon:** How else did you all survive?

169.**Johnson:** Provide how?

170.**Dixon:** How did you make it. Did you raise your food?

171.**Johnson:** I raised my food for my children.

172.**Dixon:** You sewed for your children.

173.**Johnson:** And sewed.

174.**Dixon:** Made the quilts. Pieced them together.

175.**Johnson:** Yeah. I piece them and then I quilt them. Sure did. On my grandmother's machine where she give me. And I had to milk cows for them. I didn't never have to buy no milk.

176.BREAK IN TAPE

177.**Dixon:** ... pick awhile in my field and then go out by the day, you know, picking cotton, by the hundred. Buy my children some clothes and get me some stockings and things. Sure did. I was to ask my husband to buy the

178.BREAK IN TAPE

179.**Johnson:** ... Wouldn't give me but \$3.75 out of (). That's wasn't hardly enough to feed them.

180.**Dixon:** How much was the feed?

181.**Johnson:** \$3.75 after paying my feed. () That's all we could get to our farm.

182.**Dixon:** Did people share ()?

183.**Johnson:** Well, (), but we made it. That's right. With what we raised. () We made it alright through the year. If it wadn't for that, we wouldn't have made it. Sometimes make twenty some bales of cotton and come out behind. We didn't clear nothing. The only way we could make it was to go back and borrow some more money for the next year.

184.**Dixon:** How would you borrow the money?

185.**Johnson:** Borrow the money from the man we did work where we working. We had to borrow the money for to get the children some clothes and things.

186.**Dixon:** So he would give you some money and he would, he would take it out of your half of the crop next year.

187.**Johnson:** Yes 'mam. The next year's crop. They'll take it. Yeah. They'll take it out. They'll take it out. They wouldn't just give it to you. We borrowed money to make our crop. If you going to be there. If you wadn't going to be there, you had to go to another one and borrow money, you know, for Christmas.

188.**Dixon:** Did people move around a lot from plantation to plantation.

189.**Johnson:** Yes 'mam. They moved around a heap. Cause sometimes if you wadn't doing right around there, you know, they would change. () Yes 'mam. Shore would.

190.**Dixon:** Would you please tell me how that would work () to a woman and the owner wasn't treating you right. What would you do to get to another person. How did that go.

191.**Johnson:** We would just tell him you gonna move.

192.**Dixon:** Would they try to stop you?

193.**Johnson:** We were trying to stop, but he couldn't stop you, cause he wasn't giving you enough. What he want to keep you there for? He ain't giving you nothing. You suppose to find somewhere else where you will get something at. That's the way that went.

194.**Dixon:** How would he try to stop you?

195.**Johnson:** He just tell you to stay there. He would lend you so much money. He hated to see you move cause you was a good worker, but that wadn't helping you none. (laughter)

196.**Dixon:** You got up and left.

197.**Johnson:** Oh, yes.

198.**Dixon:** Did you have to slip away?

199.**Johnson:** No.

200.**Dixon:** You went off in daylight.

201.**Johnson:** Shore did. I didn't clear then. I didn't sleep a wink. Yeah 'mam. I got all my furniture and stuff.

202.**Dixon:** How did times did you leave a plantation?

203.**Johnson:** I can't tell you that, cause my husband said move, we just moved. I couldn't tell you how many, how many times we moved.

204.**Dixon:** And you say you never slipped away.

205.**Johnson:** No 'mam. I ain't never slipped away from no plantation. They would come to me and I'd tell them, I'm going to move and they know the reason I got to move, cause I wadn't clearing nothing. Done done all that work. That year's work and wadn't getting that much.

Uh uh. That's right. If you wadn't raising, part raising your stuff, you wouldn't have food.

From one bale of cotton to the other. They didn't raise.

206.**Dixon:** If you didn't raise food, you'd starve.

207.**Johnson:** Yeah. You'd starve. Half way starve if you wouldn't raise it.

208.**Dixon:** Were there some people who were starving?

209.**Johnson:** No, but they would do without, because they used to bring sacks and things to me to gather my beans and stuff.

210.**Dixon:** And what did you tell them?

211.**Johnson:** To try and make it. I give it to 'em. Yeah.

212.**Dixon:** You shared your beans?

213.**Johnson:** Yeah. I shared with them.

214.**Dixon:** What else did you share?

215.**Johnson:** Huh?

216.**Dixon:** You said you shared your peas. What else did you share with them.

217.**Johnson:** Greens. Sweet potatoes. Irish potatoes. Milk. Butter. Eggs. Chicken.

218.**Dixon:** You shared everything didn't you?

219.**Johnson:** Oh, yeah. I usually share with folks. I didn't raise stuff all for myself. The Bible say I live to divide it. Didn't it?

220.**Dixon:** Yes 'mam.

221.**Johnson:** Okay.

222.**Dixon:** You shared everything.

223.**Johnson:** Yes 'mam.

224.**Dixon:** Were there some people that didn't want to share?

225.**Johnson:** Well there was some that wouldn't do that. Some of them up there in town won't do that now, but I always did do that until my grandmother learnt me how to divide with people what didn't have nothing. Just don't give nobody what got something. Give somebody what ain't got nothing.

226.**Dixon:** Now why would some people have, they have everything because they didn't raise their own crops.

227.**Johnson:** They didn't stop and raise it like I did. That's what it is. They be up there in Greenwood juking when I be out there working in my truck plant you see.

228.**Dixon:** And then they come back to ask you for something.

229.**Johnson:** When they make it, they'll come back and ask me for some of it. I'd give it to them, because they have little children, you know. Just like I did. You have to divide.

230.**Dixon:** Did you ever go to Greenwood to the juke joint?

231.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

232.**Dixon:** You said they were in Greenwood juking. Did you ever go juking to Greenwood?

233.**Johnson:** No, I didn't never go up there. I be working in my truck plant, 'cause you see, I would tell them. Why come you all didn't stay at home and raise ya'lls stuff like Mandie raised her's. Ya'll could have stayed at home too. But you see, some people don't take the interest of they selves. See, they'd rather be out, you know, having fun, than staying home and raising them something to eat. And that's what I did. I raised my something. Shore did. Raised my hogs.

234.**Dixon:** You had hogs?

235.**Johnson:** You heared me say I killed eight head of hogs? In one winter!

236.**Dixon:** Wow!

237.**Johnson:** And one of these here 12 pound, tin tubs like that big around. My grandmother used to line up sausage full. Them cans they be full of sausage. I killed my beef too along with them hogs. And she'd mix that meat and grind up them sausages for me. I did it too when I wadn't, you know, in the family way.

238.**Dixon:** When you were pregnant?

239.**Johnson:** Yeah. See they didn't allow me around the meat when I was like that. My grandmother would do it for me. Come up there and do it for me.

240.**Dixon:** So when you were in the family way you couldn't get around the meat?

241.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

242.**Dixon:** They wouldn't allow women in the family way around the food?

243.**Johnson:** Uh huh, because you'll spoil meat like that. Uh huh, you'll ruin all your meats.

Some people will. I don't know why I would ruin it or no, but they wouldn't allow me around it.

244.**Dixon:** Was giving childbirth in those days difficult?

245.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

246.**Dixon:** Did you have a difficult time delivering your babies?

247.**Johnson:** Yeah, 'mam. One time I did with my middle girl. I had a kind of tough time with her. I had four tumors right down here. Right down here. So when I'd go to birthing, my baby would, see them tumors would hold them up, you know, until Dr. Nick and Dr. Sanford operated on me and cut them tumors.

248.**Dixon:** What year was that?

249.**Johnson:** That was in '53. They got them and they () forceps.

250.**Dixon:** Did you have that middle girl in the hospital?

251.**Johnson:** No, 'mam. I ain't never had nary one in the hospital. I had all mine at home. But after she was born, I had to go to the hospital.

252.**Dixon:** So all your children were born at home?

253.**Johnson:** Yes 'mam.

254.**Dixon:** Did you have mid-wives in those days?

255.**Johnson:** Yeah. Mid-wives. One time I had to have Dr. Sonside cause they had done said, you know, I wadn't going to deliver nary 'nother one. They got the white doctor, Dr. Sonside, to me, but I made it alright.

256.**Dixon:** Can we go back to the plantation days. Can you tell me some more about the plantation days?

257.**Johnson:** The plantation?

258.**Dixon:** About what it was like working on the plantation.

259.**Johnson:** Yeah, 'mam. We worked, but we didn't get nothing hardly for our work. Sure didn't care for working for nothing. Like they getting now, they getting as much as we got in a month. That's right, cause one while they was paying 50 cents a hundred for cotton. A hundred. You pick a hundred you wouldn't get but 50 cent. Thirty five cent a hundred. You didn't get nothing then for working no crop.

260.**Dixon:** What about housekeeping. Did you get good money for housekeeping?

261.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

262.**Dixon:** How much money would you get for housekeeping?

263.**Johnson:** A week? About, I don't know, about \$16 or \$17 a week.

264.**Dixon:** Oh. You did tell me that.

265.**Johnson:** Didn't get much pay for doing that. You know they wadn't paying nothing in that time, child.

266.**Dixon:** Which of your jobs did you like best? Picking cotton, working in the field, or house work?

267.**Johnson:** Well, you see, I got more working in the field picking cotton. Sure seems like I picked 300 a day. Two and a half a hundred. Four, five, six, seven. That'd be \$8 I made a day, you see, picking cotton.

268.**Dixon:** Where did people get together? Where were the gathering places?

269.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

270.**Dixon:** I said where did people get together. Where what were the gathering places on the plantation?

271.**Johnson:** Gathering places? What you talking 'bout?

272.**Dixon:** Where the people got together. Like you say when people just got together to talk or whatever, where did people come together as a group.

273.**Johnson:** Come together? People didn't know how to come. They would go to each other and visit one another, you know.

274.**Dixon:** There was a lot of visiting?

275.**Johnson:** Yes, when they wadn't working in the field. They'd sit out, old people, and talk. Some of them would quilt just like my grandmother had four quilts to quilt. That lady had four. That lady four, and that lady had four. All of them would get together and quilt out all them quilts at night. Baking 'taters. Parching peanuts. They'd stop and eat, you know. They'd quilt there until 12:00 or 1:00 o'clock at night. We'd be in the bed asleep. That's when they cough and all that. We'd be asleep. People used to help people more than they do now. When people got sick, they'd go to the house and clean up this one and clean up there and wash, they'd mop. They'd cook. That's the way they did then. They didn't have no helpers like they advertise now. Old people used to help one another.

276.**Dixon:** What did they do when people got sick?

277.**Johnson:** Well, that's what they'd do when they got sick.

278.**Dixon:** What did they do?

279.**Johnson:** Wait on them. Cook. Wash for them. Mop. Give them a bath. Wash their hair. Comb their head. All that when they got sick. They didn't have no agencies and nothing

then to go out like they do now. The old people helped one another. Shore did. If they had children, you know, keep their children clean for them and keep their hair combed. Put them on clothes. One would meet them and put them on clothes. Clean clothes. They'd go to school. People don't do that much now. They done stopped that time. All of that done gone by.

280.**Dixon:** Tell me about the home remedies people used to use. The herbs and things that people used to use when you got sick.

281.**Johnson:** For medicine?

282.**Dixon:** Uh huh. They used to go to get sassafras roots. They'd wash it and string them. Put them around your neck. Get peach tree leaves, see, boil it down and bath you in it. That's for fever. Gypson weed. Gypson leaves. You'd get them and () to you. Get shucks and make tea. Get hog hoop and make tea. (laughter) That's for the flu. Sweet gum balls. You could them and burn them to the ashes with a little trash. Get them ashes and get vaseline and mix that up together. That's for the piles. Get lemons. Buy lemons. Make you lemon tea. Put some Vick's Salve along in there and mix it up there together and give it to you to drink. There wasn't as much sickness as it is now. They would pitch them herbs and doctor you with it. There wasn't as much as treatment of going to the doctor as there is now. Uh huh.

283.**Dixon:** What about when women were on their monthly time? What did they give you for cramps then?

284.**Johnson:** Cramping?

285.**Dixon:** Uh huh.

286.**Johnson:** They go out in the yard and get some yard mint. Wash them leaves. Place them in a glass, cane, boil your water and pour it in on them and let them drink it. That'll stop the cramping.

287.**Dixon:** What about for like insect bites and bee stings and such.

288.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

289.**Dixon:** Insects, insect bites, bee stings and such. Did they have some kind of salve they would put on like bites. Like you got a bit, like an insect bite or something.

290.**Johnson:** Talking about putting them on the back of us? Medicine?

291.**Dixon:** Uh huh. What would they put on your skin if you had a skin rash or something? An irritation of your skin?

292.**Johnson:** Oh, they'd give you Vaseline or Solton, Bright Blue Ointment. Lucille Vaseline and mix it up together and grease you with it. Sometimes they'd give you sulphur to take. Folks don't use that now. A little pinch of sulphur.

293.**Dixon:** You said there wasn't as much sickness in those days?

294.**Johnson:** No 'mam. There wadn't as much sickness as it is now.

295.**Dixon:** Was there any like tuberculous?

296.**Johnson:** They would, you know old people would know what to give you for to take and to rub you with different stuff. There wasn't many doctors. It was doctors but just now and then they would have to go out. They didn't have no car then. They went on horses. Had the medicine in suitcases. Little old grips. And grip on there in the front of them or on the saddle on the horse. They use to go to church in horses and wagons. They didn't have no car. The first car I knowed them to make was a T-Model Ford. That's the first car they made.

297.**Dixon:** Did they have any cars on the plantation?

298.**Johnson:** Cars? Yeah, 'mam. After they come out, they had one out there on that plantation, cause I had one down there on Mr. T. U. Black. The one I went to cooking for. One for Mr. Gordon Griffin. I cleared pretty good that year. So I went and got me and my children a car.

299.**Dixon:** What kind did you get?

300.**Johnson:** It was a '49 Ford. The one with glass on each side. Black.

301.**Dixon:** Was it pretty?

302.**Johnson:** Oh yes 'mam and could get on the road too.

303.**Dixon:** Now I've heard people tell me that sometimes you were driving down the highway you couldn't pass certain white people. Is that true?

304.**Johnson:** Couldn't pass them?

305.**Dixon:** Uh huh. That if you were driving behind a white person and they were going too slow you couldn't pass. I've heard, some people tell me that. Did you ever have that experience?

306.**Johnson:** Well, I didn't never go through with that. Only stopping I had with my car was when they was searching for driving license. They wanted to know did you have any driving license on you. They were checking then for that, you know.

307.**Dixon:** When was this?

308.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

309.**Dixon:** When did that happen, when they were checking for driver's licenses?

310.**Johnson:** That was in '50. '53, and '54, and '55, and '60. They were checking for driving license.

311.SIDE B

312.**Johnson:** They were checking for driving license. If you didn't have none, you know, they'd put a bill on you to pay. They'll do that now. They'll arrest you now for driving license.

313.**Dixon:** You're right. They will.

314.**Johnson:** Sure will. (laughter) You go ahead, girl. You'll have a fine to pay. You'll walk up there, that ticket sticking in your windshield. But it mean trouble.

315.**Dixon:** What I was trying to ask, say 'mam, was sometime ...

316.**Johnson:** Well, you know in them days on the buses, you had to sit in the back and the white people sit in the front, but now you sit right on the seat with them, since the Civil Rights done passed. You don't have to sit on the back. Get to sit in the seat with them.

317.**Dixon:** Do you remember other things about the days of Jim Crow, about segregation?

318.**Johnson:** They wouldn't let you sit at the table with them in them days. There ain't nobody but Mr. Bob Godard down there at Cruger. Now he had a cook, Mrs. May Lawrence, cooking for him and when they fixed his food on the table and you colored, you down there visiting, he'll tell you come on and eat too. Shore would. And he was about the richest man in sight. In Cruger, at least. He wouldn't, you know, sit you for to fore to wait while he eat. He'd let you eat along with him. Shore would. But he dead. In fact, you had to go to their back door, you know. You couldn't go in the front. Go around to the back and go in. Now some of them wadn't like that and some of them was. See?

319.**Dixon:** What was the difference between those who were like that and those who weren't?

320.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

321.**Dixon:** I said, did you notice any difference. I mean, there was a difference between those who wouldn't make you go to the back doors and those who would?

322.**Johnson:** Well, they.

323.**Dixon:** Were some richer than others? Who did that?

324.**Johnson:** That's what it was, you know, and some were raised, you know. Just like some of us colored people. Some of us was well raised and some of us ain't. You see? Now if you could ever train a child to something, he going always, he may go a little piece, but he going to turn around and go back to where you raised him from. That's the way it is with old folk, cause these here old people, see they was raised I reckon like that. Some of them just stand up and turn up their nose to you. Didn't want to see you, but still they want you to work for them. See, that's the way that was. If they hated you that much, they ought not want you to do nothing for them. See? That's right.

325.**Dixon:** Did your grandmother and grandfather raise you right?

326.**Johnson:** Yes 'mam.

327.**Dixon:** What kinds of things did they tell you to do? Like, what did they tell you about right and wrong and all this. You said your grandmother didn't allow you to steal and to lie.

328.**Johnson:** No. They didn't allow me to run out with women's husbands. I carried that home on my porch. On my grandmother's porch. Didn't allow me to be out all times of night. Didn't allow me to drink whiskey, beer, or nothing like that. Didn't allow me to be out with boys all time of night.

329.**Dixon:** Were there a lot of fast girls around?

330.**Johnson:** That's right. They didn't allow me to do that. They always taught me what was right, and I tried to do it. A young girl like that, she can do right if she wants. She can stand up on her principles if she want. If she don't, she ain't going to do it. I don't care what kind

of teaching you going to teach. You got to first make it up in your mind to do right then you'll always be obedient to yourself and everybody else.

331.**Dixon:** What could a good young lady do and not do in those days? You were a good young lady. What does that mean? If you acted like a young lady?

332.**Johnson:** A good young lady?

333.**Dixon:** Uh huh.

334.**Johnson:** She ain't going to do anything a bad'll do. That's what you call a good 'un.

335.**Dixon:** Like what kind of thing?

336.**Johnson:** They ain't going to bring no babies in their mother's house. That's a good 'un. She got to stay there and do what her parents ask her to do. See? She ain't going to walk away and talk about I ain't going to do nothing. Now that's the good child. Mind. They won't talk back at their parents. That's a good child. They always mind their parents. Mind other folks when they was telling them right. Now that's a good child. But when you feel greedy like that, you ain't good. Cause you doing anything you can do. That's how that run.

337.**Dixon:** What would happen to young ladies who had babies before they were married?

338.**Johnson:** Say what happened to them?

339.**Dixon:** Uh huh.

340.**Johnson:** Well, I don't know what happened. They kind of, you know, would do something between. They pay attention to the boys said that they love them. See, that's how that are. And some of them tell them, if you don't let me do that, I'm going to get me somebody else. See? They won't never, you see. But see, they couldn't fool me like that. I didn't own a thing before I married. Wadn't with nary one before I married. No. No. My children after me and my husband married and all of 'em is by one man and that's my husband. Huh. Years back, people, girls used to get like that. What make them do it so good now? They ain't tight on them as they used to be. When you used to get like that, you couldn't class with a girl who wasn't like that. No, they wouldn't let the girls class with you. You had to be by yourself. Then if you belonged to the church, they would turn you out of church. You get like that, you couldn't go to school no more. They don't never stop going now, but see, you couldn't do that. You couldn't class with no other girl that wadn't like that. You couldn't be with them now, but see, now, you can't tell them that what ain't like that. Even the ones what is like that.

341.**Dixon:** You couldn't associate with the girls.

342.**Johnson:** That's right. You couldn't associate with them, but now you can do it, you see.

343.**Dixon:** Right. Right.

344.**Johnson:** You wouldn't even go no school then. They'd expel you from school.

345.**Dixon:** No school. No church.

346.**Johnson:** No church neither. They'd turn you out of church til you birth that baby and go back and beg them ().

347.**Dixon:** After you had the baby, could you go back to school and back to church?

348.**Johnson:** Yeah.

349.**Dixon:** Okay.

350.**Johnson:** But after they own a baby in them days, sometimes the boys wouldn't marry 'em.

351.**Dixon:** Then what would happen?

352.**Johnson:** They would have to marry and take care of their children. Take care of their child.

353.**Dixon:** They'd try to find another husband.

354.**Johnson:** 'Mam?

355.**Dixon:** You said sometimes the boys wouldn't marry them. So they'd try to find another husband?

356.**Johnson:** No. Sometimes they'd married the same child's daddy. It's according to how that man feel. Sometimes that man wouldn't want them after they get the baby. He'll pull off with somebody else. See? Then they pull with the one that got the baby back. () Some of them they made them marry. Get the preacher, get a car. Pick up the boy and then the girl. The parents would be in there. Carry them on to the courthouse. Make them marry. Then

they come home. Some of them would stay one night. Some of them wouldn't stay nary a night. Them was some boys. Cause, see they didn't want to marry. See? Then them that wanted to marry, they married 'em. They stayed with them. Had some more children by 'em. But that time's done passed now. They ain't going to carry them nowhere now.