

Wiregrass Black History Project, RG 298

Dr. Myland Brown Interview Transcript

Date Span: September 23, 2024

Biographical Sketch: Myland Brown was born (1933) and reared in Dothan, Alabama. He grew up in poverty but took an opportunity to attend Alabama State College where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees. In 1968, he graduated as the first African American to earn a doctorate (Ed.D) from Ball State University. Brown served in the US Army, 1953-1955, then had a 45 year career in educational leadership. He authored the book about pedagogy and student motivation, *Pure Butter*, in 2006.

Organizational Sketch: The Wiregrass Black History Project is a collaboration between the Wiregrass Black History Channel on YouTube (by David "Mit" Kirkland) and the Wiregrass Archives at Troy University Dothan Campus. Funded in 2024- 25 by Troy University and the Society of American Archivists Foundation through its Catalyst Grant.

The Wiregrass Black History Channel will host edited versions of the interviews. The Wiregrass Archives will make the raw interviews available on its YouTube channel and create metadata records and finding aids that link to the project and to individual video interviews.

Scope / Content Note: Video interview transcript in which Dr. Brown discusses his childhood in Dothan, Alabama. He also discusses his memories of the Five Points and Baptist Bottom districts in Dothan and entertainments provided in both. He also muses on his life and on life in general.

Provenance: Interview conducted by Mit Kirkland, who provided it to the Wiregrass Archives as part of the grant-funded Wiregrass Black History Project.

Processing Notes: Transcriptions made by MS Word AI, then edited by Dr. Martin T. Olliff. Revisions planned to update and correct transcriptions.

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Dr. Myland Brown Interview, September 23, 2024, with Mit Kirkland

00:00:00 Mit Kirkland

First of all, Dr. Brown, I want you to . . . Do you give me permission to use this video to . . . to show on television and online?

00:00:13 Myland Brown

State that again.

00:00:14 Mit Kirkland

OK. Do you give me permission to use this video that I'm recording of you to show on television and online.

00:00:24 Myland Brown

You have my permission.

00:00:26 Mit Kirkland

Thank you, Sir.

OK, Dr. Brown, tell me a little bit about growing up here in Dothan.

00:00:40 Myland Brown

Growing up in Dothan, AL, Houston County.

When I was a child, sisters and brothers, we pretty much grew up the same way all other Black kids grew up. Of course when it came to having a good home, we had that.

My mother, Miss Willie Brown, who lived to be 97, she was a Christian woman and she very much believed in doing the right thing. She believed in love your neighbor like you love yourself.

And my father, he was a very good man. What I remember most about him is that he always made sure that we had three meals a day, we had a place to stay, and I always say the roof didn't leak.

My dad was something special. He had a little comedy also. He'd always tell me, "son, listen to your Daddy, because I've been through and I'm still going through trial and tribulations." He said, "but where there's a will, there's a way. And I want you to go to that classroom every day, do what the teachers say, and get your assignments. And by following instructions, you don't have to go through what you see your Daddy going through. Because the bottom line is a good quality education. And because I don't have it and wasn't able to get there because of restrictions, [I] had all kind of toil and all type of objection and that type of thing."

But I was so proud because he didn't let those type of things stop him. The judgments, the name calling and not having all the pleasures that other people had.

I used to observe students in my classroom, not all of them, some of them, they were able to go on vacation during the summer time. I know some of the students in my class, the Black students, the parents didn't even have cars.

My parents never had a car, *never* had a car. But I knew why, because cars, like everything else, costs money. They are expensive. You have to have a certain amount of income to support what I would call a car, which is a luxury. But here my Daddy put first things first – food, clothing, shelter. Good manners. Obey your teacher. Obeying adults.

He believed in what you call conditioned to the situation.

He was something special.

00:04:19 – 00:04:25 Difficult to understand, sounds a bit like “And sometimes he will. He made the land himself because he liked to dictate you drills and stuff like that, typically for.”

He said “son, when you want to make a decision, give it some time. Think about it overnight.”

[Unintelligible] I made the decision. He said because the way I see it, my daddy taught me, if you're making an important decision, he said, “always look before you leap.” Because you look ahead of time, chances are, you would have come out without precaution. So it seemed you wouldn't have been on solid ground. We already looked about it, solid ground.

My Daddy never, he never purchased anything that he couldn't pay for. That's what I remember. He also taught me, you take and pay your bills. He said, “if you don't have but a quarter left, always pay your bills.”

My daddy, Henry Brown, he was an example of [unintelligible, 00:05:32-00:05:34]

It is very important back then, it was important to me, based on a certain age category. [unintelligible, 00:05:41-00:05:46]

Poverty was the main thing we had to deal with. Picking cotton all day long for two dollars . . . all day long for two dollars. But that's all we had.

When I was born, fast food places didn't exist, so youngster didn't have fast food places like they have now. But still, we obeyed our parents, obeyed the rules and regulation, in spite of the name calling, being discriminated against [in] downtown and other places like the five-and-ten-cent store like Kress, Newberry, and Woolworth.

And the bathroom downtown, for Black folk were saying “colored women,” but for the white folk, they were saying “white ladies.” You see, it made . . . it made a difference, colored and white.

[00:06:53-00:06:54, Difficult to hear, sounds like “But still we were all there,”] that was very important, just as important as anybody else.

The bottom line is to go ahead and run the race. Get . . . get that lesson. My daddy said, "Get your ABCs . . . get your ABCs." And each time the class reports are due from the school, my dad would wait, he checked those grades. My dad did not allow us to come in there with failing grades. He didn't allow that.

You got three meals a day, you got a place to stay, any roof over it, so you make sure you get your lessons.

[00:07:44-00:07:46, unintelligible]. My daddy used to tell us how much cotton we had to pick.

[00:07:50-00:07:52 unintelligible] We were picking the cotton, my dad would tell us how much to pick.

He had a statement that said "Bring me." He said, "Bring me . . . 200 a day." That meant 200 pounds of cotton.

Therefore, to do this, you had to get up early in the morning while the dew was still on the cotton and you had to go until there was no light left. But we made it.

[Unintelligible, 00:08:21-00:08:23]

I tell my farming students when I started teaching that I helped raise salaries in the cotton fields. Minimum wage in the cotton fields.

So my farming students said, "Dr. Brown, how'd you do that?" I said for the longest, we got \$2.00 all day long for picking cotton in the hot sun.

"Well, how about the raise of it?" I said, "the Honor Society added fifty cents." So from then on, you know, we've got \$2.50 [chuckling] that was the minimum wage. That was the funniest thing . . . I had . . . But we made it.

And that sun will be so hot. Reminded me of the sun thing that we just had, all this heat and stuff like that. So sometimes our parents see you and say, they're goin', they're goin' . . . "keep going down there, keep on down there. We're going to the shade a while."

I said, "Mama," I said, "we're, we're hot, too. Why can't we go to the shade?"

And Mama say, "you can't go to the shade because you ain't finish your row." And right there it was. You don't need somebody from Harvard or Yale to say something like that.

That is so [unintelligible]. Ever since that time out in the cotton field, I always used that for all my students, and I taught forty-five years all over the United States. Even in South America, Guyana. When President Nixon left office in 1974, I was a consultant in Guyana, South America.

So when it comes to education, if you want to move forward, it doesn't matter about time, age, or what have you, if you've got those ABCs together, you're going to make some headway. You're going to move forward, in spite of. You just have to keep plugging along.

00:10:32 Mit Kirkland

OK, Dr. Brown, you said that Monroe Page was your cousin. So tell me . . . tell me about Monroe Page. What kind of guy was he? He owned a lot of property. He was a businessman.

00:10:43 Myland Brown

Well, Uncle Monroe was [unintelligible] the most highly respected Black man in Dothan, Houston County, about that time.

He had an insurance company down in what was called Five Points in Dothan. He had a funeral service and there in Five Points. He had property all over the Dothan area.

His, I think, Monroe Page's sister was my grandmother. And my grandmama was my mama's mother.

But Monroe Page was the only Black person that drove a Cadillac. Because he had that kind of . . . those kind of resources and that kind of respect. He was very smart as a businessman. So in Dothan, in a section called Acid Plant Hill, Monroe St. runs between Price St. and Bayshore St. [By "runs between," Dr. Brown means Monroe St. runs parallel to Price and Bayshore Sts., between them.] My family used to live on there, on Monroe St.

And Uncle Monroe had the largest house of anybody around here. Uncle Monroe had a house that was built like the plantation owners that you'd find out on West Main [Street in Dothan].

Small country town of [unintelligible, but he is misspeaking and corrects himself] Bainbridge, Georgia. Bainbridge, Georgia has such large houses. Nowadays they're maintained by the Department of Interior because they serve as part of the tourism industry.

When my Uncle Monroe, he [unintelligible] in Dothan. He had a tall house, and the chandeliers would come way down. And he had a . . . a dark hallway.

And I remember it so well because [Unintelligible, 00:13:12—00:13:14].

Everyday I go in there and take [the wife's paper]. She was Augusta, Augusta Monroe Page. She was a very attractive lady. I think she was probably Indian, or from some group of Indians, what have you. And she was just as sweet as she could be.

[Unintelligible] had probably five or six children. And they were very active, very [unintelligible]. He had two . . . he had . . . had twins. And Zonie was a classroom teacher. During her . . . during her teaching days. Zonie. Onie was the boy that [unintelligible 00:14:19-00:14:21] so Onie and Zonie, those were Uncle Monroe's twins.

Uncle Monroe had to be very shrewd and use his head for something besides a hat rack. So although the white population, they were doing crooked, criminal things, but they didn't want the Black to enjoy that luxury. So Uncle Monroe, when get in a mess of worry that he was being watched, or whatever he was doing that [unintelligible, 00:15:10-00:15:12] he would stop by the house there at 1215 Bayshore, and my grandma will walk out to the curb. And Uncle Monroe would go into his pocket and give my

grandma a roll of money to go back in the house. Therefore, if the police were to stop him, they wouldn't find anything on him.

So there was all kinds of things and, I dare say, undercover work done. But Uncle Monroe, I think he got the benefit because he . . . down on Cherry St., he went down there to Five Points. And they had a Cotton Club down there.

So the Black folk had such an enjoyable time, especially on weekends and my Uncle Monroe had a lot to do with that because he had the money, he had respect. And [unintelligible, 00:16:11-00:16:12] with him for business, they would go to the right place because he had [unintelligible, 00:16:19-00:16:20].

He reminds me of that commercial that's still on television, I think it's E. F. Hutton. And that commercial says, "When E. F. Hutton spoke, everybody listened." The way it was back then, Uncle Monroe because of his authority [and] respect, he was E. F. Hutton back during that time. He would be at this time, but he was such a smart man.

And then he had about, he had about 6 . . . he had about six sons, too. And they were all smart. But then as time went along and those kids, and the girls and the men, grew up, they left [the side?] and went north.

A lot of 'em went to Detroit, Michigan, mission. I remember. I can see right now. And they did quite well and stayed up because of racism. And they never did come back down here to stay. I can see them right now. And it's all because, as my daddy said, "get your ABCs and then you listen. You see, I'm out there, I had to dig that dish with a shovel. [Unintelligible, 00:17:46-00:17:48] You diggin' out of that cold weather."

I said, "I saw it, Dad," and he said, "well, if you don't get your lessons, you'll be out here doing the same thing."

"This here," my daddy said [unintelligible, 00:18:02-0:18:04]

Back then our parents . . . we didn't have a lot of money to go to the movie, stuff like that. But whatever he saw was untrue, he said, "come here. You see, that's make-believe. That's not true. Do not do that. Do not deal with that. It's harmful."

00:18:28 Mit Kirkland

Dr. Brown, do you remember some of the businesses, black-owned businesses, there were quite a few down in Five Points, right? Can you name some? Do you remember some of them? Can you name some for me?

00:18:34 Myland Brown

Down in that Five Point[s] area, you probably start up there [imagining a map]. Here's Burdeshaw St. here. And here, you turn left, you were on the Five Points.

So, Miss Adams, a beautician, had a successful beauty parlor right here. You go around a little further on this side, a black man had a barbershop over here.

You go down a little further, they had a place called the Cotton Club. In it . . . it had the same type of, I guess, appeal, the same kind of culture that the famous Cotton Club had in Harlem in New York City.

Another very cultural type setting, because people that was involved with vaudeville back then. Entertainers that would come through, they would perform at the Cotton Club and keep going, where they come around to Five Points and then Mr. Farrell had a kind of liquor store down there that he called Salt-n-Pepper. Mr. W. C. Farrell. Of course, he was some kin to me, too. Mr. W. C. Farrell, he had a liquor store.

And Dr. Jemison had his dentistry upstairs across the street during that time. And the [Marburys] had a barber shop downstairs and the dentistry was upstairs.

So you had, Mr. Farrell had a liquor store, the dentist was up there, the barber shop was down here. And over there on the backside, you had a man selling primarily hot dogs all the time. And that whole surrounding right there was sorta like an assembly place on the weekend.

So when people put on . . . put on their finery, like my uncle . . . I had six brothers . . . I had six *uncles*, three brothers. My . . . my mother was one of nine children. She has three sisters and six brothers. Two of my brothers fought . . . they . . . they were in World War 2. That that thing.

So go back to Fi . . . Five Points. You talkin' about having a good time. I do not remember . . . [but] what I can remember . . . "Silas Green from New Orleans, the best durn show you ever seen." Every year they go on tour, Silas Green. They come to Dothan. And it was set up right there on Burdeshaw, if you . . . right there where that seven place . . . that 7-11 place has been a long time, where they got a retirement home there. But Silas Green would come here when I was a little boy, to the baseball field, you have people like [entertainer] Peg Leg Bates, you had other people that put up barricades through there, so Whites came to there. But you don't hear anything like that.

And I could have purchased a book about Silas Green of New Orleans but I didn't at the time, I had planned to do it. A friend of mine [unintelligible ca. 22:20] was going to get it for me. But that just came through Five Points. There's a whole lot of activity going on, musicians, and those girls from New . . . those Creoles. Those Creole girls could *dance*.

And they were musicians that [unintelligible ca. 22:40] where they have a funeral in New Orleans, they go down there sort of sad. But when they come back, everybody blowin' [making hand motions that imitate trumpet playing]. Where the people who came to Cherry Street down there, they were the same way.

A lot of musicians. Mister . . . [Unintelligible, ca. 23:01] Because he get all sharp. And back there, you tie [unintelligible, ca. 23:06] you have a handkerchief, and sorta hang out a little bit, hang out like a tail [laughter].

Boy, you talk about . . . you talk about some good times. But Five Points . . . Oh! Isn't that . . . a while back you remember that thing that people called Baptist Bottom? You [unintelligible] Baptist Bottom was sorta like that across town.

Getting' over here between Range St. and Cherry Street over in here [imagining a map].

Ah. Actually it was called. Ah. It got away from me.

00:23:58 Mit Kirkland

Pleasantview

00:23:58 Myland Brown

Right down there, there's a certain community . . .

00:24:00 Mit Kirkland

Pleasantview? [Brown, "huh?"] Pleasant View. [Brown laughs and makes a confirming fist-bump motion]

Tell me about Pleasantview.

00:24:07 Myland Brown

Pleasant View had it's own . . . it's own culture. Full of lovely people. And there were two or three people who lived in there, they gave . . . they gave Pleasant View its reputation.

And there was a white . . . there was a white woman living there. She's a white woman, they called Red Annie. And she gave the police a fit when they came in there. Red Annie, she'd get drunk and raised sand. They had to come in and get Red Annie and take her out of town.

But all that was connected, coming out of . . . out of Cherry St. and going on down to Baptist Bottom.

You had a . . . I remember, Mr. Payne, photographer, he'd take pictures down in town. He stayed right on Park Street. Their house is still there.

[Unintelligible, ca. 25:01-25:11]

It was the best I ever had, and I stopped 1952, right after [Dorothy?] went off to college.

But I remember, I wrote a history about downtown. And I remember people saying, "come here, son. You see that? That's Baptist Bottom. That man . . . that store right there, you see that white man?"

I said, "you need something over there, you tell them I sent you."

I said, [unintelligible, ca. 25:47-25:55]. It's because your word was your bond.

You could get everything you want going to Baptist Bottom

But sometimes my daddy wanted [unintelligible, ca. 26:06-26:18], he went through Baptist Bottom to [unintelligible]. He had [unintelligible] to go downtown to [unintelligible]

Even right now, I know what it's called, because being an oldest boy, my daddy took me everywhere. He didn't . . . he couldn't take nobody 'cept the girls, he had two boys.

So right now . . . some folks . . . some people knew it.

I . . . I think Mr. McRoy, he probably . . . he may not remember [but] his daddy would. But it was so much stuff going on down there. But that was a Mecca. A survivor.

And I tell people, I say, go down to the . . . to the library and check out the phone book.

And some of the black businesses were downtown and were down there in [unintelligible, 27:16]. It's in there, but you got to know what you [doing].

You might recall a while back, about the year 2000, the anniversary of Dothan, I got a publication came out. It was in the stand and in the drugstore.

So I went to the thing and I saw . . . I saw two cousins had that book. And I forgot to go back and get it. [Unintelligible, ca. 27:45-27:51]

And they were down in Ashford, and Gordon, and Cowarts.

When my cousin [Phoebe?] died, we had it. So we went down to different communities. When cousin [Phoebe?] died, she was 100 years old.

So my momma called me, said, "son, we got death in the family."

So I came home, and it don't be that much time, but it had cousin [Phoebe?], when she died, white folks came from everywhere down there.

But being a historian, some of us knew already that the whites and the Blacks [Unintelligible, ca. 28:51-29:04]

And then they come around to the Bottom and stuff, and other places on a Saturday, and you talk about having a good time.

But I remember this and I started talking about it, somebody said, "Dr. Brown! You remember that?" I said, "I'm not supposed to remember that? I got a brain. I got a mind."

And my momma and daddy told me, Daddy said, "take [double dog dares] to fail."

I don't care how much you went down here [unintelligible, ca. 29:50]

All right, card time, let me have it.

In other words, it was one of those older report card . . . card . . . card . . . here, I've got some, I'll show it to you soon.

And what it was, that they would check . . . before they checked the grade, a word called "Deportment." Some of y'all know, you might remember that word, "Deportment." You don't see that much today. But they got a place for deportment. And if you got that check, that grade, if you failed, [imitating what his parents would say] "you ain't going to a game, you ain't going to the basketball, you ain't going to see a movie, and you should have went to church." [laughing]

[Unintelligible, ca. 30:37-30:41]

00:30:42 Mit Kirkland

Is there anything in particular that you remember . . . that is, is there something that you want to talk about, you know, growing up here and . . . and . . . and getting your education, you know, or just stuff that happened in this area?

Now, you said a lot of people came to the Cotton Club. Do you remember some of them? I know you said Silas Greene. And you said Pearl [Kirkland fumbling for the name, Brown adds "you mean Pearl Bailey"] Pearl Bailey . . .

00:31:06 Myland Brown

Pearl Bailey, yeah. Pearl Bailey was pretty nice. Pearl Bailey was something special. She could sing and dance, also she was a representative of the UN while she was still living. Pearl Bailey. Oh, and that Cab . . . that Cab Calloway . . . ?

00:31:23 Mit Kirkland

OK, let me get you started. OK, who else came here?

00:31:27 Myland Brown

Uh, you had a Peg Leg Bates. Peg Leg, you see him on the Sunday shows. He had . . . just one legged.

[Pee Wee Marquette?] He was a little guy who said, "say Peg, you seen my wife?" "No, I ain't seen her, Pee Wee, I don't know where she is." "You sure you ain't seen my wife?" "If you see her, you tell me. Me and you [live in the same yard?], so if she mess around, you tell me." "Now, Pee Wee, you know, we is like brothers. So if she mess around on you, I'll let you know." Pee Wee says, "have you a drink. I'm gonna ask you again, Peg, have you seen my wife?" "I hate to tell you, Pee Wee, but you got a dirty woman there."

That Cotton stage stuff. Down in the Cotton Club in Baptist Bottom. You also had a club in Atlanta, too.

00:32:53 Mit Kirkland

OK, tell . . . tell me about Cab Callaway.

00:32:54 Myland Brown

Now that . . . that Cab Calloway, I didn't see him personally, but he's a famous musician.

00:33:02 Mit Kirkland

Tell me about him. Did he . . . did he go to the Cotton Club?

00:33:05 Myland Brown

No, I didn't see him at the Cotton Club

00:33:07 Mit Kirkland

OK, OK.

00:33:11 Myland Brown

You know, while I was teaching, I checked out that film [unintelligible], but he appears to be talking about Lena Horne] when she was young and unknown. It was Stormy Weather. Have you seen it? You see Stormy Weather? [Kirkland responds, "um-hum."] [Unintelligible] They're all in there. Lena Horne, all [unintelligible], Armstrong

00:33:29 Mit Kirkland

Yeah, yeah.

00:33:39 Myland Brown

I went and got me to, ahh . . . it's probably why I never did go down to . . . I went to . . . I went to the Playboy Club when I worked in the state of New York. I worked with the state [unintelligible]. I went to Washington, DC, I have to go up there and hung out at the Copacabana in New York City.

And the last time I went to the Copacabana, this guy, the crooner, he sound like . . . he was a real crooner . . . I thought it was Bing Crosby.

Uh. I apologize. Will this be on? [quick cut to next scene]

34:27

When I had a tumor right here. I had a tonsillectomy. And I had cataract surgery [unintelligible, 34:36-34:40]

And [?] said, "you had all this?" And I said, "wasn't none of your business, you ain't no doctor."

And I go up to the doctor for [unintelligible, 34:49—34:50]. I said, I said y'all . . . y'all take medicine. You don't know what it's for but y'all just take it. I've never been that way. If I'm still here now. [unintelligible, 34:56-34:58].

[unintelligible, 34:58-35:05].

See, I got to find a former student, the President of Wilberforce in Ohio, the Vice President was one of my former students. The President of [unintelligible, 35:13] that's one of my students.

See ya, man, I don't take no stuff. If I people sent for me to what happened at 9:00?

[Unintelligible, 35:17-35:20] And I don't take no stuff. And White people [unintelligible, 35:21-35:24]

They done called me and said, "Dr. Brown, will you to court with me and my son?" "For what?" He said, "he was shoplifting at Target. So somebody had told me to contact you."

I said . . . I said, "where your son? Go get a red hat on, put on a shirt and tie.

[Unintelligible, 35:49-35:47]

Well, he said, "[unintelligible, 36:01-36:03]." That's all she wrote.

All they got was Youthful Offender Status.

[Unintelligible, 36:10-36:12]

So just like that commercial, I think by E. F. Hutton, it said, "When E. F. Hutton spoke, everybody listens." But I'll tell you, actually, I'm Hutton, too. [laughing]

Ask him . . .

END of Video