

JAMES E. BOGGS

I came here in 1937, and I came here on the freight train as most people were doing during those days. I was 18 going on 19. I graduated from high school in Bessemer, Alabama in 1937. I had brothers and uncles in Detroit. This was in the period when it was the Great Depression. The way people would travel mostly at that time, you were a hobo. Black and white and everything else. You had a very tough time being a hobo at that time primarily because they had had the Scottsboro case down south; and it was a question of, if they caught black and whites hoboing together, they was just going to beat the hell out of Blacks. It was tough. Nevertheless myself and one of my friends from Alabama, he was from my hometown of Marion Junction, which is below Selma, him and I got on the freight train and hoboed up north. We had nothing but what we had on our backs, that's all. Didn't even have a change of clothes which we learned out later after we hoboed some more that you always take along several pair of clothes. I had about 50 cents, he had about 50 cents. We ran out of money the second day.

I came in on a train from Toledo. Got off at the Ford River Rouge Plant, and I walked down Michigan Avenue to downtown Detroit, asking the police in Dearborn and all down that route where was Theodore and Hastings. That's where my uncle was living. I come to 940 Theodore, early in the day in June, 1937. This is the first time I had ever been to a big city. I had been to cities like in Alabama, but they wasn't nothing like Detroit. Detroit was the first big city I'd ever been to. My brothers were here. I had two brothers here and my uncle lived here. My uncle was the first Black person that worked at Budd Wheel over here on Charlevoix. So all of us thought we was going to get a job over there. I don't

know why we thought we would. We didn't get none. That's the year I came to Detroit--1937.

There's Depression all over. So what do you do? You get a job washing cars or like bums do now. Or somebody picks you up and you go out in the country somewhere and work in cabins where people had their summer cabins. I had never heard about that before until I come here. Or you'd do a little painting with somebody. Get about \$3 for a room to paint in those days. But mainly I went to car washing places. Weren't many Blacks working in the auto industry at all. Ford was the one where Blacks worked and they worked in the foundry. I used to have a cousin working at Ford. Even at that time, they was big shots. Big shots because they was always the ones who had a paycheck, getting about 25 to 26 dollars a week. At that time it was lots of money. Most people had them 10, 11 and 12 dollar a week jobs.

I went and worked on the Works Progress Administration. I worked on Orangelawn, Greenlawn, Cherrylawn, Southfield, State Street and all those streets, digging the curbstones for they put in the curbs and put in cement streets cause most all the streets was dirt roads in those days.