

JOHN GRAVES

Spartanburg, South Carolina, District No. 4.

Interviewed by Caldwell Sims

Union, S.C. (2/27/37)

Edited by: R.V. Williams

Most everybody knows my name. You gotta help me. Oh, yeah, that's what I goes by. It's Brack; they call me Ole Uncle Brack.

"Look out, over there!" said a negro who was standing nearby. "Uncle Brack, you know you have got more names than that. Why, everywhere you goes, they call you a different name."

"Shut up, you sassy-mouth nigger!" Uncle Brack waved his stick as the younger negro moved out of its reach. Uncle Brack walks with two sticks nearly all the time. He is bent almost double.

"He the greatest nigger rascal a-going", Uncle Brack said. "He just dreams all the time, and dreams don't never amount to nothing. The dreams that he carries on with in the daytime are what makes him tell so many lies. The idea, talking like I have a different name everywhere I go, when I don't go anywhere. Why, I can't hardly hobble to the store. They must help me. I took down sick in November. Mr. Rice sent me things. You government folks ain't sent me as much as Mr. Rice and the good white folks who like me.

I was born ten years when Freedom came out. Been seventy-odd years since Freedom, ain't it, Cap? Dr. Jim Gibbs was mighty good to me. You see that I'm going about now. Dr. Gibbs came from Aiken to Union and set up a drug store where Cohen's is now. Dr. Gibbs was a Charleston man, but I am a Kentucky darky. Dr. Gibbs brought me from Kentucky to Charleston when I was five years old. My ma was the one that they bought. Dr. Gibbs' wife was a Bohen up in Kentucky. When Dr. Gibbs fetched his wife to Charleston, he bought my ma from his wife's pa, and she fetched me along too.

It is ten o'clock before I can creep. That's the reason that I have to beg. Wasn't for my age, I wouldn't ask nobody for nothing. The Lord spared me for something and I carry on the best that I can. Doctor says he couldn't do no good. That was five years ago the first time I took down.

Doctors study money too much. I trust the Lord, He's spared me to this day. I can't hardly walk, and I just can't bear for nothing to touch this foot. I have to use two sticks to walk.

Uncle Brack punched his foot with a stick; then looked up and saw two negro girls approaching. As the girls got opposite Uncle Brack, he threw his stick in front of them and they exclaimed, "Is that you, Uncle Brack? How did you get up here?"

Uncle Brack replied, "I never meant for you to get by me. Just 'because I'm old, ain't no reason for you not speaking to me." As the girls walked on, Uncle Brack said, "I flirts with all the colored gals, and I also have a passing word for the white ladies as they go by.

I used to work at the baker shop over there when Mr. James' children were little saplings. I'm going on eighty-six and those big boys raise their hats to me. White people has respect for me because I ain't never been in jail. I know how to carry myself, and I expect to die that way if I can. A little child who just could talk good gave me a penny this morning. I used to read. I learnt to read in Aiken, when school first broke out to the colored people. Northern people taught me to read long time ago. Now my eyes are dim.