

EmJ2 – Emmett Johnson, “Wonderbread Route Salesman”

Transcript: pp. 11-14

Time-Line: Decade VI, Local and National Events, Points of National Interest, 1957, “Civil Rights Act.”

EJ: ...Like I said, I left Levitz to go work for Wonder Bread. I worked for Wonder Bread. I was the first black route salesman for Wonder Bread...I worked for Wonder Bread for about four years and I came into a lot of segregation and when I worked for Wonder Bread and I was a route salesman--...
I just delivered the bread. I just sold the bread to stores. And cupcakes. I sold cupcakes and stuff. Doughnuts, the Hostess cakes and all that. And I experienced in some of the stores that I had to go into and I would deliver my product and a lot of storeowners--. I worked for Wonder Bread. You got your Sunbeam, you got Drake Cakes. We were all going to the store at the same time and if my bill was like twelve-fifty, he would take it and take both guys and he would pay them and give them dollar bills and he would give them whatever amount the twelve-fifty would pay them. And me, he would take my balance and he would take and count me pennies. He would give me twelve dollars and fifty cents worth of pennies. I experienced that kind of segregation...Well, I ran into a lot of problems where I would go into a store and have to use the bathroom and he would tell me that the bathroom was broke and I would see white people

go into the bathroom and use the bathroom and they would tell me, "It's out of order." I experienced this.

I: Here in Bridgeport?

EJ: Here in Bridgeport. Even with the company, when I first started, they'd go on my truck. You're responsible for your load on your truck. You're responsible for every penny on your truck. They'd go on my truck at night and steal stuff off my truck. One week I would be short thirty-five dollars and I know that I'm a mathematician and counted good. It's anybody in the company. They would steal stuff off my truck at night. That went on for about a year until one guy came over. He felt sorry for me and he told me what to do. To lock my doors and that way you won't be able to get on my truck. My truck would be in the barn, in the garage and I'm the only one with a locked truck. Everybody, their trucks is open. This is their way of trying to get me to quit and I wouldn't dare quit. I had the longest route in the bakery. The average guy in the bakery went out forty-one stops, thirty-nine stops. I had eighty stops...

Twice as much as they had. I would get up in the morning at five-thirty and go in the bakery and go on my route at six o'clock and I would come home at seven o'clock at night. Six-thirty, seven o'clock at night. And the majority of those drivers would be in and out by two-thirty, three o'clock. I had twice as many stops, but that didn't stop me. I was determined that I'm capable with that job and I can do the job. And the saddest thing when I left and quit the bakery after they hired four more minorities and

my route, that I had to deliver my product, they put four trucks on that route. The route that I had, they put four trucks on that route...

The route that I had been doing by myself...you were paid a bonus. You were getting a bonus on what you sold. And you had to learn how to maneuver and make sure that you put the right product in the right places. If a store's not open on Saturday or Sunday, you don't put any quantity in that store. If a store's open Saturday and Sunday, this is where you put the quantity at because if the store's open Saturday and Sunday, they've always got people in and out the store. And they're always going in Sunday to buy the bread and cake for the kids to go to school with. To fix their lunch with. So you got to learn. Nobody taught you stuff like this. You had to learn it on your own. And this is what, took me a couple of weeks to find out. Nobody would tell you. They wouldn't tell you anything. They wouldn't tell you nothing. They wouldn't tell you anything because they didn't want me there in the first place. As sad as it seems, before I was hired for that job, all the white guys had to come together and decide whether they wanted me to work or not. As sad as it seems, in the state of Connecticut. I would see them doing something like that down in the southern states, but as sad as it seems, in the state of Connecticut...

I was there four years and then after they hired a couple more minorities and then I got out. I told them what I had experienced and I told them what to look for and how to keep their record

clean. The main thing is you've got to have a good work record and a good driving record. If you don't have a good work record and a good driving record, then they can lay you off; they want to get rid of you. But if you come to work, have a good work record and a good driving record and then I taught them how to move this stuff around. Different stores were open on the weekend and how you could make money. But nobody would teach you that. Nobody taught you that. You have to learn on your own because they didn't want me there in the first place.