

## The Mabel Hampton Tapes

February 25, 1999

These tapes were made in the years 1976-1988 approximately. For the majority of the tapes, the setting was the home of Joan Nestle, Deborah Edel and the Lesbian Herstory Archives which was also the home of Mabel Hampton from 1986-1989, the time of her death. After Lillian Foster's death in 1978, Ms. Hampton frequently stayed at the archives, having her own key and using it as a base for her work in the community and her many trips to Atlantic City. In 1987, Ms. Hampton moved in with Lee Hudson and Joan Nestle and the archives, having grown too ill to keep her apartment in the Bronx. The tape with Lillian Foster was made in 1976 at the Bronx home of Ms. Hampton and Ms. Foster.

Several more tapes exist and are housed at the archives that have not been transcribed and several other tapes have been made by other people and are in their possession. There are also several video tapes of Ms. Hampton and many snapshots. The Lesbian Herstory Archives is the home of the Mabel Hampton Special Collection. (LHEF, Inc., POB 1258, NYNY10116, ph 718-768-3953, fax 718-768-4663. Joan Nestle can be reached directly at 212-873-3765 or e-mail [Joannestle@aol.com](mailto:Joannestle@aol.com)) A complete bibliography of the archives' holdings of the life of Mabel Hampton is in process.)

The tapes were transcribed by Sara Atatimur, a blind woman who was an activist in both the lesbian community and the disabled community. She was a student at Rutgers when she was killed in a traffic accident in 1989. The Open Meadows Foundation made the transcriptions possible with a grant of 1200.00 in 1986.

I started making these tapes in the mid 70s when I knew very little about oral history formal procedures. Thus at times I ask stupid questions, am too intrusive and too abrupt in beginnings and endings. But these tapes are also the story of our relationship with all its complexities.

Please give credit to this resource in the following way: The Mabel Hampton Special Collection/Lesbian Herstory Archives/Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation, Inc.

Joan Nestle



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INTERVIEW WITH MABEL HAMPTON (M)

Interviewer: Joan Nestle (J)

Interviewer: Deb Edel (D)

J: You were seven?

D: No, you remember back to five and six.

J: You remember back to five and six.

M: Sure, I do. I was around with my grandmother. My mother died when I was a month old. Now, I tell you, the reason I have to switch over here was: my mother was poisoned. Now that is another story.

So, my grandmother raised me and--my mother's younger sister--they--raised me. I went to school in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The school had all white and colored in there. And I used to--gramma had pigs, vegetables, chickens, turkeys--all kinds of things--(dog barks). Libby,



Mabel Hampton

Page 2

ain't nobody after you! (Dog continues to bark). Oh, no, it came back.

J: Chickens?

M: Chickens, turkeys. And we lived in a house where there was--something--"What do you call a house where it's all on one floor?"

J: Like a railroad flat?

M: No, No, No, No, No. It's like the colonial houses--something like that--the rooms all around.\* And it was a very, very nice house. I used to go to church, Sunday school, and I went to school.

One time, they vaccinated me, and gramma didn't like it. So gramma whipped me and put some of that--what do you call it--suet from the chimney on my arm and made me stay in.

Most I liked about it was--across--in the back of us and on each side was people with children. We had so much fun runnin' around, you know. I had a birthday once--the last one--and that birthday I took--it must have been a dozen or more children--and went huntin' for grapes. Everybody was lookin' for us, and we was out in somebody's

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\* Perhaps she means a ranch house. (SA)



Mabel Hampton

Page 3

orchard lookin' for grapes. And grapes and--what's those-- apples. I see myself now, clamb up on a fence, stealin' some apples, and the woman caught me. (Laughs). I got out of there. So, they found us that night, and I got whipped, but I didn't mind it because all of us girls.

There was only one boy in the whole thing. And he grew up--he died when he was twenty-one. He had--I can't remember what--but I heard about it, and I was in New York when it happened. So, this boy, he was adopted by a white woman, and she gave him violin lessons. And, I would say he was my boyfriend. He'd come, and he'd take me to Sunday school every Sunday mornin'.

Let me see, what else happened in there? Across the field from us--we were near a railroad station. This big, (or haul or hole) big hall. I went to school, and the school is-- now it is known as a teachers' college. Then, it was very pretty.

We'd go to school. Gramma would fix my hair--my hair was kind of long. And she'd put nice dresses on me 'cause I had an aunt in New York, and this aunt would send fine clothes up there to me. But she wouldn't come up. After I graduated from one small--I guess I was about six or seven years old.



Mabel Hampton

Page 4

One day--I got hooked up--my other aunt made me go into the chicken coop and steal the eggs. And I used to go in there and steal those eggs for her, and I love eggs 'til today. And she would give me some, and gramma said, "Who went in there?" So, one day, the dern chickens got mad at me bein' in there and they dropped the--it was a door that the chickens go in and out of--and I was small enough to get in and out of there because--I was born--my head was big as a silver dollar and you could put me in a pint coffee pot. I was so small. Gramma once, she was makin' the bed or doing the chair or something, and shook me out in the yard. Yeah. It didn't bother me though. I'd imagine, I don't know. I was so small. She was busy working and forgot that I was layin' in the chair on the pilla and covers. And there I rolled out. Gramma was very nice. Charmin' lookin' woman too.

So, I went through that period. I used to go to Sunday school. I went to two Sunday schools--the Presbyterian and the Baptist--and I used to recite. And, the last time I recited, it was Christmas time. The Santa Claus was supposed to come in--one Santa Claus--and then Santa Claus was all drunk and all of them come in and scared me to



Mabel Hampton

Page 5

death.\* I hollered--I hollered--and gramma took me off the stage. That growlin' old Santa Claus and things rushin' in on me like that--I couldn't take it.

I guess, a little while later, my gramma--it was Christmas time--and she would kill the hogs and things like that. the men would come around and they would help her, and she would take her meat and stuff next door to where we live at--there was a yard in between--up on the top floor. It was a private house and we'd take and store--or she'd take and store--all the meat up there. See? Girl, that was good meat. I'm tellin' you, you could smell those eggs and bacon a mile away. They were eggs and bacon. They wasn't nothin' like we got now.

So, I just love to eat. I used to get my plate--and chicken!--oooh, gramma could cook some chicken. I never would be able to cook chicken like gramma's chicken.

J: Chicken is pretty good.

M: But they were good chickens there, you know.

I lived across the street [from where] I went to school--Teachers' College, It's known [as] now. And I had--

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\* Cf. with the story on the LHA video of Mabel wherein she says that Santa Claus came in before she got to say her line. (SA)



Mabel Hampton

Page 6

the children I played with was--the schoolteacher's name was Miss van Owen. She had a house, not far from ours, and she was married. So, she was very nice to me. She taught me a lot of things.

One day--one Monday--I be skippin' on something--one day I didn't get up so early--I don't remember if I had a cold or what--and I heard a terrific crash in the kitchen. So, I spring out of the bed, went to the kitchen: gramma, she had a stroke, she was layin' on the floor. So I called the people next door, down the walk, and they came, called the doctor, doctor said she had a stroke. So then we had to phone New York to get this aunt to come up. Never cared too much for her. She wasn't nice. So, anyhow, she came. And gramma lived one week after she had that stroke. And my mamma's younger aunt--I'll never forget it--was combin' my hair, and I looked over at gramma layin' in the bed. It was in the morning. The sun was up and everything. And, all of a sudden, she never said too much; she couldn't talk, see. I kept looking at her. I knew something was wrong with her. She looked at me and I looked at her. And when my aunt got through combin' my hair, I kept watching gramma in the bed. So, she went to see gramma. Gramma had gone away.

I didn't know what to do then. I was a big girl, goin'



Mabel Hampton

Page 7

on eight years of age. So, the other aunt had come from New York, so she called and told her mamma had passed. So, all of that ended that. So, my aunt come in and got the doctor and got everything. And the other aunt came and they had the funeral and all. She said she had to go back.

Now, you see, there's something in here. That's why, everybody who writes, there's something they cannot tell. Of course, now, people don't give a dern what you tell. You can tell anything you want. They just read it and that's the end of it. I couldn't do it.

So, my aunt got things together and said she had to come back to New York to her husband. Now, there's the tale over here. So, I called her my sister, but she was my aunt's younger sister, my mother's younger sister. So, I came back--I never forget it--on the train she gave me a sandwich--liver--and it had spoiled, you know. See, 'cause I hadn't been used to eatin' food like that. All our food was fresh; mamma grew out in the garden. So, what they did with all the chickens and things like that, that I never knew. Of course, my aunt, I guess she took everything, and then besides, she was runnin' around with the boys--the men, you know. So, I guess they all took everythin'.

So, across the street, there was my little friends,



Mabel Hampton

Page 8

Dollbaby and Pattie Harris. It was a boy and a girl. And then Anna Mae Thomas,. Oh, she was a sweet girl. Boy, she was sweet, she had braids way down here. And her and I was always runnin' around.

J: Still down south?

M: What do you mean?

J: Where did they live?

M: They lived across the street from me in Winston-Salem. Still in Winston-Salem. I don't get out of Winston-Salem until after gramma--

J: When you were eating the liver on the train.

M: Yeah, I was eatin' the liver on the train comin' in. So, my aunt gets mad at me because I wouldn't eat it. Okay, I wouldn't eat it, I wouldn't eat it. So, when we gets to New York--I can't remember how we came in. Whether we came in Pennsylvania Station? I don't know. I can't remember that too well.

But anyhow, I know when a man came up to my aunt and she said, "This is Mabel. Mabel Hampton. This is my niece." He was tall, dark, and had the most beautifullest wavy hair. He looked like he was Indian or something. He was an East Indian. And she says, "Now Mabel, this is your Uncle George. He's a minister." Because they knew I



Mabel Hampton

Page 9

wanted names and all that because I was in school. And those people there--they taught us--they taught me--there was quite a few colored in there. They taught us like they taught the white girls. They didn't divide the work like that. So, I knew right from wrong and a little bit of everything.

So, he says, "How old is she?" And I think she says, "In May, she'll be eight years old." I didn't like him. He was a minister. I didn't like him. He was a handsome man. Those foreigners, when they're good lookin', they're good lookin'.

So, he says, "Come on now, we got a lot to do." Now, when he gets to the house, my aunt let me sleep in the--how do I say it now--I slept in the one room where I think the piano was. Now, this place was at 52 West Eight Street--downtown. So, and you go down a few steps to the basement, and that's where she lived at. So, he found out that I could sing, so he had his church in the front. The kitchen was one one side. You come in, you go down four steps, you go into the door, and there was something like a livingroom. But he fixed it up like a church when it come time to preach on Sunday. And, after he preached, he would--

What's on your mind?

J: Go ahead.



Mabel Hampton

Page 10

M: (Evidently speaking about a pet), You know what's on her mind?

J: No, go ahead.

M: She wants to get up on my lap.

J: Well, she's going to have to not. Go ahead.

After he preached the--

M: After he would preach, then I would have to take it all down. I had to wash dishes, and I never went out anywhere.

So, then, they fixed up. My aunt got me in school. Up until five years ago, the woman who taught me is still alive. See, and you know--oh, that's another part. She was very nice. I can't quite name her name but it's written in some of those papers I got home.

So, I started going to school. So then, I'll never forget one word as long as I live. I could not remember that word. And she tried to teach me to remember that word, but I couldn't grasp it. And that word was "went"--w-e-n-t. And, one night, he was trying to tell me about this "went", and he got mad and took his shoe off and beat me all in the face. My mouth was all swollen like that. We didn't come to the rape part yet. So, I think I remembered it, but I never liked the word.



Mabel Hampton

Page 11

So, he--my aunt went out one day. And he raped me. I said to myself, "I've got to leave here." He wouldn't let me sleep in the bed. In there they had a coal--a place where you put coal at--and he put a blanket down and made me lay down there. So, this day, I got tired of that. So, I went out, with nothing on but a skirt--no, it was a dress--and it had, you put your arms in--what you call--a jumper dress. And I went out with this jumper dress on. And I walked and I walked and I walked and I walked.

So, I don't know how that happened--it may come to me--somebody gave me a nickel. That was a turnin' point in my life, that nickel. So, I started to walk some more, and it looked like to me, I walked right around in a ring and come right back to Eighth Street. When I recognized where I was at, I went in another direction. Don't fret. And I walked and I walked, and finally I come to a thing--now, I didn't know nothing about this--as I call it--a thing in the ground, in the sidewalk, and people was goin' down there. That was the subway. So, I goes down there, and I see this woman put something in there.

Now, wait, I'm ahead of the story. I went and sat down, and a woman said to me. It was early enough--it wasn't too early--about three o'clock. And she says,



Mabel Hampton

Page 12

"aren't you Miss ----", somebody, she called her name, "little girl? What are you doin' down here?" So, evidently, this girl ran away a lot. So, I said, "Yes." She says, "Here's a nickel. You go back uptown. Come back to Harlem." I don't know this. So, I goes down stairs, seen the people put the nickels in there, and I went on in and, when the train come up, I sat down. Now, to me, I'm gettin' away from Eighth Street.\*

When the man says, "All out," I seen the people all get up and come out. Now, we was not--we was not in New York, we were in Jersey City. Grove Street. I come upstairs where I seen--I not use to playin' with children--I didn't know what to do. I walked and walked, and finally I come to a park. Sounds like a fairy tale 'cause it's so--

J: Were you scared? What were you feelin'?

M: No, I never was scared of anything, Joan. I always had a guardian angel ta direct me. I wasn't goin' to go back to that place and have him pull on me and try to do things to me. And he would get mad with his wife and beat her. That was my aunt. And she was as crazy as he was.

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\* According to her stories on the video, the precipitating event for Mabel leaving her aunt's house was an incident at school after which she was threatened with a whipping, not the rape by her uncle. (SA)



Mabel Hampton

Page 13

So, I goes into this park. This was Grove Street. I walked and walked, and I seen this park. So, I gets--I seen all these children playin'--white and black, all of the playin' havin' a good time--the swings swingin'. So, I goes on in and looks at them. So, an Italian girl says to me, "Come on. Get on the swing. Where do you live at?" I looked at her for a second. She says, "What is your name?" I says, "Mabel." Naturally, I'd been schooled enough, I knew. I could speak English good. So, she says, "Come on, swing." I got on the swing, I says, "Don't like it. It makes my head swim." So, she says, "Okay." We went on something else and it went alright.

So it began to get dark, and I'm still out there swingin'. So, the girl comes to me and she says, "Where is your people." And she had another tall girl with her and some uncle or brother or something. So, she says, "Aren't you cold?" I says, "Yes." She says, "Wait a minute. I'll go home and get you a sandwich and bring you something to put on."

So while she was gone--she comes back with the sandwich, and I started eatin' it. She says, "Now, tell me where you're goin' because my brother will take you." She must have been in her teens. I says, "Well, my aunt told me



Mabel Hampton

Page 14

to stay here until she come and get me." She says, "Where're you from?" I says, "New York." So she says, "Well, alright." She calls her brother. She says, "Tony, you go that way, and I'll go this way. You go after the cop and I'll go after to see if I can find the aunt."

So, and I sit there and ate the sandwich. She had brought me a Red Riding Hood cape and put it around me. I thought, "Gee, she's nice. She give me a sandwich and put a cape on me." So, I sat there.

Now, I began to worry because the cop would come or the woman--whoever she got. So, she was mo' lucky to me than the boy was because she brings a woman back with her. Her name was Bessy White. She was a young woman--somethin', in her twenties, somethin' like that. So she says, "Where you from? How you come to be here?" I told her the same story. I said, "My aunt told me to sit there until she went some shopping." "Where you from?" I says, "New York."

Well, we looked down the street--I looked down the street--no "we"--and from the distance of about four blocks I seen this boy comin' and I knew that was a cop because I'd seen them before--seen them cops walk around, you know. So, Bessy says, "Come, I'll take you home." And she said to the other girl--she said--"if the woman comes, bring her to my



Mabel Hampton

Page 15

house. I live on Seedler Street." That's Jersey City. She says, "All right."

So, I was so glad that she got me, because I knew that, if the cop got me, he would take me back to New York. And I'd get beat very badly because he always was peckin' on my backside--knockin', slappin' me around. And he used to take me in back of the court to sing, and the people used to throw out nickels and dimes, and he took the money.

Alright? So, we disappeared. Now that ends her right there.

And this woman carried me to her house, and she says, "Mamma, here's a girl that's got lost. Help her out." Now, I got to continue with, "My aunt left me there." In other words, I knew everything from my age right straight on down, and I kept silent. See.

Alright. When we walked in, it was a private house, we go up the front steps. On the one side was Italians; on the other side was Italians. And the kids and all--marvelous. So, she says, "Are you hungry?" I says, "Yes, ma'am." She gave me eggs--scrambled eggs--three eggs--rolls--you know, I must have been hungry because I ate almost a whole loaf of bread. I always could eat. Now, it's doing me very bad that I can't eat so much. See.

So, alright. She says--and I have this little red cape



Mabel Hampton

Page 16

on and this blue jumper dress. She says, "Well, come on in, and, as I went in, I seen a young woman sitting left of where I come in at." I say to myself, "That is a good lookin' woman." I always was admiring some woman. Oh, and she was. She had beautiful hair, and she looked just like an angel. So, she get up out of the chair--she's kind of tall, I guess about five eight--and she says, "You come with me. You stay with me."

So, I went upstairs with her, and she bathed me, and she said, "We'll have to find you clothes." Always talked very softly. And she says, "You'll sleep with me." I was glad of that. Oh, yeah!

So, I went and stayed with them. The other sister went on about--she went lookin' for my aunt. I knew she'd never find her. See, as I went to school, you know I knew my name. I knew everything about me. I kept quiet. I kept quiet for twenty years.

So, Miss White was a very nice woman. She had a (sounds like)

bitchy of a husband, all he wanted to do was put his hand up your dress. And, in those days,, the women swear it was the girls were fresh. Old men have always been fresh. They don't give a damn what you are or who you are. They feel you one time.



Mabel Hampton

Page 17

So, I made lots of friends. And, after I was there about a month, they put me in school--Number 32, in Jersey City. Now, that ends that part.

D: Was that family white or black?

M: Hah?

D: The Smiths--the Whites, were they white or black

M: What do you mean?

J: The family you were with.

D: The family you were living with, were they black people or white people?

M: They were black people.

D: So, it was an integrated neighborhood--

M: Their name was White.

D: It was an integrated neighborhood then.

Blacks and whites together.

M: I guess so. There were Italians and all around there, and they'd bring in food and everything. Oh, yeah. See, I never knew about what people holler about now. I've always been treated from a child nice by anybody.

So, I went to 32 School and I met a lot of girls and all like that. Then, oh, I told Ellen--her name was Ellen White. I told Ellen--she was a light, brown-skin woman. Very



Mabel Hampton

Page 18

strikin'. She was quiet. And, I think--did she play the piano?--yeah. And, she told mother, she says, "We'll keep her." She says, "I like Mabel. We'll keep her." She says, "I like Mabel. I'll keep her." At night time, when I would go to bed, she'd put her arm around me and hold me tight. I got used to that. That was grand. Oh, boy!

So, I told Helen her father [was] always puttin' his hand up my dress. So, she gets after father, [and] he says, "So-and-so lied," because he drinks, see. So, one day, he was going to get the stick and kill me, but she took me away and carried me off to her girlfriend's house. And there I stayed, so he didn't come up there. Well, to make a long story short, I weathered that storm. And after--let's see, what else happened. Now comin' on out, see.

J: Right, where was her girlfriend?

M: Her girlfriend lives a couple of blocks down, and her name was Miner--the last name. And I stayed there with her a couple of weeks until pappa got over his anger--'cause I told on him, see. And mamma believed him. Yeah, his wife believed him.

So, the next thing happened. I graduated from school in eighth grade.

D: You were there a long time.



Mabel Hampton

Page 19

M: What?

D: You stayed there a long time.

M: Yes. And after I graduated, I met a family. They was--this woman took in children, and--I went back to Ellen--whenever pop would do anything, I run away again. [I] was scared that he would hit me. So after I-- (dog barks) Ford God sakes. Oh, brother. (It appears the tape is shut off for a bit).

I--then I met this woman. Oh, no. Pop got after me, and she took--she--and this girl married. They were always after her, "Why don't you marry? Why don't you marry?"--her people. So Ellen married this Benny Harris, I think his name--I'm not sure. I forgot it. So, all this was in Jersey City. And he took me to this woman's house. And she had white children there, and they were--you know--I helped her in the house with the children.

So, time went on. Not too much happened there. But Ellen became pregnant about two years later, and I went back to the Whites and I stayed there for about a couple of months. And after Ellen passed away from childbirth, Benny took the baby and me to this woman's house. And she had white children, colored children, and she was very nice.

She had a boy there by--I can't think of his name now--



Mabel Hampton

Page 20

I got it wrote down somewhere. She--you know--she take in the children and I took--helped her like that. So, the boy and I became very fond of each other. And he was a nice guy. I guess he was about nineteen or twenty--something like that.

So, something said to me--and I didn't know about--I'd forgotten about how old I was. Something said to me, "Why don't you find out just where you come from and who['re] your parents." Okay, now I'm gonna find out. So, I said to this--can't think of her name. It's wrote down. (Dog Barks. Tape is stopped).

She got to holler at everybody?

J: (Offers something to eat).

M: Uhmmm. I was too well raised to refuse.

So, what happened, I went to live with this woman. Benny says, "You can take care of the baby and help her." I says, "All right." So--

J: You were going to find out who you were, you said.

M: Find out where I come from. I know all that. But I want to find out who this man was that treated me so bad--my uncle and all of that.

D: 'cause you hadn't forgotten, really. You just



Mabel Hampton

Page 21

were keeping it silent. they do.

M: I hadn't forgot noting! There's nothing I forget 'til this day. 'cause, when you're treated bad, you don't forget. Okay. York. There I began to question

So, Benny took me after Ellen passed, and he took me to this woman's house, and we both stayed there. The woman was very nice. right I trailed him by--'cause I was a

So, meantime, after I was there for quite a number of months, the baby passed away. I went to a church, and I

D: The baby also. ge Mills. So, he said he would

M: Yeah. So that ended that right there. find him.

D: The order must have been very upsetting, because you were very close to the woman, Ellen. sent was about two

M: Yeah. So, I stayed on with the lady. So I said to her one day, I says, "I wanna find out." Seems like my mind had slipped. I wanted to find out everything I could. you could have bought her for a dime. She thought I

So, she told me, "Yeah." So, the boy and I--she gives us money--we gets on the train and goes to-- (dog barks) What was the name of this place we went to? Orange, New Jersey. Salem. He had killed a white man. In them days,

(About the dog) I tell you, she's a bad girl. So, after--they don't allow dogs in this house, do they?



Mabel Hampton

Page 22

D & J: Yes, they do.

M: I ought to find you a second home.

So, let's see, now how do I bring this in? Oh, this <sup>we</sup> boy and I went to New York. There, I began to question people on Eight Street. So, after I questioned about nine or ten people, it come out that my aunt had moved to New Jersey. Alright. I trailed him by--'cause he was a reverend, minister.

So, comes back home. And I went to a church, and I think this minister knew George Mills. So, he said he would find him. Sure enough, he find him. He told me that my aunt was still alive.

So, I left my name and address. And then about two weeks later--can't think of the woman's name to save my life who had the children--she came in, she said, "Mabel, your aunt is here." I said, "Hey." So I--when I walked in the door, you could have bought her for a dime. She thought I was dead, see. There he stood. And I said, "Mister, I feel like killing you. But, no."

You see, I'd heard from my aunt that he was wanted in Winston-Salem. He had killed a white man. In them days, they start lookin' for you. Okay. And he and her had disappeared to New York.



Mabel Hampton

Page 23

J: Oh, that's why they came to New York in the first place.

M: That's why they come to new York in the first place because we--

D: But you didn't realize that when you were little.

*I remembered*  
M: Wait a minute. I knew it. Because, one night before gramma died, my aunt came to her house--came to our house in Winston-Salem, and I was asleep, but they woke me up talkin'. And she demanded money so she could come back and take him away--so she could take him from Winston-Salem to New York. My gramma didn't want to give it to them, but she raised so much hell, she gave it to them, and before I could get out of bed next mornin', she was gone. Now, I knew all of this. Nobody didn't have to tell me, I knew it. But I kept silent.

So, my aunt was sitting there in the chair. She says to me, "I thought you were dead." I says, "I know you did, but I'm very much alive." She says, "Why did you leave?" I says, "Why should I stay? You didn't want me. Your husband didn't want me." She says, "Well, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do about it." I says, "There's nothin' to do 'cause I'm a woman now." I says, "I'm twenty-one."



So, she says, "No, you're not. You're only eighteen."  
Well, you could have bought me for a quarter. I done went  
over so much ground, I thought I was thirty.

So, she talked. She says, "Will you come to see me?"  
I says, "Yeah, I'll come to see you." She says, "We're in  
Orange, New Jersey." I says, "I'll come to see you." So,  
she says, "You wouldn't come and live with us?" I says,  
"no, I won't come and live with you. I don't need to live  
with nobody. I got my own self right here with these  
people, and they're lovely to me. I grow," I said, "With  
Miss white and did fine." She said, "But your mother would  
have wanted." I says, "My mother wouldn't want anything."

I says, "Yes, and here's another thing," comin' to the  
end of the story. I said, "Now listen here, who is my  
father? And what was my mother's name?" I knew a little  
bit of it. She says, "Well, you see, your father is from  
Greensville\*, North Carolina. He had eight brothers," and I  
forget how many sisters he had. She says, "And he used to  
come in on the visits." I says, "Okay, he used to come in  
on the visits. Is he my father? One of those brothers?"  
She says, "yes." I says, "Which one?" I think she said his

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\* You may want to check to see if she meant Breensboro  
or Greenville, NC. (SA)



Mabel Hampton

Page 25

name was Joseph. George or Joseph. So, she says, "Your name is Rogers."

"How is it my mother died so young?" She said, "Who told you that." I said, "I heard that when I was little." She says, "Well, I don't know." She says, "But your mother was killed." I say, "How?" She say, "She was poisoned." I said, "Who poisoned her?" I knew she couldn't do nothin' to me in that woman's house, so I fired the questions at her. She says, "I don't know." She said, "I don't know, it was poison. It must have been somebody that was in love with your father." I said, "Was it you?" She says, "I loved him too." I says, "Then you poisoned your sister for him." "Well," she says, "I didn't say that." I says, "Well, I'm sayin' it."

So, she says, "You comin' to see us?" "Yes, I'll come and see you." That ended that right there. She walked out. Well, the people were so mad at me and they were so mad at her. "Why'd you talk so nice to her?" I said, "I'm after something." I knew my name.

(End of Side 1).



## INTERVIEW WITH MABEL HAMPTON (M)

Interviewer: Joan Nestle (J)

Interviewer: Deb Adel (D) *Edel*

Lillian Foster (L)

J: See, it's all in here. The tape is in here.

This is the microphone. Okay, now, here we go. Is it wound up?

M: You mean to tell me that we were sittin' at the table talking and this thing was on!

J: No, no. When you were just now inside. And we came in early. You were cleaning the table, okay? Now we want you to talk.

M: What am I gonna say.

D: You have lots of stories to tell, Mabel.

M: But I don't have nothing!

J: Yes, you do. Remember the story you told



Mabel Hampton

Page a2

about the girls' school?

M: Now, wait a minute. Wait a minute. Come down here and shoot my (inaudible).

J: Now, really, just talk about some of your experiences being a woman about town.

M: Now, this is tough. I've had so many experiences that I don't know them.

D: Well, before you could talk about that, you could tell a little bit about what Joan was like as a kid.

M: (Laughs). She gonna knock me out now for fair.

J: I'd rather hear what Mabel--I want to hear Mabel's stories.

D: It'll get her started.

M: You didn't even prepare me at all for anything.

J: That's good, so it will come spontaneously.

M: I've got some stories but I--

J: Remember the story you told us about--it was at a girls' school and they thought you had magic?

M: You know too much. I ain't gonna tell it. I'm not telling it. That, I'm not telling.

J: Tell about the theater.



Mabel Hampton

Page a3

M: What theater.

J: Your early days in the theater when you sang.  
When you were in the Village.

M: Oh. Oh, yeah, uhmhum. Well, I was in this  
show, and I meets this woman. She was about twenty-four or  
twenty-five. And then, I don't know, I liked her the minute  
I seen her. She was nice! She taught me how to dance, and  
she would take me home at night, and--

J: What year was this?

M: Oh, that was around nineteen-eighteen. And,  
she was my first sweetheart. And, we used to go out at  
night. After the show she'd take me to different places,  
and lots of things happened. We'd come back next morning.  
But one morning, we came back, and the girls pulled a fast  
one--they locked the door on us. The locked the door on us;  
we couldn't get in, see, without ringing the bell and the  
woman come to the door. So, we couldn't want to ring the  
bell.

So I decide I was goin' home. She didn't want me to  
go. So, I packed up the next morning, went back to Jersey  
City where I come from, and I got a job there a couple of  
days after. And she came over to get me. And everybody  
around there know'd that she was white and I was colored.



Mabel Hampton

Page a4

She drove a grey car. She drove a grey car to come up to get me, and she was the sweetest thing that ever walked.

She took me to Cony Island. And I danced over in Cony Island in a show there. You know, in the show. And she'd come back at night, get me, and bring me back to Jersey City.

Now, you don't want to know anymore. You're too foxy for me. You so foxy, it isn't funny, but I'm going to outfox you, see. I know what you after.

L: Well, you heard me, so I heard you.

N: Okay, you're listening. But you was in there too.

(Tape cuts).



Lillian Foster

Page 2

wonderful pair. I'll never regret it. But she's a little bit tough.

D: Where did you meet her?

L: I met her nineteen thirty-two, September the twenty-second. And we haven't never separated since in our whole life. Death will separate us. Other than that, I don't want it to be the end.

1932

D: What city did you meet in?

L: New York City.

J: Remember, you would tell stories of all the friends you had then? What it was like being lovers then?

L: And I had friends all over the city. And, I don't know. I always was a spoiled kid. And, I'm still a little spoiled but I'm a ol' spoiled lady, and at that time I was a young, spoiled kid.

J: Did you go to clubs and things?

L: I went to night clubs. I lived in night clubs in Atlantic City. And, I really enjoyed my life. And that will be the end of me--my life. This is my life.

J: Tell that story you told about the woman who walked in and asked, you know, about your husband.



Lillian Foster

Page 3

[sounds like Louistro]

L: A lady walked in once--Joe

(inaudible)'s wife--and she says, "You is a pretty neat girl. You have a beautiful little home, but where is your husband? And, at the same time, my friend come in the door with the key, and I said, "There is my husband." She said, "Now, you know, if that was your husband, you wouldn't have said it."

J: But you said it.

L: I said it.

J: You want to hear it now. All right, then we'll do--. Turn it off now. (Tape is shut off).



Lillian Foster

Page 3

[sounds like Louistro]

L: A lady walked in once--Joe

(inaudible)'s wife--and she says, "You is a pretty neat girl. You have a beautiful little home, but where is your husband? And, at the same time, my friend come in the door with the key, and I said, "There is my husband." She said, "Now, you know, if that was your husband, you wouldn't have said it."

J: But you said it.

L: I said it.

J: You want to hear it now. All right, then we'll do--. Turn it off now. (Tape is shut off).



Mabel Hampton

Page 33

comes on that thing. I'm going to break it.

Go ahead. Tell about what you were saying.

You were in a theater group with Josephine Baker and Iva  
[McCallion]. You knew what it was like then.

M: Oooh, wait a minute. That was the day.

This is still with the dancing.

J: Around nineteen-eighteen? Still the same

time?

# INTERVIEW WITH MABEL HAMPTON (M)

Interviewer: Joan Nestle (J)

Lillian Foster (L)

J: Just tell how it was different being a lesbian  
in the twenties.

M: I went to work in a family--two children, a  
man and his wife. The man was a doctor. She was the first  
woman I ever fell in love with. She loved me too.

I didn't know what it was all about, so one night, I  
was gettin' ready to go home, and she asked me would I stay  
all night with the kids. I phones back,  
(inaudible) stay. So, when she got ready to leave, she came  
in and kissed me. When she kissed me, I fainted dead away,  
the shock was so big. Now that's the first real love I ever  
had--ever known. That lasted for three solid years.

If that come on that thing--. You hear me, if that



Mabel Hampton

Page b2

comes on that thing, I'm going to break it.

J: Go ahead. Tell about what you were saying. You were in a theater group with Josephine Baker and Eva [Mc'Gaillion]. You knew--what it was like then.

M: Ooooh, wait a minute. Thaaaaaat was the day. This is still with the dancing.

J: Around nineteen-eighteen? Still the same time?

M: Not only Josephine Baker but there was--what's the child's name? What's that woman's name?

J: [Marlene Deitrik]?

M: No, she-- Lillian, what's that woman's name that straightened the hair? Walker?

J: Lena Horn.

M: What was her name? Walker. Wasn't her last name Walker?

L: Hundred and twenty-fifth Street?

M: No, she--the first--the woman that first started straightening hair.

L: Who's hair?

M: Colored people's hair, dear.

L: Yeah, up on a hundred and twenty-fifth street she was.



Mabel Hampton

Page b3

M: Oh, that's right. Well, anyhow. (Snaps  
or Nelia  
fingers). [Lilia] Walker. [Lilia] Walker.

L: Marion Walker.\*

M: Yeah, her daughter--

L: I'm all right.

M: Her daughter was named [Lilia] Walker. We all  
used to, from the show, go up to--

L: Girl that fell out in the school one day--

M: She fell out of there like gangbusters.

L: And couldn't get up. Their neighbor come home  
an hour later.

J: What was the name of the show?

M: Layin' on the floor. Hugh?

J: What was the name of the show?

M: It was a musical--"Come Along ['manda]." And  
then, there was, oh God, other different ones.

But anyhow, we went up to Lilia Walker--. All of them

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\* Checking a tape I have of Jewelle Gomez lecturing on  
lesbians in the Harlem Renaissance, I find a reference to a  
"Madam C.J. Walker", the first black woman millionaire, who  
made her fortune out of designing a way to straighten black  
women's hair. It's possible that the C stands for Celia,  
although Mabel seems to be referring to Madam C.J.'s  
daughter. In any event, Marion does not seem to be correct.  
(SA)



Mabel Hampton

Page b4

now--they're big stars then--some's dead and others wasn't. And we goes up to this house up on the hill. Beautiful! Oh, girl, it was beautiful there. And on the floor was nothin' but pillows. You didn't set in chairs; you set in pillows. And they had lights--something like that light, but it was circle, but it was 'round the--

L: The base of the wall (inaudible)

M: The base of the walls, see. And you sit on floors and you drink, and you hug and you kissed. You did anything you want that they bid you not to do. See, but you had to be known in order to get in.

J: Like a key club--

M: Deh, deh, deh, deh. And I was known, so I got in. It ain't what you know, it's who you know. And I got in by who I know. The woman in the gray car carried me in. See. And there we stayed there a couple of days. We had food. They had food, they'd bring--

J: It's like a hotel.

M: Yup. It was a house set up on the hill. And she had servants there. All the stars--Ethel Waters--all of them went there. But they were little folks then. They wasn't big, big people like there are now. See, fifty years later--



Mabel Hampton

Page b5

J: It was just beginning.

M: It was just beginning. And all of them was friends. And I danced at the--at the--just a moment, I'll recall the name of it.

L: (Inaudible)

M: No. Garden of Joy. The name of the club was The Garden of Joy. I'm trying to think of the man's name because, one night, they all was going up there. Aw, there was a bunch of them that were going. There was about eight or nine. And we got through dancin', it was about 2 o'clock in the morning. So, the girl that I was friendly with, she says--I says, "I have to go home and leave the landlady the key because she can't even get in."

So she says, "Oh, I'll go with you."

I says, "No, I don't want you to go," 'cause I'm used to running around--going around, all around. Boom, boom, boom. Down hundred and thirty-fifth, twenty-fifth street, nobody bothered me.

So, I goes on and let the woman in. She was waitin' for me. I locks the door, put the keys in my pocket and starts on back to the club of the Garden of Joy. hundred and forty-second Street, up on a hill. And just as I got on Lennox Avenue, between--that was a hundred and thirty-third



13  
38  
Mabel Hampton

Page b6

Street and Lennox Avenue--this man walks in front of me, and one in the back of me. He says, "Wait a minute."

I says, "Wait for what?" Now, he don't know where I'm going.

So he says, "You're coming with us."

I says, "I'm not coming with you." Both of them grabbed me and brought me back to a hundred and thirty-first Street. Now that's practically a half a block from where I opened the door for the landlady. And carries me up to this room in a private house. Makes me strip. 'cause, I tell you, these things has been going on since the Year One. Makes me strip, and he punched me.

He says, "How old are you?" I told him I was nineteen. He took my watch and took my ring. This girl had given me a ring. He took that. So he says--at that time, the doorbell--somebody knocked at the door--he opened the door, and a woman came in--tall, brown-skinned, very attractive lookin' woman. And he says, "Well, she'll do."

And she asks me, "Have you ever been with a man?"

I told her, "No."

So she says, "Well, okay. She'll be alright. She'll do. We'll take her along."

Now, she says, "Dress."



Mabel Hampton

Page b7

I put my clothes on. I don't say nothin' 'bout I'm meetin' friends or nothin'. So when I comes down, and we gets down into the street, we crosses over on the side where the school is on Lennox Avenue and a hundred and thirty-fifth Street--the school. And, you know then, there was a subway there. You went down the subway to go downtown. So, it was the downtown side. Isn't that the downtown side that I live on. 'cause I had to go down to a hundred and tenth Street, cross over, and come back up to a hundred and forty-fifth Street. So, when we get to the subway, the man's in front of me, and the man in back of me, and the woman, I don't know where she went and didn't care 'cause I was figurin'. I could always figure. I went down those stairs like Libby would leap out that window. Two, three steps at the time. And the man turned around, he seen me gone. The other man says, "She's gone downstairs."

In comes the train at the same thing. I don't wait for no money. I ducks under that thing, ran right in the car. The door slammed to like that, and he threw the knife right through that door. I don't know whether it went inside or what, but it struck the door. I was scared as I could be. I went right down to a hundred and tenth Street, cross over, you know, the platform there, and got the uptown train and



Mabel Hampton

Page b8

come right on up to a hundred and forty-fifth Street. At that time, four or five of the fellows and girls were standin' outside sayin', "Where was you so long?" And I told them what happened.

Well, I never seen so many switchblade knives in all my life, so don't tell me women ain't always had switchblade knives, 'cause they have. And they went in and told some more. The come all the way--they walked--they didn't ride--they walked back down to a hundred and thirty-fifth Street, and they went up to that house. See, first they went to a hundred and thirty-fifth Street where I told them that they were gonna take me 'cause I heard the man tell the woman--right on the corner of seventh Avenue and a hundred and thirty-fifth Street. It's a red-stoned house there--or apartment or something. And they went there and they rang the bell, ain't nobody say, "Booh."

We came back. We goes to the place where they carried me at a hundred and thirty-fifth Street. When they get there, nobody knew nothin' there. So, they got the cop, and the copy made the woman who owned the house come out, and I described the room and everything I'd been in. So the cop knew that I had been in there. 'cause she said she hadn't seen me. He says, "Well, the girl just left there."



Mabel Hampton

Page b9

But we all night long looked for those people and ain't found the woman nor the man nor nothin'. So, this thing of snatchin' people for white slavery has been goin' on since time began.

L: You know, I always talk about, but God--thank you, Jesus--. I started out on my own at the age of nineteen. My mother died when I was twelve. I went to high-school one year. That's all I went. Then I begged daddy to let me go to work. He didn't want me to go to work. Well, I kept beggin' him to let me go to work. Well, what I'm tryin' to get to, to make a short story, ain't nobody ever bothered me. Now, isn't that somethin'?

M: Well, I was kiddin', all right.

L: From nineteen, I have walked this New York at every hour. And nobody ever bothered me--man nor woman. Ain't never bothered me. I have slept right in the bed with the girl and a man or her husband. And they didn't bother me. So maybe they didn't want what I had.

J: Well, I bet. How could that be?

L: I don't know. But nobody ever bothered me.

M: That was a very bad experience. I would never have another one like that, see. Never had another one like that.



Mabel Hampton

Page b10

L: I've been a lucky girl in New York all these years.

M: And nobody bothered me after that.

L: But you know now, I don't know why, maybe that times is gettin' so bad out on the street and that I'm half sick, I'm nervous stayin' in the house by myself. Maybe 'cause I'm older and I'm half sick, I'm very nervous being alone.

J: You can't take care of yourself.

L: But ain't nobody ever bothered Lillian Foster.

M: Me, I don't know. It never bothered me, even after that, but I took precautions. Anybody walkin' about me, I'd step out in the street.

J: It sounded as you were talking, that the women really fought--took care of each other. I mean that you were very protective of each other.

M: No, to me it means that I have a spirit that walks around with me and guides me. Even if I'm wrong, something will happen that rightens itself. See, I really believe in that. I once--I joined the [Rose of Crucian]. You've heard of it? I still correspond a little bit with them, and they taught me a lot to think.



Mabel Hampton

Page b11

If I lose something, I don't worry--she can tell you--I don't worry about it. If I lose it, I lose it, I know i'm going to find it. And ten to one chances I finds it. I find it when I don't want it. If she loses something, I says, "Oh, bother, you'll get it," and sure enough later, she'll go and get it.

L: Somebody watches over Mabel. I don't know her mother, but it had to be her mother by her being there. And she must be an angel 'cause Mabel is the luckiest women with nothin' I ever seen in my life. Yes sir, she's very lucky.

But nobody--and, do you know, I've never been in a fight. I was in school, I see all the children fightin', nobody ain't never bothered me.

J: It was a different time.

(The recording ends on this side of the tape. Although J had said softly to herself, I'm going to turn it over, there is nothing anywhere on the other side of the tape. The second side is completely blank).



INTERVIEW WITH MABEL HAMPTON (M)

Interviewer: Joan Nestle (J)

J: [This is the story] of Mabel Hampton, with Joan Nestle just helping.

M: We arrived in Bedford hills. There was--

J: Did you go by bus? How were you taken there, Mabel?

M: We were taken buy--let me see, were we taken by bus or car? Wait a minute, I was the only one. [I was] taken by car, and there was a woman with me. She was asking me questions--how old was I?

J: How old were you?

M: I think I told them I was eighteen.

J: Was that the truth?

M: Yeah. And the woman said, "Well, how did you



Mabel Hampton

Page d2

come to get mixed up with somebody like that man?"

I said, "I didn't know who he was." He promised he was going to take us to the cabaret or something--my girlfriend and I--but he didn't do it. So she asked me to tell how the cops come to get me.

So I told her, "Well, the fellow knocked on the door, I answered the door--"

J: We've done that. We've done that. Go on to Bedford Hills.

M: Alright. So, she says--they asked me was I hungry; I told her "No."

She says, "Do you know how long you're going to be here?"

I says, "Well, it seems like I'll be here for three years." I says, "But I don't think I'll be here for three years."

She said, "Why?"

I says, "Because I haven't done anything. What have I done?" I says, "I don't know nothing about a man or nothing like that. Why should they keep me in here three years?"

She says, "Well, that judge don't give a dern whether you do anything or not. She gets paid to send you up there."



21  
46

I said, "Well, that's a terrible way of makin' a livin'."

She says, "I know it is." She says, --.

J: Who was the woman who was talking to you?

M: This woman was--turned out to be she was my investigator. See. It turned out she was my investigator, and I thought she was very nice.

So, we arrived in Bedford Hills. I went in a private house--big, big, big, big private house. And the man there had mixed gray hair--he was very charmin'. He called his wife in, and she says, "My, you look young."

I says, "Yes, I'm eighteen."

She said, "What was you doin' bein' in trouble like that?" So I repeated the same thing, and she says, "Well, you'll get along here alright, and we won't have no trouble. We'll get you out." So, she says, "You hungry?"

I says, "Yes." They give me food.

"Now," she says, "I'll take you to the dormitory--"

J: Was she black or white?

M: She was white. All these are white people.

So, she says, "I'll take you to where the girls sleep at." I got through eatin' a very nice dinner. Then, I didn't have no clothes. They didn't give you a chance to



22  
47  
get nothing. See. She remind me of that hussie right over there.

J: Anita Bryant.

M: Yeah. Could have been her sister.

J: The judge [reminded you of Anita Bryant].

M: The judge.

J: So, did they give you clothes?

M: Oh yes, I got--

J: What did she give you?

M: Well she brought in the--let's see, what did she bring in? She brought me in a shirt--a gold shirt--and then--what do you call them things?--peticoat, drawers, shoes, stockings. She asked me what size shoe, I told her.

She And she says, "Now I'll take you to your room." She says, "Now remember, there're some more girls in your room."

J: What kind of dress was it?

M: The dress was a gray dress. It buttoned down the front. The shoes was Oxfords, and the stockings was

black.

So, she says now, "One of these girls will comb your hair for you."

I said, "I can comb it."

She says, "All right." So, I had pretty, shoulder-



length hair, so I didn't mind that.

So we comes to a door. I can't remember the number on that door--I should, but right now I don't. She knocked on the door. I heard heard a voice saying, "What do you want?" She says, "Miss -----what is that woman's name? Can't tell it now." So, she says, "I got a new girl that's comin' in."

(Pause in tape).

J: So, they take you to this house--?

M: The house, yes, the house is gone. Now, she takes me to the yard where there's a whole row of little houses--two or three doors. Now, it wasn't the supervisor that was with me. It wasn't her, it was this man's wife. She was like an overseer.

So, she says, after the girl opened the door--I faced a tall, good-lookin', brown-skin woman--I guess he was about thirty years old. So, she put her hand out. She says, "Oh, you're a kid. Come on in." And she hollered over her shoulder to some more, calling them by name, she says, "Look what we've got here."

And one of the girls says, "I hope she can stand the pressure."

"Well, if she can't, I'll take care of her."



I said [to myself], "Oh my god, I'm in for it now. What am I going to do?" You see now, somebody's going to pay for this.

So, this woman gave me the bundle of clothes that was handed to her from outside, and the girl says, "Come on over. Here's your cot." It's a cot you slept on. And she<sup>(1)</sup>\* asks, "What time is it?"

<sup>(she)</sup>\* I says, "What do you want to know the time for? You ain't goin' to bed now." 'cause it make no difference, I take care of the kid.\*\*

"What's your name?"

I says, "Mabel."

"Mabel what?"

I looked at her, "What did you want to know my name for? [It's] Mabel."

"Alright, if she don't want to tell me, don't tell me."

\* Although Mabel did use the pronouns "I" and "She" as indicated in order to outline the dialogue between her and her cell mate, it's not absolutely clear who's saying what. Is Mabel really getting tough with this woman right off in order to make a point? Or is it actually the other woman who's getting bossy? (SA)

\*\* The confusion continues as above. I left this out of quotes because it's not clear whether it's Mabel's musings on her own ability to care for herself, or whether it's part of what could possibly be her cell mate's refusal to tell her the time. (SA)



25 50

She says, you'll tell me later." so, "Here's a nightgown for you." I put on the nightgown. She says, "Now, there's the bathroom. Go in there and undress." I went in there and undressed. Put on--she throwed me a pair [sounds like 'used' (used what?)] (inaudible)-- So, I put them on [and] come on out with my clothes.

and She say, "Here is your bed." Well, I never seen a funny lookin' bed like that. So, I sat down on the bed. She says, "Now, don't cry, because nobody's gonna hurt you." and The woman in the back of the room says, "No, not while you're here."

bath So, I said, "Oh, what is goin' to happen?" So, of course, I said my prayers.

There "Oh," one of the hollered, "She's holy and sanctimonious."

huge I said, "Well, what did that mean?" I said to myself.

some So, the one that was taking care of me said, "Sure, I told you she was an innocent"--what did she call me? she called something.

diningroom. The dialogue was about as long as from here

Again, confused as to who is talking. It could have been that woman who said Mabel was "holy and sanctimonious" talking with the woman taking care of Mabel, or it could be Mabel's guardian talking with Mabel. (3)



She said, "Hmmm, you must knowed her outside."\*

"No, I didn't know her outside."\*

So, she said, "All right. Go to bed." I was accustomed to saying my prayers, so I didn't know nothin' else to do but say my prayers. So, I fell asleep. Nobody bothered me, and nobody said a word to me. I fell asleep, and when I woke up, the sun was shining beautifully in there--beautifully.

She say, "It's early. You have to get up and wash up and get dressed now. We go for breakfast." So, I got up and pulled off this cotton nightgown and washed up in the bathroom. We dressed and we come out in the yard. It was beautiful out there. There was chairs sitting around.

There was--it was just nice. I ["said it can't be squared," or "saw a canopy spread"] (inaudible)--the huge log. And then I heard something like a bell or something. The girl said, "Now, we have to go down in the diningroom and eat."

So, she took me by the hand, and we went on down to the diningroom. The diningroom was about as long as from here

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\* Again, confusion as to who is talking. It could have been that women who said Mabel was "holy and sanctimonious" talking with the woman taking care of Mabel, or it could be Mabel's guardian talking with Mabel. (SA)



Mabel Hampton

Page d9

to that store up there--bookstore. And all the girls and women were together. Must have been--I couldn't count them all. There were about fifteen or twenty. They were women. They wasn't young girls. They could have been young girls. I didn't pay them any attention.

So, J: What color were they? girls' club?

M: White and black. White and black they were. So I thought, "Well, what kind of place is this?"

So, she set me down by her, and--I'll never forget it--they had--she says, "We have sausages, eggs, and potatoes. You like that?"

What I says, "Sure!" When she said, "Do you belong to a girl?" She says, "Boy, it's good to see you smile."

So, we ate: coffee, rolls they had. Oh, they had good food. Always did. I don't know where it come from, but they had good food. So, she says, "And then we go back and make up our beds and sit around and talk." So that ended the first day.

The second day was the same thing all over agiin.

So, J: Did you see any signs of lesbians?

M: Not then, not then, no. So, the men come up.

So later on--about two or three days of--everybody would talk. The would whisper. So I said to that girl,



"Who are they talkin' about?"

She laughed. "Don't pay those creeps any mind. Those dykes don't mean anything."

I said, "What the hell does she mean by 'dykes'?" I wouldn't say nothin'.

So, she says, "You belong to a girls' club?"

I says, "Yeah. Uhmmm."

She said, "What'd you do there?"

"Nothing, but talk."

"All right. You'll tell me later what you did there."

J: What were you thinking when you said 'Yes'?  
What were you thinking? When she said, "Do you belong to a girls' club?" and you said, "Yes," what were you thinking?

M: Well, I just thought that it was an ordinary club at that time.

J: You had belonged to a club?

M: Yeah, but they wasn't--I don't know whether they were lesbians or not. But I had messed around with a couple of girls--in Jersey City.

So, I was wonderin'. I says, "Here I'm going to be up here by myself for three years." So, the man come up-- during the fifth day, he come up, this same white fellow. And he says, "Hello, little girl." He says, "You want to



29  
54

write any letters home?"

I says, "No."

"You ain't got nobody to write to?"

"No." I said, "I'll think about it." So I thought about [Maud]. [Maud] and I had been friends. We went to bed and had a nice time. So the wife, she come up on a Sunday. She says, "You want to go to church?"

I says, "Uhugh."

"What are you: Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian or what?"

I got to say something. I looked around the room. I says, "Methodist."

She says, "Are you sure." She says, "Can you swim?"

I says, "I go to all of them when I think about it."

So, she says, "All right."

So. She says, "Now, I have your clothes pressed and everything. You can go with me."

I says, "Are you going to take me?"

She says, "Oh, yes. I'll take you."

So then she did. And there was a Methodist minister there, and he was very nice too. Then we come on back. We set out in the yard and looked at the flowers. She says, "You want to go for a walk?"



I says, "No, I don't want to walk."

She says, "Why? Why don't you talk?"

I says, "I have nothing to say."

She says, "All right, you and I will start walkin'."

So we started walkin'. She took my hand and guided me along. She says, "Any of the girls up here you like?"

I looked and I said, "What is she trying to dig out of me?" I says, "No, outside of you and the white woman down in the office."

She says, "Well, all the women likes her 'cause she nice--and also her husband." We went on down. Some place or another--I don't know whether it was a pool or what it was--but we sat on this thing. She says, "Can you swim?"

I says, "No."

She says, "Neither can I. We'll sit here and talk."

So, she says, "You know, you don't know me. My name is Ruth."

I says, "Yeah."

She says, "I know you. Your name is Mabel. I still haven't got your last name."

Well, I'm not gonna tell her my last name because I didn't want anybody to know I was there. I didn't know what they would do or what they would say.



Mabel Hampton

Page d13

So, she put her arm around me and says, "I like you."

I said, "Yeah. All right," I said, "I like you too."

She said, "Oh, that makes it much better." So, she says, "You want to come and sleep in my bed tonight?"

I says, "I don't know."

"Oh," she says, "You'll come and sleep in my bed."

So, we went back. It was after church and we went back. She says, "You want to eat anything?"

I says, "Oh, no."

She says, "Then I won't eat anything. I'll wait 'til supper." We went back and sit. "You play cards?"

I said, "A little bit."

She says, "What you play?"

"Black jack," I says.

She said, "Who?"

I said, "Black Jack."

"Oh, you get around, don't you? Make me think those white people is lying on you."

Black Jack is like poker and things like that, you know. But she didn't figure, me lookin' so young, that I could play that. See.

J: She thought you were innocent.

M: Yeah.



So she says, "Well, we'll play Black Jack."

I says, "You play Black Jack for money."

She says, "We have money? Have you got money?"

I says, "No, I don't have any money." I said I didn't have time to pick up any money because the people I work for was away. The children was in camp, and I was there by myself. Only three days, and all that happened.

She says, "So that's what Judge Norris do. She takes all the children and sends them up here." She said, "Someday somebody's gonna send her somewhere."

I said, "I wish I could right now."

She says, "No, that's alright. God will take care of her."

So, we had to have a supper--a lovely supper with ice cream for dessert. It was summertime, and we went back out there and sat down. So, she says, "I like you."

"Yeah, I like you too."

She says, "I don't know whether you like me the way I like you."

I says, "No, I guess not." And I sat there.

She said no more [until] time to go to bed. We went to bed and she took me in her bed and held me in her arms and she kissed me. I wasn't so big. I was much smaller than I



am now. I wore a Twelve dress. Very smaller. I wore a Four shoe. So, she held me in her arms, and I went to sleep.

J: Say the truth, Mabel.

M: I told the truth. Listen, I don't want so many people knowin' my business. Break it in half.

J: It's up to you. It's just that--

M: Okay, it's up to me. Okay.

She put her arm around me like Ellen used to do, you know. And I went to sleep.

Well, next day--everyday was about the same thing. Clean up your room and talk to the girls. Then, I began to take notice. This one was paired off. This one was paired off. This one go this way, and those two go this way. I says, "That's funny. I b'lieve they like girls. I have a stinkin' idea they like girls. I like this one."

So, it went on like that for a month or two. If she was goin' somewhere, she'd kiss me goodbye. So, I said, "Yeah, I like her kisses"--to myself, nobody else.

And, from one to the other, they would try to pump me and ask me questions, or pump her--ask her questions. She says, "None of your damn business."

So, we come to the point where the girls come and make



wine. And, oh boy, I had a ball. So, this girl wouldn't let them give me any wine for a long time. "No," she says, "We're up here, and you don't know what the little one will say or act. So, leave her out of it."

They were oldtimers, see. They was really oldtimers. And so, she would say to me, "I'm goin' with so-and-so down by the pool." And Mr.--what was his name?

J: We'll find out.

M: I know, but then it brings more back to you, you know. It's been so long, and I may have papers and things that got his name on them.

So, we wound up, she kiss me and I kiss her. We made love a couple of times. It was nice!

So, time went on. Eighteen months. One day, I sittin' out in the yard--this girl made dresses for me, you know--go to church. I was sittin' out in the yard, and she had her arm around me and was whispering in my ear something. I says, "Somebody is comin'."

She says, "What are you, a spiritualist?"

I says, "No, but I feel there's a man comin' up here."

It was a big, big, huge place.

So, she says, "Alright," and she removed her arm.

In about three seconds, the man appeared. And he says,



"Is a girl here named Mabel Hampton?"

I said, "Yes."

He says, "Are you Mabel?"

I says, "Uhugh."

And He says, "Well the"--what do you call it? What's that man's name? "The supervisor wants you down in the house, and he's been after comin' up here to get you and take you down there. Now, it's all right."

So we had as far to walk as from here to Eighty-Sixth Street maybe.\* The big house. And there he wanted me to take care of his house. He says, "You think you can do it?"

I says, "Yeah, I can do it."

J: Clean his house?

M: Yeah, clean his house.

And his wife said she was very glad. So there--I stayed there for not quite six months.

J: Living in their house.

M: In the house. They took me to live in their house. And, of course, I'd go up and see the girls, and the girls--

J: What was the reaction of the girls? Were they angry? Did they feel you were with them?

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\* About six blocks? (SA)



Mabel Hampton

Page d18

she says. M: They didn't get mad at me. See. Because they figured I was different from them in a way. They were old, seasoned women. They was prostitutes and different things. One woman up there had a house in the city, she told us. And this house is run by another woman. And they have men cops and everything come in there [to see] prostitutes. And then they would come up to visit her and give her money. She made lots of money. Oh, you made money's mammy up there. But nobody said anything. Everything was a Q T.

So. J: Were the girls divided up into butches and fems or anything like that? Studs? She says, Well, you

can go-- M: No. What do you call them things that

you write J: Did anybody can go somewhere? (inaudible)--

M: No. Wait a minute. Not that time. See, that's after I come back to New York and went back. Then I found out everything. You can go tomorrow. You can leave

tomorrow J: I didn't know you went back. his woman's house.

But you're M: I went back. I told you. This woman turned me in. I was too-- fine. I had met a white woman there, and

her and J: Alright. Tell the story that's going along.

So, you were in that house for six months. lived in New York.

And she M: Yeah, okay. After I was there for awhile, the investigator came up. She talked to this woman. And then



39  
62

she says, "Mabel, would you want to go back to Jersey?"--not New York. "You can't go to New York 'cause that's where you was picked up at--in Morningside Avenue. See, you can't go back there. Is there anybody else you know you could go to?"

So, this other colored girl says, "I'll see you when I come." I says, "Oh, yes." So, I forget, I called this woman's name. I says, "I can go and stay with her."

And she said, "Well, I'll investigate her and find out--"--you know what I mean--"That she knows you."

So, sure enough, she went away, and I would say about three days later, she was back again. She says, "Well, you can go--I'll write out--" What do you call them things that you write out so that you can go somewhere?

J: Like a pass. "I'm gettin' out," and "come to

see me soon." M: Yeah. "I'll come down to see you."

She says, "Now, you can go tomorrow. You can leave tomorrow. I'll take you and take you to this woman's house. But you're not to go to New York." colored girl and the white

girl So, in the meantime, I had met a white woman there, and her and I became friendly. Just ordinarily. But she was a lesbian. And she had her girlfriend that lived in New York. And she told me that, anytime I wanted to come to New York, I was free to come to New York. That's how I met Gladys



Mabel Hampton

Page d20

Bently and the rest of the women. So, she says, "I'll give you her name and address." She says, "Can you remember it?"

I says, "I think I can." You don't take no papers or nothing out. You go out with what you come in. Okay.

So, this other colored girl says, "I'll see you when I come out. I'm comin' out in six weeks too."

"Oh, yeah," I says.

She says, "You give me your address, and I'll give it to someone else."

So now I had two friends: a white friend and a colored friend. Oh, I was so happy. They had made me stay there one year and six or seven months out of the three.

Okay, so this woman says--right on the end of my tongue--she says, "Now, you're gettin' out," and "come to see me some time. I'll come down to see you."

I says, "Alright."

So, this investigator come that mornin' at eight o'clock and got me. I kissed the colored girl and the white girl "goodbye," and I was gone.

Now, I know the colored girl said to me, "Be careful of those white people. Be very careful of them."

"Well, I've been around them mostly all of my life."

She says, "Well, your life isn't over with yet."



Okay, so we were going in a car. We come on to New York--come on to Jersey City. And this woman says, (shrilling) "Mabel, I haven't seen you in such a long time. Why did you get yourself in trouble?" She reminded me of that bitch over there.

J: Anita Bryant. Say her name because people won't know who you're pointing to. You have to say that bitch's name because women who hear this won't know what you're pointing to.

M: Okay.

J: Anita Bryant.

M: Just reminds me of Anita Bryant.

So she says, when I got there, "You should have been ashamed of yourself."

So, I says, "I want a job."

She says, "Yeah, I got a job for you.. Up on the hill."

Now there was a colored woman up there that I had met once before, and she was gay. That's all I wanted. They took me up to the woman's house. She says, "Yeah, I like you very much. She talks nice."

She says, "You want to live there?"

I says, "No."



65  
work for. Now, I don't know what happened. She  
was very (End Side 1).

other-- M [in mid-sentence]: "-- I will stand." I had  
some furniture there. And I had been friendly with her. I  
had all them girls. So, she come in there, "Oh, Mabel," she  
says, "I'm so glad to see you. I know my husband would love  
to see you. And your things are well taken care of."

I says, "Thank you." She used to save my life.

uncle So, he had a movin' van. The name was Brown--Maud  
Brown. She says, "Boy's things."

So she--"Come over and have something to eat." I went  
over and had something to eat.

Miss Wathchamacallit say, "You're workin' now."

I says, "Yes, and I'll pay you." I always got good pay  
for whatever work I did.

put So, this woman say, "You don't want to stay."

I says, "No." I think she had--was it one child or two  
children?

I say J: This was the gay woman.

started M: Hugh?

She J: The gay woman? Who--?

I say M: No, no, I'm talkin' about this woman I went to



Mabel Hampton

Page d23

work for. Now, I don't know what nationality she was. She was very nice. She was a good-lookin', blonde woman.

And down from her--on another street--lived this other--(bangs) Pitts was her last name. And I went down to see her. Well, her and I, we slept together, and we ate together, and we talked together, and we laughed together. So, she says, "Now, what are you going to do?"

"I ain't gonna do nothing."

Now there's a whole lot to do with Pitts, me, and my uncle. You'll have to break it off and put it together.

She says, "How's things."

I says, "Well, I'm alright."

She says, "You need money?"

I says, "No, I got money in the bank."

"Where'd you get it?"

And I told her "This white woman gave it to me, and I put it in the bank."

"oh," she says. "You're alright. You've been messin' with white people."

I says, "That's nothing new." I said, "Skip it." I started to tell her something and I said, "Skip it."

She says, "You still is a fresh woman."

I says, "Yes, and I'll always be that."



about She says, "Well, all right." She says, "I love you for it."

So time went on. Two weeks to the date, I left. The white woman appeared in a gray car--open car.

J: Which white woman? The woman from--

M: The woman that had the whore house.

J: That you met in Bedford.

M: That I met in Bedford--contacted the woman that she went with. And that woman--another girl had a girl--a white girl. And they [palled] around--wasn't nothing to it--but they palled around.

J: So they were lesbians and they were prostitutes?

M: Everything was lesbians now.

J: And also prostitutes?

M: And prostitutes and lesbians, see.

J: Lesbian prostitutes. I mean, lesbian women who were prostitutes.

M: Lesbian women who were prostitutes.

And this white woman that had this whore house--she knew what I was because she--

J: Was she a lesbian?

M: Yes. She had talked to me and questioned me



Mabel Hampton

Page d25

about what I did, where I went, who I knew. And she knew half of New York, includint the police force.

York J: So she came and picked you up--.

and those M: So, she came to see me. So, when Miss-- whatchacall her--seen her pull up at the door, she didn't know what to say. She didn't like the idea. Was a good-lookin' woman. So, she asked was Mabel Hampton--Miss Hampton--there.

She says (whining almost), "yes."

capa "May I see her."

"You certainly may. Babel-l-l-l, Mabel-l-l-l. Someone want to see you."

I on I come on down. I said, "Oh, my God. So you're the one." I threw my arms around her neck and welcomed her-- 'cause them other stupid asses didn't know nothin' about welcomin' anybody.

late So, she says, "You want to go for a drive?"

I says, "uhmhum." I went upstairs and got my jacket. Flew down.

them Called the woman by name--can't think of it now to save my life. And she--"Well, you know, you don't go to New York."

until I said, "If New York is around the corner, then I'm



goin'." Naturally, I knew them all. But they didn't know me--  
just So we gets in the car and goes straight on over to New  
York. Went to a cabaret, and that's how I met Ethel Waters  
and those people, you know.

J: We'll talk about them.

M: I met so many people that this girl knew, and  
this woman that was the head of this house knew. They was  
friends. M: Yeah. Did nothing. She gave me some wine. I

drank some J: So she took you--do you remember the  
cabaret?--the name of it?--or where it was? he stoop waiting

for me. M: Wait a minute now. I know I went to Small's  
Paradise. I went to--oh, it's on the end of my tongue Oh,  
I can't think of it now. I will though. you go?

I see J: We'll come back to it. Talk about meeting  
Gladys Bently. Did you get to meet her? Gladys Bently?

M: I didn't meet her then. I met her a year  
later when I come back to New York for good. ferry across.

The ferry J: Okay, so she took you to this cabaret--? ferry

So, she to M: Yeah, because she knew the friends. All of  
them was friends, you see--both white and black. White  
one's come in from Jersey, and the black ones come in from  
Newark, New Jersey, and like that. And they'd stay there  
until about twelve or one o'clock, and then they'd go home.



And, naturally, I knew them all. But they didn't know me-- just as this new little girl.

Now, J: So, what happened that night? So, she took you to New York--.

M: Hugh?

J: Continue with your story. She took you to New York, and you went to a cabaret--.

M: Yeah. Did nothing. She gave me some wine. I drank some wine. By twelve o'clock, she brought me on back. You know, Pickle Puss was sitting on the stoop waiting for me. "Miss Mabel, Miss Mabel, I think that's terrible. Miss Mabel, Miss Mabel, I think that's very terrible--you going out with white girls. Where did you go?"

I says, "Down to the ferry."

"To the ferry?"

I says, "Yes."

Now, there wasn't no--yes, there was a ferry across. The ferry went on to New York. But we didn't need no ferry. So, she took it for granted.

Now, this woman with a gray car brought in another woman, and two or three times a week they were taking me out to down by the river. Mamma didn't like that. And Maud laughed, Maud laughed, so I said, "Take Maud too." Well,



she didn't mind them takin' Maud, but she didn't like the idea of them takin' me.

Now, something happened in between that. You've got to cut that off now. Cut it off.

(Tape is turned off and turned back on).

J: Okay, now I don't want to miss anything. Now just--remember to talk into the microphone.

M: So, anyhow, this woman--she didn't treat me right. I paid her whatever she asked me for. And this white girl and I, she'd come in the mornings some times and take me away with her--especially the mornings when I didn't have to work. And the woman I worked for, she didn't mind her coming up there to see me. So, I had a very, very, very good time.

Then come--I contact myself with Winston Salem, North Carolina. I finds my aunt--young aunt--and she was so glad to hear from me, she writes a letter and asks me could she send her daughter--her daughter's name Margaret--send Margaret up there to stay with me, and I could do what I possibly could for her and like that. I did not tell her that I had been in Bedford. I said nothing about Bedford--not a thing. So, in two weeks time, the girl arrived up there, and she stayed up there with me, and I got a room



47  
72

right with Miss--I can't think of the woman's name right now--but I got a room with her. And I told her, I said, "Now, listen, Margaret, you cannot go and stay out all night." The woman told me that Margaret was going and staying out all night. I says, "Margaret, you cannot go and stay out all night because I will go and get myself in trouble. I'm not supposed to go nowhere but stay right here."

the So, she says, "Alright."  
seen So, I took it easy then. So, she'd go around--go with the girls--I called up a couple of my friends who had daughters and like that, and they went out. They would sneak to Coney Island. Coney Island is in New York.

So, one night, the white girl brought me home early--very early--because we'd been out half the day. We went up to--let's see, where'd we go. We were in New York and we went up to--I think it was--I don't know if it was Gladys Bently or someplace. It was an actress. We went to her house, and we stayed all day until six or seven o'Clock. Then we got dressed--she made love--we got dressed and we come on back. So, when I gets back, Margaret wasn't home. So, I says, "Now that's funny. I told her to be home early." She didn't come in 'til around one o'clock.



Mabel Hampton

Page d30

I said, "Margaret, where were you? Where were you?"

"Oh, I called some of the girls, and we just went to the movies."

I said, "You goes to the movies on Sundays?"

She says, "Yeah, they wanted to go to the movie."

"Alright, but don't let it happen again 'cause I'll have to send you back home."

So, next morning, I went onto work and, while working, the white girl called me on the phone and says, "Mabel, I seen your niece."

"Seen who?"

"Yes," she said, "I seen your niece in a cabaret."

I said, "Are you sure?"

She says, "Yes, and some more women was there with her."

I says, "Alright."

So, when I did get a'hold of her next morning, I says, "Where were you yesterday?"

She says, "Mabel, I just went to visit some friends."

I said, "Where do the friends live?"

"Oh, they live downtown here."

I said, "Alright." I said, "If you go to Coney Island one more time, you go home to your mother 'cause I can't be



Mabel Hampton

Page d31

worryin' over your troubles and mine too. And Miss ---- [I think--was her name Mitchell? No. It was something like that.] and she'll be telling somebody that I'm steering you wrong."

"No, I won't go."

you. Alright, she didn't go. So, when the white girl come and get me in the car that afternoon, I told her. So, she says, "Alright." She says, "Now, Aunt, I don't know what I'm gonna do."

says I says, "You see, I can't make love to her and watch over you too."

"So," she says, "I'll see what happens."

stayin' o. So, when she got dressed to go, about six o'clock, I asked her where she goin'.

"Downtown."

So, instead of that, the white girl followed her in her gray car. She followed her right straight on through the tunnel into New York. See, she could easily keep up with her because there wasn't as many cars as there are today.

So, she didn't call me then. She waited until they got into Coney Island. So, then she called and told me that she was in Coney Island.

call I said, "Okay."



50  
75

Mabel Hampton

Page d32

Marg So, she says, "What shall I do? Keep tabs on her?"  
to t I said, "No because she gonna keep tabs on herself  
because I'm packin' her grip and sendin' her home in the  
mornin'."

So she says, "Alright." She says, "When am I gonna see  
you."

I said, "Tomorrow night."

So, sho' 'nough, I packed Margaret's grip and waited  
for her to come in. She came in 'round two o'clock. I  
says, "Was the show good?"

She said, "Yeah, it was alright. I missed the bus."

I says, "Don't tell me you missed the bus. You were  
stayin' out there with the boys and with the girls in Coney  
Island."

"Who you had me watched [by]?"

I says, "No, I didn't have you watched. You had  
yourself watched." So, I says, "Alright, you can go home to  
your mother. I have money. I 'll send you back home. You  
go home tomorrow mornin'."

So, I packed the rest of her things. She cried, but I  
couldn't take it because, you see, if these people found out  
that I had her, I could get in trouble. So, that night I  
called the white girl and she come over and got me and



Mabel Hampton

Page d33

Margaret and Margaret's clothes and everything, and we went to take them down to the train and sent her on back to Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

So, then I says, "Well, now I'm through."

So, the white girl says, "You ain't through, Mabel, you just beginning." She says, "The woman in your house--she watches every move that you make."

I says, "Yeah?"

She says, "Uhugh." She says, "Now, I'll tell you what you do. What do you think of doing?"

I says, "Let me sleep on it, and I'll tell you what I think I'm doing." So, I gets in the car in front of the door, and we pulls away. I didn't get back until two o'clock myself 'cause I was sleepin' with the white girl.

Okay. So, we made love, we talked, we had something to eat, we drank, dressed, and come back to Jersey City. It was three in the morning when we come back. My friend was waiting up for me. She says, "You got a nerve." She says, "That investigator knew what you was doin'. Bum, bum, bum, bum, bum," she says. "You are runnin' around with a white woman, and I know it." She says, "And I'm going to tell her."

So, I steps out the door and went to Maud. I says,



"Maud, I've got a few pieces of furniture and stuff in that room. Can your husband take it?"

She says, "Yes, my husband will take anything that you hand out."

"Fine." So, I called up the white girl, and I says, "I'm leaving here tomorrow mornin' for Bedford Hills."

She says, "My God, girl! What are you talkin' about?"

I says, "Well, you realize, I'm getting old, I'm not getting young, and I don't intend to stay there."

"Well," she says, "All right. When are you goin'?"

I says, "Tomorrow mornin' at eight o'clock."

She says, "Oh, all right, I'll be there--'cause I'm goin' up there and see my sweetie. She don't know I'm comin', and I'll see who she's got up there."

I says, "She ain't got nobody up there."

"You've been goin' almost six months. You say she ain't got nobody up there."

I says, "No. She loves you."

I'm old now, I can talk up a breeze.

So, she says, "All right." So Maud's husband came over at six o'clock and picked up what few things I had and took and put 'em in his garage--or storage house, whatever you call it.



Mabel Hampton

Page d35

So, she come down, "Where do you think you're goin'?"

I says, "I'm goin' to New York."

"What do you think Miss--" glory, what's that woman's name, but I can't get it to save my life!

Well, anyhow, I says, "Yes. I don't care what she think. She can think anything she please. I don't belong to her. I don't belong to you. I don't belong to nobody. You knew me for years, and you would turn me in?"

"Certainly I would. When you act like what you do, runnin' around with white folks and cabaretin'."

I says, "How do you know I'm cabaretin'?"

She says, "'cause you're the type."

I says, "All right. Okay."

I didn't tell her I'd met all the big shots [sic] in New York in them few months.

So, I dressed--then I was dressing. I had that same dress on that was made for me. It was grey; it had a deep hem in it, with short sleeves, and it had string--it had nothin' but a cord around the waist, and the cord was pulled from part of the material. You pulled it and made a rope. And at the end of the rope, it had [hennah] tassels. You pull it. After you pull it, then you get the tassels. You get the tassels and so 'em on. And around a part of the



54  
29

sleeve there was--everything was grey. (Demonstrates). It had a round neck, and then it had a sleeve like that--turn a few back--and [hennah], [hennah], [hennah], and a thread like that. I could make it but can't describe it too good.

But anyhow, I put that on. I put on a cap. A little cap with a thing comin' down--a tassel. I put that on my head. And she says, "So, you're goin' to New York?"

I says, "Yes, ma'am. I'm off to New York."

So, she says, "Take care of yourself."

So I says, "Thank you. I will."

Meantime, Maud had told me that she came up on the stoop, and there was a white woman sittin' on the stoop talkin' to this woman that I lived with. And this woman whose home I was in was tellin' this white woman--she done payed more than attention--that I was runnin' around with white women. She had it all danced up--packed up--together, so that all I had to do was to be a fall guy.

So, this white girl pulled up with this car. When I looked at this grey car, I said, "Bye, bye."

"Be careful," she says. Then I see Maud. I gave Maud a kiss. And we were gone.

Well, we come right on through New York like a bat out of hell. And, we took the highway. We took the highway, we



Mabel Hampton

Page d37

took the low way--oh, boy--and I sung. We just had a lovely time. She had brought some sandwiches and things. And there was nothin' for me to do but to settle back. And we went right on in 'cause she knew how to go into Bedford. Didn't even need no passport. They didn't ask her no questions.

She went on and pulled up in front. She says, "Here's one of your lost sheeps," she says to this man.

He says, "Mabel, what are you doing here?"

We told him the story. I didn't tell nothin' about Margaret--sendin' Margaret back home or nothin'. I just told him this woman didn't treat me right, and I got lonely, and this lady, which I had met a couple of times, brought me out here.

He says, "Well, we won't say anything at all about it. You can stay as long as you want, and take a good rest."

I said to myself, "That man knows something. I need a rest." So, I changed, and they gave me a little cottage by myself. I had a cot in there. And some of the women had left. But, boy, next Sunday, they were comin' up there just to see what I was doin'--hear my story. Nobody said nothin' at all. This woman called in--the woman I'd lived with--called this investigator and told her what I had done and



that I was runnin' around with men and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So, she reported it back to this supervisor up there, and he laughed. Him and his wife laughed. They didn't say nothin' at all. They didn't say a word. I went on cleanin' their house, cookin' their meals, and havin' a good time.

And then, one of the girls showed me how to make wine. We drank wine. We was drunk as the lord, and we would hug and kiss each other, and we would just have a ball.

So, after I was there about a month, I kind of got tired. But nobody said anything to me--I'd just as soon stayed. He told me I could stay as long as I wanted, and leave when I got ready. So, I hadn't got ready 'cause I was goin' with a girl up there, see. And this white girl would come up and bring the other girl with her and see her friend, and we'd all go walkin' in the woods, see. And then she'd take the other woman, and they'd all go back to New York.

So, one day, something--I don't know--I just got lonely or something, although I was lovin' a girl up there, but I said, "Pooh, pooh, pooh, pooh, pooh. I want to go back to New York." So, I told the supervisor that I'd like to go back to New York soon.



Mabel Hampton

Page d39

He said, "All right. When you get ready, tell me. In fifteen minutes, you can get ready."

I said, "Oh, I can get ready in about two or three minutes."

He laughed.

So, we was sittin' up there doin' nothin'. I had on little short pants. We was havin' a good time, and all of a sudden, somebody come up the wall. I didn't recognize this investigator. She stood right in front of me. I threwed my head back and looked her up and down. I say, "Oh, my God. This is the investigator."

She says, "Why didn't you tell me you was here? And you've been here a hell of a long time and didn't tell me. I'm runnin' all over New York lookin' for you. I see you've been doin' the right places."

I said, "I wasn't a bad girl even when I started out."

She says, "I knew you wasn't." She says, "But that guy's in jail. He's almost dead. They'll kill him soon."

I says, "yeah."

She's the one who told me he'd even send his mother up--send his wife up--for money, you see. And Judgie wasn't doin' so hot herself 'cause she's done told on too--sent too many people up she shouldn't have sent up--and they were on



her tail. ed yourself."

So, after that she said, "Come on down to (inaudible)"--called him by his first name too. And he went down there. He laughed, he gave us ice cream and something to drink. We had a ball for a couple of hours.

And so, she says now, "You're no longer in my debt. You've been a good girl, and I like you." She says, "Now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. This is Sunday. Then there's Monday. Tuesday morning, you'll be in New York." That's all I wanted to hear. I did not want to hear any more. I'd be in New York. So, that's why I waited to leave.

So, Monday morning, they all got up and they bid me "goodbye," and they toast me. I was high as a Georgia pine. And they went on down there and waved and waved at me. [Muriel] says, "I never knew a girl who--a woman--could come in here and turn the place upside down." She says, "These women likes you."

I says, "I like 'em all. They belong to me."

"I guess you're right."

So, the car pulls up. the investigator got out. She says, "Now, I hope you all have learned a lesson from this young woman." She said, "Treat everybody right, and you'll



57  
84

Mabel Hampton

Page d41

get treated yourself."

So we get in the car and we went on back. We raced. Oh boy, didn't we go through that bridge and the tunnel and all them things. We had a w--and she stopped and gave me something to eat. And, it was Tuesday. So, she says, "Now, where you wanna live?"

Of course, the white girl had told me where she was going to take me, you know. See, at that apartment with three rooms ... And that was the end of the white woman and I. See, 'cause she had to take care of business, and I had to find a job.

So, a week later--I had nothing to keep me to do anything--I went and got a job at the [Alhambra]. I couldn't dance very good, but I made believe. I wasn't bad lookin'. I had nice lookin' hair. So, that's what happened I went there and a couple of other places--

(Tape cuts off here. End of transcript).



Mabel Hampton

Page 12

J: Where?

M: In Jersey--I didn't know it was Jersey City at the time. And I didn't know where to go. Then I began to wonder--I was going to say--that was my first

J: How old were you again?

M: Got on eight.

J: Eight years old.

M: That's why I tell children--don't let

INTERVIEW WITH MABEL HAMPTON (M)\*

Interviewer: Joan Nestle (J)

J: --Story. This is the second day of the taping. Now remember, your last words were: you left Greenwich Village, you left your uncle, and a new world--you went into the subway and came out in a new world.

M: A new world. Later I learned it was Grove Street.

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\* The second side of this tape ends with the beginning of Mabel's story of Bedford Hills. Hence, it precedes the transcript whose page numbers are preceded by the letter e. Also, Joan indicates that it is the second in a series of tapes--the first of which evidently ended with Mabel's escape to Jersey City from Greenwich Village. It seems this particular tape has not yet been transcribed, although the first transcript, indicated by page numbers with no preceding letters, does include part of this story. If this first tape is found, its order in the series will be indicated in a footnote on the first page. (SA)



Mabel Hampton

Page f2

J: Where?

M: In Jersey--I didn't know it was Jersey City at the time. And I didn't know where to go. Then I began to wonder what I was gonna say--what would I say.

J: How old were you again? Tell us.

M: Goin' on eight.

J: Eight years old.

M: That's why I tell children-- Don't let children hear anything--know anything. Because, if you do, they can put you up against the cross.

Well, I went to school. I don't know if I was in the sixth--five or sixth--grade, but I went to school.\* And I could read and write.

So, I began to walk. Now, the description of where I walk. That was Grove Street. To get to where I was, I had to walk twenty blocks or more. I seen the people walkin'-- white people. I seen a few colored people. White people.

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\* She couldn't be eight and in the sixth or even fifth grade. However, the "eight years old" seems consistent with other accounts. (SA)



Mabel Hampton

Page f3

And I came to a hospital, which later I found out was the Jersey City [H]hospital.\*

I walked past that and I kept walkin'. I seen a couple of cops and things. I wouldn't ask nobody anything. I kept walking and walking and I could--I must have walked about an hour. Then, all of a sudden--it was a straight walk--straight going on down the street. I didn't turn no corners or nothin'.

All of a sudden, I heard a noise and I looked to my left. Yes, I was on the lefthand side of the street. And there, I seen children in a playground. The children all was between the ages of seven, eight, and ten as I figured out later. And, they were playin', playin', playin', and I didn't have any time to play. I didn't know what to do.

So, I goes in. I sits down on something like a bench or something. I sit there a few minutes, and then I got up and went on over to where a white girl was swingin'. She says, "You wanna swing?"

I says, "Yes." So, she put me in the swing, and I swung. She pushed me and she pushed me. So, I said to

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\* Today, the only public hospital in Jersey City is the Jersey City Medical Center. If this is, in fact, what Mabel Means, it is located on Summit Avenue, much closer to Journal Square than to Grove Street relative to the PATH Station stops. (SA)



63  
68

myself, "She's nice."

She came over to me. She says, "Where do you live at?"

I says, "I don't know right now 'cause my aunt brought me here and told me to stay here until she come back."

"Alright." She pushed me, she pushed me. Well, time was goin' fast. I don't know what time it was. Maybe school--school had to be out because that's what I came from. So I remember that. So, all of a sudden she says to me, "Your aunt hasn't come back yet?"

I says, "No. She told me to wait here for her."

She says, "We'll give her a little more time." She says, "Are you hungry?"

I says, "Uhugh."

So, she call her brother--I think it was her brother--she called him "Tony." I think his name was Tony. So, she says, "Listen, we've got to get this kid to her--find her aunt and take her home."

So, he says, "Alright. I'll see what I can do."

She says, "I'm going home. It's getting dark." See, that must have been after six o'clock. So, she says, "I'll go home to get something to put on her and a sandwich, and you go after the cop."

When I heard the word "cop", I didn't like that idea.