

[Harlem Riot]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 West 130th Street

DATE July 7th, 1939

SUBJECT Harlem Riot.

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview
3. Name and address of informant
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Vivian Morris

ADDRESS 225 W. 130th St.

DATE July 7th, 1939

SUBJECT Harlem Riot.

“I haven't seen you for some time. Where've you been?”

“Haven' been aroun' much. Been lookin' f'r work. Yeh, I been outa work the las' coupla months. Sure I been on relief, but what the hell's that? What's it git yuh? I ain' been able t' git me a job. Where the hell d' they think jobs is comin' from? Y' talks about things gittin' tough; I thinks if they gits much tougher they's gonna have plen'y a trouble, sumpin like the riot they has back a coupla years in 1935.”

“Hat do you know about the riot?”

“You askin' me? Yeh, I oughta know if anyone does. I been there smack ina middle of it an' all night long. 'Riot' they says it is. From what I kin see this ain' no riot like they likes t' call it, no mam. T' my min' an' experience it wuz sumpin more'n a lotta fightin'. T' my min' it wuz a expression of downright bitterness——how kin it be but——all the hard knocks we cullud people been gittin' handed out to, all a 'em pilin' up one atop a another it hadda bust out wide open sometime——an' it did. Yeh, we wuz bitter as all hell. You know how come.

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—We spends our cash—as little as we kin git when we gits it, t'buy 2 food an' clo'es f'r us right here on a hun'ed an' twen'y fif street. We spends our las' rusty cent an' can' even git us a coupla jobs nohow in any a 'em stores. —

“Take f'r instance the kid who started the riot. He been hoppin' aroun' outa work lookin' f'r a job since he left high school f'r about a year an' couldn' git none.—Don? git me wrong. I don' mean t' say its correct t' smash windows an' beat hell outa the whites who got businesses t' git us jobs, but dammit it does make y'sore as holy hell when y'wanna work an' they don' hire ya.—Plen'y a surprises in 'at riot.—it git started 'roun' about 4 P.M. —Sure, the kid swiped a fist a candy. I guess he musta been hungry. That wuz the startin' point. Hell came after that. Word got aroun' the kid wuz murdered. That's all they needed t'know. Windows wuz busted t' hell, shots wux fired, an' Lawd, y' shoulda seen! The crowd wuz set t'bust inta the armory. Jesus! swipin' guns —an' they woulda used 'em”—y' kin imagine if they did.—

A hearse come swingin' down the street an' they thought they wuz gonna take the boy. It wuz like throwin' gas onna fire. Hell an' brimstone pop out. —Some funny things happen ina whole mess a it. I kin remembers a couple. When things a this kind happen, people think might fas' an do fas'. —A Chinaman comes rushin' outa the store an' hang up a sign sayin': “Me collored too.” —Yeh, here's a hot one. Sam Katz, a glazier guy on a hun'ed and twen'fif street didn' so much as git touched. Instead as I kin remember he git the job a puttin' in the glass windows mos, of 'em.

“F'r all the stealin' goin' on the main thing they steal wuz food. I sees a woman reach inside a busted window an' heave out two big, juicy hams, slings 'em unda her arms, an says: 'I been eatin' pig 3 feet an' chitterlings f'r a helluva long time, but from now on I'm gonna eats ham. 'An' then she traipses downa street on home. —Yeh, they been takin' plen'y a food. One a 'em says: 'Dam if I ain' gonna eat tomorrow'. —“Long about 4 A.M. a milk wagon gits on downa street an' they makes f'r it. Out comes the driver scared as hell, an sumbody says: 'Aw, leave him alone, he's oney a worker, we ain' got nothin' on him.” So

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they swipes all the bottles a milk instead.——Y'see all the stealin' goin on wuz like a new world —ev'rything was in their hans an' reach, what they always needed an' didn' never get.——

“I see a white fella with a paper stuck in his pocket goin' up en' down the block a number a [times?]. The cullud folks begin t'hink he wuz a newspaper reporter an' they dislikes reporters f'r the dirty stories they been always printin' about the black man. They calls him a white son of a bitch an' grabs him an' rpis the paper outa his pocket. It was the Daily Worker. The guy see it an' says: 'He's O.K. It's a workin' man's paper. Leave him along. He's O.K.' So they leaves him be. — -It wuz sure sumpin! Fightin' an' breakin' windows goin' on.——

“An' I tell y' this. Some people gotta idea this was a race riot. I know it wuzn'. F'r instance during the evenin' a cullud liquor sore wuz busted into an' the guy who own the joint say he's cullud an' someone yells out. “He ain' no better, gittin' the gravy from us folk,' so they goes on bustin' up the joint an' takin' out bottle aliquor What I'm tryin' t' say is that it wuzn' a question of culla. People wuz sore at the guys who lived ona gravy while they wuz starvin' t' death.——

“Yeh, [man?], it sure wuz a knockout. The cops sure didn' help none. At first they jus' keeps their hans ona guns till it got real outa han' an' then they let loose. They ain' no proper words t'say what 4 what happen. What I know is some guys git shot dead an' one guy git shot f'r stealing groceries.—Things wuz hell. I guess the window washers been unemployed f'r a couple days. ——Nex' day it gits almos' as bad. Oney [God?] took a han' an' sends down a [?] an a rain t' cool 'em off a bit. [Certainly??] did it all right. The rain come down an' soaks 'em. Certainly did the job.

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“I tell y' this, if they wuz work ina first place this t'ing wouldn' a started. ——I an' no prophet, but I [knows?] this, if jobs an' stuff don't git better, I tells ya as I s an' here it's gonna happen again, [?] won' be f'r fun, either.”