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## **U.19 Long Civil Rights Movement: Breaking New Ground**

Interview U-0656  
James Anderson  
27 June 2011

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## **Abstract – James Anderson**

Interviewee: James Anderson

Interviewer: Robert Hunt Ferguson

Interview Date: June 27, 2011

Location: Anderson Farm & Feed Supply, Lexington, Mississippi

Interview Length: 1:22:42

The interview with Mr. James Anderson focused mainly on his memories growing up on a farm in Holmes County, Mississippi during the 1930s and 1940s. Mr. Anderson's parents farmed land that they owned and farmed land that they rented so he knew both owning and sharecropping. In the 1950s, James Anderson began to take over his father's land and farmed it in addition to working other jobs. Mr. Anderson also discussed living and working in Milwaukee, WI for several years as a young man before moving back to Mississippi. Finally, Mr. Anderson spoke about being part of the local civil rights movement in Lexington, Mississippi, registering to vote with his parents, running for local office, and being threatened with violence by local whites.

## Field Notes – James Anderson

Interviewee: James Anderson

Interviewer: Robert Hunt Ferguson

Interview Date: June 27, 2011

Location: Anderson Farm & Feed Supply, Lexington, Mississippi

Interview Length: 1:22:42

THE INTERVIEWEE: Mr. James Anderson was born in 1927 and was ten years old when his father bought 120 acres in 1937 to use as a row crop farm. Mr. Anderson inherited the land from his father and used it as a row crop farm as well. Mr. Anderson has lived in Lexington, Mississippi all except for two years of his life when he moved to Milwaukee, WI in the 1950s for two years. In addition to being a farmer, Mr. Anderson was a trucker, managed a local machinery store, and managed a Community Pride grocery store. He was also involved in the local civil rights movement in Lexington.

THE INTERVIEWER: Robert Hunt Ferguson is a PhD Candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Ferguson is white, male, native North Carolinian, aged 32 in the summer of 2011. His research focuses on race relations and labor in the rural Jim Crow South.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: The interview took place at Anderson Farm & Feed Supply in Lexington, Mississippi. The store is owned by James Anderson's son, Henry. During the interview, several individuals conducted business in the background, other audible background noise includes chirping pullets that the store had for sale, a truck engine that ran for roughly five minutes, and several members of Mr. Anderson's family walking through the interview and saying hello – including a son and grandson. Before our interview, Mr. Anderson carefully read the interview agreement and the letter of introduction from Mark Schultz, taking up to ten minutes to look over the documents. He expressed some concern that the project would use his stories to make money and that he wouldn't be compensated. I attempted to allay his concerns while reinforcing that his participation was completely voluntary. After a brief discussion he agreed to sign the form and conduct the interview. He requested that a copy of the interview be sent to him. We were interrupted once during the interview when a store employee asked us to move to another side of the store so that they could move the chicken coops inside to protect the pullets from the intense heat – the temperature hovered around 98 during our interview, though it was about 15 degrees cooler inside the store. The interview itself ranged from his childhood on his parents' farm, two years he spent in Wisconsin working in a mill, his return to Mississippi, and his careers as a farmer, a trucker, and managing several businesses. Mr. Anderson also discussed his involvement in the local civil rights movement. Mr. Anderson had injured his neck in an automobile accident several decades before our interview and

sometimes wasn't able to write without pain. He filled out and signed the interview agreement, but his hand began to hurt and he asked me to fill out the Life History Form while he dictated.

Interviewee: James Anderson

Interviewer: Rob Ferguson

Interview date: June 27, 2011

Location: Lexington, Mississippi

Length: 1 disc, approximately 1 hour and 23 minutes

### **START OF DISC**

RF: Okay. My name is Rob Ferguson. It's June twenty-seventh. We're in Lexington, Mississippi, at Anderson Feed Store. I'm with Mr. James Anderson, if you wouldn't mind introducing yourself.

JA: Yes, I'm James Anderson.

RF: And when and where you were born.

JA: I was born approximately a mile from where I live today, about eight and a half miles out in the country north of Lexington on Upper Louisville Road, 3847 Upper Louisville Road. I've lived there, well, that's been my home since 1937. I moved away, came back. I built a house there in 1960 and I've been in that house since then and that's where I am today.

RF: So you were born in 1937?

JA: No, no, no.

RF: No, I'm sorry. I must have misheard.

JA: No, I'm (1:02). My daddy bought this land in 1937.

RF: I see, okay.

JA: He bought a hundred and twenty acres of land in 1937. I was born in 1927. I was ten years old when he bought this land.

RF: Those were big flood years. In '37, was Lexington affected by the flood much?

JA: Well, not a whole lot. It was affected some.

RF: Mainly that was the delta?

JA: Huh?

RF: Mainly that was in the delta area that the '37 flood—

JA: Yeah, the delta, yeah. Yeah, those people in the delta had to build scaffolds to get to their houses. The water was all around their homes and some had to move.

RF: And you said your parents bought the land in '37.

JA: Yeah.

RF: And about how many acres?

JA: A hundred and twenty acres.

RF: A hundred and twenty acres, okay. Had they been farm owners before that? Had they rented land?

JA: Yeah. My daddy farmed here with my mama until I got large enough to help. You had to do something for a living and really, it didn't provide much of a living because if you worked on, if you lived on somebody else's place, they get half straight off the bat, plus whatever you owe comes out of it. And when you get through, you're right back where you started with nothing. So you turn around and borrow money on next year's crop. When you pay up, you were right back in the same spot. You wasn't covering no ground. That's the way it was. Most people, most black folks didn't have transportation. Few had their own transportation, but very few had their own wagon, buggy. You was doing good when you had a buggy. It was tough. Houses, inadequate housing, but if you didn't have your own, you had to put up with whatever you lived in.

RF: Right. What was your house like growing up?

JA: Growing up, my house, when my daddy bought this land, the house wasn't up to par. He added on and repaired whenever he could. Finally, I believe it was in 1953, he moved out on the road. The house was way back in there. The (4:16) didn't come in there. So we worked. We'd take the plow and mules and fixed the road.

RF: Yourselves?

JA: Or either you couldn't get in and out. We fixed our own road. The county didn't. It was just the main road. They didn't turn out in your drive or nothing and you weren't hardly allowed to ask for anything.

RF: What sort of crops did your parents grow?

JA: We made crops. It was a small farm, started off as a small farm. My daddy rented out as we got older and we'd rent land, rent other land. When you don't have enough help, you have to get help to do your chopping, get help to work the stuff, get help to get it in in the fall. You're right back where you started. You're spinning your wheels and ain't getting nowhere.

RF: So in addition to the hundred and twenty acres they owned, they also rented some land as well?

JA: Yeah.

RF: And did they rent out any of the land that they owned to anybody?

JA: No.

RF: Okay. So they farmed that themselves.

JA: No, they never rented out any.

RF: About what age did you start helping out in the fields?

JA: You ain't going to believe.

RF: Okay.

JA: Six and seven years old, I started, and at eight, I was plowing with a mule. I was running, (6:13). The plow would throw me over here, but I had to straighten up and get it right or else my daddy would get my behind.

RF: So at eight years old, you were in the field plowing behind the mule.

JA: I was chopping before that for years. I plowed with a mule at eight, nine.

RF: That's sun up to sundown every day?

JA: Yes, sir. I plowed reaching up to the plow like this. That's right.

RF: Could barely see over it.

JA: You didn't get (6:43). You didn't get no breaks. You were just another person. You had to come on like anybody else.

RF: How many mules did your family own at any one time?

JA: Oh we just had a pair of mules and a horse. My mama, the way we got by was my mama had a buggy and had a horse pull the buggy, and he had a pair of mules and something, all that other stuff. And she'd peddle a lot, have a big garden, share of green beans, corn, potatoes, anything that could make a dollar.

RF: And that was for the family and to sell?

JA: That's right. And she always had a yard full of chickens, sell those eggs. We didn't have the beef cattle. We had just regular milk cows and she'd sell butter. She had more butter than we used and she'd sell milk. She'd sell whatever she raised, she'd sell. That somehow kept the expense down. Every dollar we could save, we didn't have to borrow that dollar because if you borrowed it, you had to pay interest on it.

RF: About how many milk cows did you have?

JA: Seven, eight.



RF: And so you got milk from them, made your own butter from them. Most of the row crops, were they taken to market somewhere, taken into Lexington to sell?

JA: Well, the row crops they'd sell were just cotton. As a matter of fact, that's it. The corn you raised, you had to feed your stock. And the cotton was the only thing you had to sell really. You'd have a few peas; you could sell them. That's about all the income you was going to get.

RF: And did you take the cotton to the gin in town?

JA: The gin.

RF: And that was in Lexington in town?

JA: Well, they had the gins were plentiful then, but people with just mules and wagons, very few people used big trailers. You'd see a few wagons and small trailers. My daddy took cotton over there on the wagon to the gin.

RF: And about how far was that each trip?

JA: Well, a man named C. T. Bailey had a gin up here on 17 about three or four miles out of town. That's where everybody in that community ginned at or you could go north to Paris had a gin up on 17 further north. And there was a gin here in town. The gins were pretty plentiful because with just the mule and the wagon, you couldn't go—

RF: You couldn't go too far. And besides picking cotton and being behind the mule, what other tasks did you have on the farm when you were growing up?

JA: When it was cotton picking time, I wasn't no big cotton picker, but I'd get all I could get, yeah, pick cotton, pick peas, pull corn, whatever.

RF: Did you have hogs as well on the farm?

JA: We had one time maybe and my daddy one time had a few.

RF: Were your parents from Holmes County?

JA: As far as I know. They was in Holmes County when I knew them. (laughs)

RF: How many siblings did you have?

JA: How many siblings?

RF: Yes, sir.

JA: It was four of us. There were some miscarriages. I think two kids, I'm the oldest alive, and I think two or three that miscarried or died, didn't live, and I'm the first one that lived. I'm the oldest and then I was nine years old when my brother came in '36. In '37, I had a sister was born and in '39, my baby brother was born. There was one that was born after that that didn't live.

RF: And they were also involved with doing all the chores?

JA: Yeah.

RF: Did your sisters have different chores?

JA: Well, the sister, she helped Mama in the house, but when we went to the fields, she'd chop cotton.

RF: She did?

JA: Yeah. She did what the boys did sometimes. Everybody had to get it.

RF: When you had leisure time, I know that wasn't very often, but what types of things did you all do as a family or as a community or with your friends?

JA: I don't know. At home, my sister and my brothers, we'd sing a lot in a group and every time they had anything at any church, we had to speak pieces and we had to do something, take part in it. As we grew up, we grew to be active members in the church. Whatever went on, we was in it. My brother next to me, he was a piano player, good, and my sister could sing and guess what? My daddy was a preacher.

RF: Oh really?

JA: Yes, he was. But when you'd see him in the field, you'd see him in church Sunday, when you see him Monday morning, you wouldn't think of him. Whatever had to be done, he was doing it.

RF: What denomination was he?

JA: Baptist.

RF: And was he at a specific church or did he travel around?

JA: Well, it was a long time, years, before he started pastoring. He became a pastor and he pastored quite a few churches throughout Holmes, Yazoo, Carroll County.

RF: Carroll, yeah.

JA: He pastored quite a few different churches.

RF: About how old was he when he started pastoring?

JA: I don't know. I don't know. He didn't live to be an old man like I am. My daddy passed at sixty-seven, but he was very active in whatever. Of course, I'm just eighty-three. My birthday I'm waiting on, eighty-four.

RF: Let's see. I was going to ask you about, so did you and your brothers and sister grow up going to church with your parents regularly?

JA: Oh yeah. You'd better, you'd go, yes, sir. You had to go. Ain't nobody asked you did you want to go. Get ready and let's go. That was it. You knew when you got up you had to go. Yes, sir. You'd wish you had went if you didn't.

RF: Was that every Sunday plus did you go certain nights of the week or just Sundays?

JA: Well, it was different than it is now. They'd have a prayer meeting during the week. Coming up to a revival, they'd have two weeks of prayer meetings before the revival. So everybody's fired up when you'd get to the revival itself. It wasn't like it is now.

RF: How often was a revival?

JA: Spring and maybe fall revival, but like I said, now we just go into a revival, have a revival. Back then, you'd have two weeks of prayer service ahead of the revival. Everybody'd get primed up.

RF: We're going to just move across the store for a second. I'm going to pause it.

(break in conversation)

RF: Okay. So church was a regular thing for you and your family.

JA: Yes, sir. I never was asked did I want to go; just let's go.

RF: Right. So the revival, it was several churches coming together?

JA: No, it would just be our particular church because he wasn't pastoring then. When he was pastoring, it was whatever the church was he had.

RF: Did the church sponsor big community-wide picnics?

JA: No, not really, no. Back then, they had what you call children's day across the summer where children from every church would come. You'd have it here this Sunday. You'd go over yonder next Sunday. But all the churches, surrounding churches, the children would have speeches and singing and whatever. And you'd find a lot of talent in those coming together and sometimes the best would be rewarded something to encourage them to do better.

RF: And so when you and your brothers and sister were singing at home, you were singing spirituals and gospel songs?

JA: Nothing else, you'd better not. (laughs)

RF: So your neighbors growing up, they were all farmers as well?

JA: Yeah.

RF: Did you have both black and white neighbors?

JA: No.

RF: Just black neighbors? Yeah, okay. Was there a sense of community amongst your neighbors? It was a pretty tight-knit, neighbors helping each other during harvest season?

JA: Yeah. People weren't like they are now. Say, for instance, a farmer got sick or his wife got sick and he wasn't able to go to the field because he had to see to his wife. Those farmers would come together, the whole community and whatever. They'd break his land and plant it in one day. There'd be that many of them. People cooperated. They worked together. If you got sick, you had a sick person in your house, they sat up with you all night, just wouldn't stay the night. One or another would stay. People acted like they loved one another back then. You got the feeling that people actually cared for one another. I can remember my mama being sick and I'd go to bed and go to sleep. I'd wake up and the people who were there when I went to sleep would be still sitting there. She was real sick. They were sitting right by her bed, somebody fanning, somebody whatever.

RF: I know that some people call those death watches. Is that what you called them?

JA: It didn't necessarily have to be, but when it got to that point, the door was never closed at that house. People in the community would be there. In other words, what I'm trying to tell you is people shared in whatever situation it was. I can remember back then it would come time to kill a hog and my mama, when we would start cutting up that meat, she'd give me a bag and I'd go drop this out at Aunt Sally's house, go on over yonder and all the way around, just all I could carry. Sometimes I might be riding a horse and carrying it. And in reverse, when that person killed a hog, they'd do the same thing. But now, if you see a smoke behind the house, you don't know what's going on. If the hog killing's going on, you ain't going to know nothing about it. People lived neighborly then.

RF: How many families are we talking about in your community?

JA: People knew one another from church and different churches. There wasn't no limit. If I knew a person, "Take this over to brother so-and-so's house." Well, when brother so-and-so killed, he'd do the same thing.

RF: And that extended to borrowing tools for the fields?

JA: It was tough. It was tough in those days and without one another's help, they wouldn't have made it. If my mama had greens in the garden and other neighbor didn't, the neighbor would never know the difference because Mama is going to send me to carry some. They shared.

RF: Did your folks have to rent, did they own the mule or have to rent the mule when you were young?

JA: My daddy bought his. When he was renting the land, he bought. He had worked now on sharecropping where the (22:53), but then when he rented, he had to buy his own. Sometimes something happened where the neighbors, like I said, neighbors would share. If your mule ain't able to work, he's sick, something happened to him, come over and get one of mine. See, if people were like they were then, this world wouldn't be in the shape it's in.

RF: Yes, sir.

JA: They cared. They shared with one another. They cared for one another.

RF: Yes, sir.

JA: Yes, sir.

RF: That's one reason I study history. I'd like to see more of that today.

JA: I would love to see folks caring for one another. We go to church and we say we're Christians, but we don't show much Christianity. We shake hands and "glad to see you," but that's it.

RF: Let's see. So you said that you moved away for a few years and came back. Is that right?

JA: Yes. I went to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and stayed about almost two years.

RF: In Milwaukee?

JA: Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I never was a city boy. I couldn't take that city. I came back and bought me a pulp wood truck and started hauling pulp wood.

RF: Okay. That's when you became a truck farmer was when you came back?

JA: Well, let me go back. My daddy had a truck. We logged. We hauled pulp wood and we hauled logs, whatever, had to do something to make a living. And then when I came back from Milwaukee, I bought me a pulp wood truck, bought it from (25:00) Chevrolet and I think I paid something like seven hundred and some dollars for that truck.

RF: About when was that?

JA: That was in '53. I hauled pulp wood, hauled logs if I could find some, had to make a living some kind of way.

RF: Why did you move up to Milwaukee from here?

JA: At first, I did work. I worked for Louis Grocery Company. I'm a hell of a truck driver.

RF: You said Louis Grocery?

JA: Louis Grocery. You ever heard of them?

RF: I haven't.

JA: You haven't?

RF: No, I'm from North Carolina.

JA: Okay. Louis Grocery was here in Lexington. They used to have a store across over next to the post office over there. Then they had a bigger store in Durant and then the big business was in the north and they made their own Louis Pride flour and Pride meal, stuff like that. I worked for Louis Grocery. I drove one of their big trailers that hauled stuff in. You didn't go empty, though. If

you left here going to New Orleans, you left with forty thousand pounds of groceries and then you delivered that on the way to New Orleans. Then when you get to New Orleans, you get a load and you come back or if it's too late, you'd stay all night. He'd pay for your hotel room. But if you come back the same day, he paid you for your entire hours. I worked for him awhile.

RF: That's what you did? You hauled down to New Orleans?

JA: I hauled wherever. I hauled wherever.

RF: Okay. What was the furthest trip that you'd make?

JA: I went up to Tennessee a couple of times. Well, because these trucks, they (27:21). These trailers hauled into, hauled the stuff into a warehouse in Durant and the store here in Lexington would go get that stuff from the warehouse and then in Enola, they had a mill that made the flour and made the meal over there and would sack that. We'd go to Louisiana and get the sugar. That's the biggest I hauled, sugar, three-hundred-pound sacks.

RF: So that got you up to Wisconsin or--?

JA: Well, yeah. What happened was the boss man put me on a haul to all the stores. I had to supply them all with sugar and every one of the big stores. For a solid week, I didn't go home. I'd unload that store and head back to New Orleans, load that, take that somewhere else to another store, and head back to New Orleans. My wife didn't hear tell of me a whole week. And so when I come in, the big boss was there and he didn't want to pay me for the hours I had and I told him, "You told me that if I go and come, didn't stop, didn't stay in a hotel, that I got paid for my hours until I got back." "Yeah, but you've got too many hours." I said, "I put them in. I worked." I said, "Sometimes, I ought to have been asleep, but I rode." Well, he said he wasn't going to pay me. I said, "Well, boss, I won't be working for you no more." I quit. I had a cousin that come from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, that weekend and when he went back, I went with him.



RF: Really?

JA: Yeah, and I went back and I stayed almost two years in Milwaukee. I couldn't take that city.

RF: Were you trucking up there as well?

JA: No, no. I didn't do any trucking up there. I worked in a factory. I'll show you something about that factory. The last place I worked was steel, Alesmith Steel. We were building frames for the automobile and if you notice, you don't see that now. If you notice some of them old cars, they had a big bar that the springs sit on and your wheels fasten onto that allowed it to do this. Well, it takes some time with that big bar. You make it in two or three pieces. And they was paying us like four something an hour if you made so many and it was just two men in the place at two machines. It was slow. There were only two men in that place, we'd make four something an hour, either one of us. Every time one would come down the chute, I was waiting on it. Everybody else, the chute would pile up and you'd have to shut down until they catch up. They had another guy in there. I thought he was my uncle. He was a great, big, stout guy. The two of us, anybody else on that machine, you'd go back to two or three dollars an hour, but he and I would run it, we'd make four something an hour. We were working. Okay.

Shortly after that, about a month, I wasn't there but about a month before they called for a layoff and they come around and tell all of us, "Friday may be your last day working in this plant. You'll either be transferred or laid off." I was told that because I hadn't been there hardly a month. I said, "Lord, have mercy. I just got here and am making some money and now I hear I'm going to be laid off." Come around and I didn't get a layoff slip. The reason was I ran that machine and they had a union there, okay. Next week or so, a guy come around and said, "You won't be working. You'll either be transferred or laid off. You won't be working in this plant after Friday."

Everybody come by, people getting layoff slips. I didn't get one. I hadn't been nothing like six months. People laid off six months were the first ones that got the slip. People laid off a year got the next slip. People laid a year and a half got the next slip. I'm still here. People got two years got the next slip. And the only reason they had to let me go then, the union caught on to what was going on, told them I had to go.

RF: The union got you fired?

JA: Yeah. Well, you worked according to how much time you'd been there.

RF: Oh I see.

JA: See, here I come in. I left there with three months and I was supposed to have went the first month.

RF: I see.

JA: Then the union found out about it and they told me I had to go. They knew what I was doing, they didn't have nobody else to do it and they kept me, they kept me in there, and I was glad.

RF: So were you ever a member of that union?

JA: Huh?

RF: Were you ever a member of that union?

JA: No, I never was a member. I got kicked out.

RF: So then you came back to Holmes County.

JA: Yeah. I was laid off and I swore I wasn't going to come back to get to no job at all again. I left and come home.

RF: And you bought the truck.

JA: I bought the truck, started hauling pulp wood.

RF: And when did you buy the land that you started farming?

JA: See, the land I'm on right now is the land my daddy left. I never bought any land. I rented land and farmed. I farmed pretty big, but you know what, I worked a job and worked forty acres of cotton. I'd come off that job. I'd take the cotton and go to work. My family in the field with the tractor and choppers and what have you. And when I come from work, I give them the car and I get on the tractor and I run it until eleven o'clock at night. I go to work in the morning and work right with the rest of the folk, come back to the same thing that evening. At night, I'd run until eleven o'clock at night. You know what? I worked myself to the point I had many nights, my wife would have sat there to see that I didn't go to sleep. I'd go to sleep with my hand in my plate. But I had to take care of those kids some way.

RF: Sure, yes, sir. And how many children?

JA: Ten.

RF: You had ten, that's right.

JA: Living.

RF: Henry told me he was one of ten.

JA: Yeah.

RF: And they all worked on the farm as well?

JA: They did. They'd better. (laughs) Yes, sir.

RF: And so you planted cotton. You took your cotton to gin as well.

JA: Yeah. I ginned at, I can't recall the man's name, up that corner is where I ginned at. I know that man. I can't recall his name. It's an old gin shed sitting there now. When you go in that curb, where the green marker is sitting over there, before you go in this curb, you see this old building sitting there? That's part of the old gin.

RF: Okay, sure.

JA: That's where I ginned my cotton.

RF: Did you feel like you got a fair deal like all the other farmers who were ginning?

JA: As fair as I expected.

RF: When you rented land as well, did you rent from other black farm owners or mainly was it white farm owners you rented from?

JA: No, the land I rented, I rented from a white guy.

RF: Was that a good working relationship or was it—

JA: Yeah. I didn't have no problem with him. I paid him his money and we didn't have no problem.

RF: What about relationships with Ag Extension? Did you have any—

JA: Like what?

RF: The Ag Extension workers, the Extension Service. Any working relationship with them?

JA: No.

RF: No dealings with them?

JA: No.

RF: Okay. What about the AAA?

JA: AAA, no.

RF: No dealings with them either, okay.

JA: I forgot the name of the company in Greenwood.

RF: Not Staples?

JA: No, no, no, not Staples. They would let me have as much money as I wanted. I'd pay them, but I couldn't ask them for too much because I paid every year. I never owed them a dime for next year.

RF: So they knew your credit. They knew you were—

JA: If I didn't have a dime left, I paid them.

RF: This was a loan company or--?

JA: Yeah.

RF: Okay.

JA: I almost got it then. It's some sort of credit union.

RF: Okay, so not through the government. It was privately owned.

JA: No.

RF: Okay.

JA: I borrowed money from them. That's where I bought my first, well, not my first tractor. Yes, I did. I bought my first tractor and that tractor went bad and they told me to go wherever I wanted to find one. I went picking. I got me an A John Deere. Man, I thought I was on top of the world. They gave me the check to pay for it.

RF: Wow. So that was your second tractor.

JA: Yeah.

RF: The John Deere. What was your first?

JA: The first was a John Deere, but it was a B, a little John Deere. I had me an A. I'm ready now.

RF: What year was that when you bought that tractor?

JA: That was like in the 60s. It was in the 60s because I worked for, you know Hardin Iving got the ready mix down here?

RF: I don't know.

JA: Well, that's his son. I worked for the old man. That's where I worked in the day. I drove trucks or whatever for him and I left there and go home, go to the field. I didn't go home. I'd get on that tractor. I had lights on. I'd run that tractor until eleven and sometimes twelve o'clock. Come home, my wife would fix me my food, and I'd start eating and she'd have to wake me up. I'd go to sleep with my hand in the plate. Get up the next morning and go on at it again.

RF: Did you take over all the operations on the farm from your father or did some of your siblings also take over?

JA: That first tractor, he and I bought it together and he just went out and he'd just give me his share in it. But it was kind of old and it went out right in the main planting time and I had to have something. I bought me a '70 John Deere. It was the baddest thing I ever had. Man, you couldn't do nothing with me. I was done. That 70 A (41:12). 70 John Deere is a bad tractor. I wish I had me one today. I was a bad boy with a 70 John Deere.

RF: I have to ask where tractor pulls popular?

JA: I've never been in one of them, no.

AA: Hey, how are you doing, sir? Alright.

RF: How are you doing?

AA: Alright.

RF: I'm Rob Ferguson.

AA: Anthony Anderson.

RF: Nice to meet you, Anthony.

AA: Mr. Anderson, how are you doing?

JA: That's my grandson right there.

RF: Very nice to meet you. I'm meeting a lot of the family.

AA: Yes, sir. You're having a conversation with a wise man now.

RF: I can tell.

JA: Naturally, he would say that. I'm his granddaddy.

RF: Right. Well, we've got it on tape. So it's official.

JA: All grandchildren think their granddaddies are great. (laughs)

AA: That's right. I know I've got the greatest.

RF: Well, let's see. But you got out of farming eventually.

JA: Yeah. I got out of farming. I hardly remember how I done it. I just quit. I quit. The last tractor I had was a (pause) fourteen. Tony? Lord, I can't recall it.

AA: Yes, sir.

JA: What size tractor does Roy got that I let him have?

AA: A 14 66. He's got a 14 66.

RF: That was your last one?

JA: That was my last one. I sold it to my son-in-law. That was a bad tractor.

RF: So this was in the 80s when you got out of farming or later?

JA: Yeah. Well, I didn't do much farming, not a whole lot. I don't know what I did, but I used that tractor and I raised a few beans and corn and stuff like that. I didn't go and fool with cotton. I bought that tractor over there at (43:28). I kept it a couple of years and my son-in-law was using it, cutting hay, and he was coming in one evening with his hay bale behind it and it blew, just went out the side.

RF: So that was that.

JA: He said, "Pop, I'm going to get it running. I don't know what." So he bought an old engine, just something to get me going, and he was fixing to put it in there. I said, "Roy, no, we ain't doing it

like that." I said, "You've been going this far. I'm going to take it from there." I went to the part house and bought everything new to go in it. See, it's got those sleeves. When you put sleeves in one, it's just like brand new. The new piston's got a new sleeve to run in and I had new sleeves put in, a new piston, new everything, and it's still running today. It still gets it today.

RF: Going back a little bit, did your parents, did they make a big deal out of education for you and your siblings? Did they push you to go to school?

JA: No. That's a sad thing that we kids, it don't happen now, we kids had to help get that crop out of the field. There have been many times when there was a test going on. I had to chop cotton. I couldn't go to school. I had to help with that crop or if you're picking cotton. I had to go to the field. I missed some tests. I think I was a pretty smart scholar, but if you don't get the opportunity, you can only go so far. I think I did good for what I had to work with.

RF: Sure.

JA: Started coming spring time, my daddy started the field and bushes would grow up in the field and they'd cut those sprouts and get them out of the field. So I had to come, miss school. I had to come home and cut them sprouts ahead of the plow and then we started planting. I had to tow fertilizer. I had to tow seeds. I missed a lot of school. But when I went, I got what I was supposed to get. I didn't back down. Math was my best subject.

RF: Math?

JA: Math. I could read pretty good and do all that other stuff, but math was my main subject.

?: You know that gentleman right there?

RF: How are you, Mr. Anderson?

?: Alright. How are you doing?



RF: Alright.

?: (46:53)

RF: That's alright.

?: Good to see you.

RF: Were your parents ever involved in, well, was your father actually involved in any fraternal organizations like Masons or anything like that around here?

JA: He was a Mason.

RF: He was a Mason?

JA: Yeah. My mother was an Eastern Star.

RF: Oh, an Eastern Star. Were a lot of people of their generation in your community members?

JA: Well, it was kind of a family thing. My daddy's daddy was a Mason and my daddy's mama was an Eastern Star. So that was kind of a family thing.

RF: A family thing, sure.

JA: All his brothers were Masons.

RF: Did that give them any sort of, I guess, social or political standing in the community?

JA: I don't know about that. They never took it as. They were just ordinary people and that's all you could get out of them. They weren't going to be nothing but ordinary people, didn't care what.

RF: So did they ever get involved in politics or anything like that?

JA: Well, my daddy didn't. I did. I ran for supervisor and I've been on the school board for twenty-two years. I'm in my twenty-third year on the school board. I ran for supervisor and I missed that. I ran for the school board. I ran against a highly educated woman, but I beat her.

When I come up for reelection, I had three people running against me. That's hard when you've got three people running against you and you've got to get fifty percent plus one. I got it. (laughs)

RF: What do you think got you involved in politics? How'd you get interested in it?

JA: Well, I don't know. Like I said, I ran for supervisor because we wasn't getting what we deserved and the road wasn't being worked. We just wasn't getting. It was a big challenge running back then, a black man running against a white man.

RF: Was it in the 60s?

JA: Yeah. No, it was in the 70s, '71.

RF: '71.

JA: '71. I ran a good race.

RF: You won the first one?

JA: No, I didn't. I lost. And then what happened, my daddy got hurt. My daddy got shot and he couldn't--. I had to get out of the race and see to him. I was in there, but you know, campaigning, you've got to get out there and stay. But Daddy come first and I had to, my sisters and brothers were all up north. He had to be lifted. He weighed two hundred and seventy pounds and there wasn't nobody else to do it but me. I think if I had been able to devote all of my time, I believe I'd have made it.

RF: When did you first register to vote?

JA: For the race?

RF: No. You said if you had been able to vote the whole time, oh, I'm sorry.

JA: No. I mean I had been able to—

RF: To be in the race the whole time.

JA: Yeah.

RF: I see.

JA: You know, put more into the race. But Daddy come first. I had to see to him.

RF: Sure, yeah. During the 60s, do you remember people involved in the civil rights movement in town or was that something that came later?

JA: What?

RF: People involved in the civil rights movement. Do you remember them in town?

JA: Of course. I was in.

RF: You were involved, okay. That was what I was getting around to.

JA: Well, it wasn't an easy thing, but when it comes to improving and moving up, you can't sit on the sidelines and move.

RF: Yes, sir.

JA: If it means better, you just have to tighten your belt and do it. I was living out there on that country road. I had a bridge going into my house. The bridge broke in. I asked my supervisor for lumber to fix it with and he said, "I don't have it." But I'd see the truck putting in box covers and what have you at everything other place. And I asked for a box cover: "I don't have one." Yet I'd pass places where they was putting them in. So I decided to run. I said, "You don't have to worry about mine. When I get elected, I'll put my own in."

RF: How many times did you run for supervisor?

JA: I just run that one time for supervisor.

RF: Were there many black officials in Lexington at the time?

JA: There was very few. In fact, that same year, you've ever heard of Representative Roberts G. Clark?

RF: Yes, sir.

JA: The first representative?

RF: Yes, sir. From Tchula or Lexington?

JA: Huh?

RF: Was he from Tchula?

JA: No, he was from here.

RF: Okay. I couldn't remember.

JA: But Tchula was in his area, in his district.

RF: Right.

JA: We campaigned together when I was running for supervisor. That man, me and him used to get to talking. My wife wouldn't know where I was. His wife didn't know where he was. And my wife would call his wife and say, "Do you know where them two men is?" And she'd say no. His wife would call my wife: "You heard anything from him?" I was close. Me and that man were close, yes, sir.

RF: From what I understand, he was a good man.

JA: A great man.

RF: A very good man.

JA: A great man, yes, sir.

RF: Do you know if your parents ever registered to vote?

JA: My parents?

RF: Yes.

JA: Yeah, they registered.

RF: They did register, okay.

JA: Yeah.

RF: Well, you said your father died in the late 60s, right?

JA: Huh?

RF: Your father died in the late 60s, is that right?

JA: No, my father died in '72.

RF: '72, okay. And your mother lived on after that, okay.

JA: Yeah. Mama died in '83.

RF: '83, okay. So when you were younger, were they registered or did that come much later?

JA: We all registered the same time.

RF: Really?

JA: We registered. We had to have federal people to come here and see us registered. You wasn't allowed to go in there. You had to have federal marshals went in there with you.

RF: So you went with your parents? You registered the same day?

JA: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

RF: How did you feel when you registered to vote? How do you think your parents felt?

JA: You know what? I felt like a man.

RF: Yes, sir.

JA: It was something I never had the opportunity to do before and you know, you're taking a chance, but your future was taking a chance. If you're going to ever be anything or ever move up or ever be anybody, you've got to take chances. But one thing I learned is make sure, however hard you had to fight and whatever people done, make sure you treat people right. Nobody could ever say, "James, (55:26)." That's a fact. My daddy taught me that and I teach my children. Do right, whatever, whatever it costs you. Make sure you do what's right.

RF: I know this won't be a surprise, but when I interviewed your son on Thursday, he said almost the exact same thing and he said he learned that from his father.

JA: Yeah. (laughs)

RF: That's good to hear.

JA: Yeah, there were ten of them and we had to get it. I had to get it. They had to get it, yes, sir. My oldest boy, I was working for Ford Construction and he's on that A John Deere that I was telling you about and the long bottom, he rode along it from here, he rode along it from here to (56:50) the Dollar Store.

RF: Wow, that's a ways.

JA: I was working for Ford Construction and I had him on that tractor and I'd come in in the evening and that tractor, I'd come in at the upper end and he's at the lower end. That boy done let that tractor get away from him. I don't see him. He's so little. (laughs) He's so little, I couldn't see him down there. Lord, that boy done fell off that tractor. (laughs) He'd be on it, though.

RF: That's a big piece of land.

JA: Yes.

RF: Near the Dollar Store.

JA: That wasn't my land. I rented that land.

RF: That's the land you rented? Okay, yeah. Is that a mile from here to the Dollar Store, something like that?

JA: Hmm?

RF: About a mile from here to the Dollar Store? It's the one down the hill, right?

JA: Yeah.

RF: Yeah, okay. Maybe a little less than a mile.

JA: I don't know. That's less than a mile, I think.

RF: Yeah, okay. Still, that's a good-sized piece of land to farm.

JA: Yeah.

RF: We were talking about the civil rights movement, voting. Do you feel that you owning land and your parents owning land gave you any sort of additional protection politically?

JA: Well, at least it did this for me. You know you had a place to stay. You were living in another man's house and he just become dissatisfied, something you didn't do right, and he asks for his house. You may have to pile that stuff on the side of the road somewhere, but you've got to get out. So when you're in your own house, at least you feel secure, yeah.

RF: Conversely, do you feel like anybody was targeted because they owned land, somebody wanted their land and threatened them or anything like that?

JA: Well, I don't know about that, but you know, those who were actually in the movement, they was targeted. We all were.

RF: Really?

JA: Yeah, yes, sir.

RF: Were you directly threatened yourself?

JA: Well, what they'd do at night, you'd lay down and you'd hear somebody on your porch. You don't know whether they're there to shoot you down or you don't know whether they're going to set the house on fire. You lived in fear and I remember one night, my daddy was pastoring a church up in the hills and he was gone out there to a meeting and my house was about as far as from here to the bank from my mama's house. She was there by herself. And these guys pulled up down from my uncle's house and I was laying down. I want to see they was shooting a plug shotgun, plug, took three shots, pulled up right in front of his door and shot three times: boom, boom, boom.

RF: Into the door or in front of the door?

JA: They were shooting over the house. You would run out and they were liable to shoot you. And they reloaded and did it again: pow, pow, pow. I laying on my porch and I'm listening and then they cranked up and they come up the road and sometimes they'd come up the road by that short bend. They'd turn and go back. I stood there waiting that night. They come up. They were driving a '67 Ford with the muffler out. They had this (61:02). So I was looking out my window. We didn't have shades. We'd hang a curtain or hang a sheet or something over the window. I thought maybe he was going slow, he was going to turn around and go back, but when he made that curve, he tightened up, coming on, and I got my .22 rifle and when I come around the foot of the bed, those lights were shining on me. They had to see me and I made it to the front door, just cracked the door and waited. They slowed up and I thought he was going to stop, but then he tightened up and went on up to my Mama's.

Now I know Mama is there by herself. So I handed my wife that automatic rifle and I got my pistol and I went up the road. There were three guys in that truck. I can see them right now and what they do, they drive up in front of your house and toot the horn. If you come to the door, that's where they shoot you down. So they drove up there and cut the lights off, cut the truck off and cut the lights off. And they didn't know I was standing right behind the truck looking at all three of them through the back, and they toot the horn: honk, honk, honk. See, if you hear that, if you come to the door, that was it. I knew Mama was there by herself. I was just standing there waiting. Nobody come. She didn't have no light in the house, but she raised the shades and she was trying to see who it is, but they couldn't see her. Hit the horn again: honk, honk, honk. Nobody showed up and they ain't had no idea that I'm standing right at the back of the truck. And they did it a few times. They said, "There must not be nobody there. Let's go ahead." They pulled off and



when they pulled off, I called Mama to make sure she was alright: "Mama, are you alright?" She said, "Yeah, boy, are you out there?" I said, "I was standing right behind the truck. They didn't know I was there." It was just the good Lord was with us. There's been some challenges, but we made it.

RF: Did you recognize the men?

JA: I knew the truck, but I didn't know the people. I didn't know them.

RF: So they were from around here. They were local.

JA: Here in the town of Lexington, yeah.

RF: Was there anybody at the time you could report that to or it was just--?

JA: It was what?

RF: Anybody at the time that you could report that to or it was just something that you had to deal with on your own?

JA: You didn't get much help.

RF: Yeah.

JA: That's all I'll say.

RF: Sure, no, I understand.

JA: You didn't get much help and that's why so many had to go on their own. You're on your own. I can't help you.

RF: Was it your brother who was a police officer?

JA: My uncle.

RF: Your uncle, okay.

JA: What's he called? The man you're talking to, his father.

RF: Roy Anderson's father.

JA: That was my daddy's brother.

RF: Okay, your dad's brother, okay. But he was the only black police officer in town for a long time, right?

JA: For awhile. He was the first black. And certain things, certain places, he would go and he had a limit to what he could do. Otherwise, you do what you're told to do.

RF: Were your parents supportive of you being involved in the movement and getting involved in politics?

JA: They were. My mama never did anything, but my daddy was involved in it. He was in it.

RF: He was, okay.

JA: Marching or whatever, he was right there. My wife never did go much, but me and my daddy went. I was his oldest. We'd stand shoulder to shoulder and he supported me in whatever I do and I supported him. That was my daddy (65:41).

RF: That's great. Let me look and see what other questions I might be skipping here. Let's see. Did your mother or your wife get involved in any home demonstration club? No? Okay. 4H, anything like that? Any of your children—

JA: No.

RF: No, okay. I try to ask this of everybody that I talk to. When several years, twenty, thirty, forty years, when the next generation is listening to this interview, what would you want them to know about what owning land meant to you and your family, what the land meant to you and your family?

JA: To me, owning land is like having money in the bank. You don't know what it means to have a home that nobody can put you off until you have lived in a house and people come tell you to be gone in the morning and you've got no place to go. I've had that to happen.

RF: Yes, sir.

JA: I load up and park at my daddy's house and the next day I find a house somewhere, get told, "You have to go." So when you get your own home, that's the night you can't sleep for having flashes run over you. You feel like, in other words, you feel like you really are a grown man when you can own your own house. It makes you feel like a different person. I don't know about anybody else. It don't drive nothing to my head where I act a fool, but I learned to appreciate it. I learned to appreciate it.

RF: Your grandchildren are here. Do you think there's a legacy there?

JA: Well, I have to say, like I said, my daddy, we did things trying to move up. It's been in the blood for a long time. This is something I haven't mentioned to you. In 1970, '71, '72, I managed the first black store.

RF: In the county?

JA: A bunch of people come together, put up money, and bought a store, named it Community Pride, and I was the first manager. When I went into that store, they had fourteen hundred dollars worth of stock. They had very little money in the bank. I could write one check a week. Louis Grocery was where you get your cheapest groceries. They were coming from in the north. You had to buy at least a thousand dollars. So the most important things I bought from Louis Grocery. I could only write one check a week. Within three months, you understand, I said fourteen thousand dollars worth of groceries when I took it over. In three months' time, I had a twenty thousand dollar stock in the store.

RF: In Community Pride?

JA: In Community Pride, and I could write a check whenever I needed to, no limit on me. I could buy what I wanted. I stayed there a little over a year. People got to where they didn't

appreciate what I was doing. Everybody else at that store, when dinner time come, they didn't want to stay at the cash register and they'd run. Everybody would go eat their dinner. They'd sell sandwiches in that store. I bought me a sandwich and I worked straight through. I didn't have no break period. I worked from the time I turned that key until I turned it back, and I'd eat with a sandwich in my hand. And one of the people who was helping put up the money for that store came in one day during twelve o'clock and I was with a sandwich in my hand and I'm mopping up or doing something, and she said, the lady said, "There's the reason this store can't make no money. The darn manager is eating up the profits." I give it to them. I really give it to them. They went down. I had brought it up in three months' time. I could only write a thousand-dollar check and that was it and I could write a check for whatever, no limit, whatever I needed, and I had twenty thousand dollars in the bank instead of fourteen.

RF: How long did the store last?

JA: Not long, about a year after I left.

RF: Was there only one branch?

JA: No, the store had, Community Pride was over different counties, but it was one connection. What they done, since we wasn't up and out in the business, they hired a manager that managed, I don't know, fourteen or fifteen stores, something like that, and he went from store to store and he checked your markup, sometimes made you change your prices and whatever. He'd go around and check all your stock, make sure everything was right. He'd check over all your papers and everything.

RF: Did you know a Ms. Fanny Booker?

JA: Of course I did.

RF: Okay.

JA: Oh man. That house out there is where she died. She told me she wanted me, since she didn't have no children, if me and my wife would take her when she got old and promise to keep her until she passed away that she would will that house to me. But me and wife were too tied up. I didn't want to do something half do it. That's why I couldn't do what I wanted to do for her and I wouldn't do it. Yeah, me and Fanny Booker were like, just like that, sure did. Here's something I ain't told you. In '72, I started driving a truck for J. J. Ferguson. He had a plant, asphalt plant, gravel plant, gravel crusher, washer.

RF: What was his last name? Ford?

JA: Ferguson.

RF: Ferguson? Oh, okay. That's my name.

JA: J. J. Ferguson. You ain't heard of him?

RF: I'm not related to him.

JA: Anyway, I started driving a truck for him in '72, in October of '72, and I drove a truck for that man seven years and he made me truck foreman after seven years. I was truck foreman for two years and he made me superintendent. I ran that business down there for him. The longest any man had ever been there was three years. I ran it sixteen years.

RF: Did you retire from there?

JA: Well, I didn't retire. I quit. What happened, we had shut this plant down. I was then working out of Greenville and that particular day, that wasn't my job, but whatever come up, if they needed me, I'd pinch hit for somebody. I was escorting a load of beans. Anytime a truck got over eighty feet, I believe it is, they have to be escorted and we had a hundred and ten feet beans. I was following the second truck and going up by, what's the name of the place up here where the casino is, the corner of 61 going up?

RF: Not Greenwood?

JA: You go like you're going to, oh, my head ain't right.

RF: Up in the delta?

JA: Yeah.

RF: I know where you're talking about. I can't think of the town either.

JA: Okay. And there was a lady sitting at the thing, waiting. She didn't see nothing but that truck and that truck passed, just as it passed, the tail passed, she followed the tail right into my path. We locked up, both the car and two pickups, we went out into the field for a minute, the front of that building over yonder. And both cars were jammed together. She couldn't get out and I couldn't get out. I got my neck broke.

RF: You broke your neck?

JA: And that was the end of my work.

RF: Sure.

JA: But I worked for that man thirty-two years, J. J. Ferguson. He used to have a meeting once a year where he'd call all the superintendents in and bring all the employees, anybody in management, he brought them all in. And it was myself at first and my son got to be out on the road and he used to come, but the guy in charge told us that we was the first two blacks to be in that. And J. J., every year, he made them hold that spot for me. I had to do the prayer when we come together. We was the only two blacks there and then finally, my son was added on, and three of us there. He wouldn't allow nobody to do the prayer but me.

RF: I don't think I realized that Ms. Booker died in Lexington because she used to live near Tchula, right?

JA: She lived in that area.

RF: She was involved with the Providence Farm up there.

JA: Yeah, but when she died, she's got, it's a house right when you go down the hill from where the international place used to be and you start up that other hill. The brick house that's sitting next to the road as you start up that hill, that was her house.

RF: And she had a museum or something, but I hear that museum isn't around anymore.

JA: It was out back. No, it wasn't. Her house was right here and the museum was right on the same side of the road.

RF: But it's not there anymore?

JA: The building is there. I don't think nothing's in there.

RF: Okay. That's too bad. I've been reading about that museum and I hope I—

JA: Her church was Sweetwater Church out in the country. J. J. gave me that authority. They decided to brick that church. We were making mason sand down there and I gave her a load of mason sand to do the brick. The church up here that my daughter-in-law used to be a member of, they had a pretty big sized church and they did brick there. I dumped a load at the front and one at the back, gave them two loads, didn't cost them nothing. All the gravel around that church, I gave that. J. J. told me, "Anything the church wants, let them have it."

RF: That's great. And she was pretty involved in the movement as well.

JA: Yes, she was.

RF: Yeah, that's what I thought, and with the Community Pride stores.

JA: Huh?

RF: Was she involved with the Community Pride stores too?

JA: Yeah, somewhat.

RF: I think I read about them through her.

JA: Yeah.

RF: Did you know much about the Providence Farm up around Tchula? Ever hear much about it?

JA: I never did go up there. I didn't know too much about it.

RF: Yeah. That was all gone by the 50s or 60s, I think, anyway.

JA: Yeah.

RF: Was there anything else I didn't ask you about farming or about the land or anything like that you want to add?

JA: Well, you just about got my history.

RF: Okay.

JA: I think the most important things I've told you about. Wherever somebody is fighting for justice, you'll find me there. I believe every man and woman ought to have freedom to go and come, live, do what they want to do. I stand on that. I think regardless of how high a man gets, you ought to never get too high where you can't treat people right. Give everybody their fill because Lord knows, I want my fill. I will not trample on the next man's. That's one thing that I would never take from an individual, the freedom of choice, the freedom of speech, freedom to act. An individual deserves that. And I'll say this and then I'm through. There's one thing I'm proud of. My record, anybody knows me, knows I **(82:18)** misusing nobody and now you've got hell on wheels if you misuse me. I stand on that. I think every man ought to have that.

RF: Well, thank you for talking to me.

JA: You're welcome.

RF: I appreciate it.

JA: Okay.



**END OF INTERVIEW**

Transcribed by Emily Baran. August 2011