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U.19 Long Civil Rights Movement: Breaking New Ground

Interview U-0657

Roy Anderson

27 June 2011

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Abstract – Roy Anderson

Interviewee: Roy Anderson

Interviewer: Robert Hunt Ferguson

Interview Date: June 227, 2011

Location: Anderson Farm & Feed Supply, Lexington, Mississippi

Interview Length: 1:09:45

Mr. Anderson spoke about his memories growing up on his parents' farm near Lexington, Mississippi – his chores, his experiences playing baseball in the neighborhood, his love of the country. Mr. Anderson also discussed a five year move to Chicago when he was in his early twenties where he clerked in a law firm. He returned to Lexington and began farming. A recurring theme in the interview is that Mr. Anderson feels that he is a very lucky individual to own land and feels that he wouldn't want to be anywhere else but on his farm in Lexington.

Field Notes – Roy Anderson

Interviewee: Roy Anderson

Interviewer: Robert Hunt Ferguson

Interview Date: June 27, 2011

Location: Anderson Farm & Feed Supply, Lexington, Mississippi

Interview Length: 1:09:45

THE INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Roy Anderson was born in 1953 in Lexington, Mississippi. Anderson's parents bought farm land in 1951, which he later inherited. Mr. Anderson also purchased eleven additional acres in 2000. Mr. Anderson is a cattle farmer presently. He has lived most of his life in Lexington, MS, except for several years when he was a law clerk in Chicago.

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 Roy Anderson's cousin, Henry. Mr. Anderson and I sat outside of the feed store while others did business inside – the store had both black and white patrons. The interview was interrupted twice. The first time so that I could receive a phone call at the store, an interview subject called the store and asked to set up an interview with me later in the day. The second interruption came when Mr. Anderson introduced me to another possible interview subject who stopped by the store. The occasional vehicle can be heard in the gravel lot next to where we sat for the interview.

Interviewee: Roy Anderson

Interviewer: Rob Ferguson

Interview date: June 27, 2011

Location: Lexington, Mississippi

Length: 1 disc, approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes

START OF DISC

RF: Okay. So my name is Rob Ferguson. It's June twenty—anybody know what today is? June twenty-seventh, sorry about that, twenty-seventh. I should have figured that out before I started talking to you. 2011. Would you mind introducing yourself for the--?

RA: I'm Roy Anderson. I was born December the twentieth, 1953, here in Holmes County, Lexington, Mississippi.

RF: And you're a farm owner. Is that right?

RA: Yes, I am.

RF: How long have you owned the land.

RA: Well, presently where I am, eleven years. We still our parents' property that we use also. Then we've had ownership of that since 1951.

RF: Wow, okay. So your parents owned that since the early 50s?

RA: Yes.

RF: Okay. And what sort of farming do you do?

RA: Presently, I'm just a cattle farmer. I don't do any row crop farming, just cattle farming.

RF: And what about your parents? Were they also cattle or did they do row crop?

RA: Well, we both had cattle, row crop. Back in the old days, they raised a little bit of everything, gardening, fruit trees, and then cattle and row crop farming also.

RF: And we're at Anderson's Feed Store. Is this your store?

RA: No. I used to own this, but I sold out and closed down and later on, my cousins, they opened it up. Henry is my cousin.

RF: Okay. Oh so Henry owns it. I didn't realize that. Okay. So let's see. The land has been in the family since the early 50s.

RA: 1951, yes.

RF: So they farmed corn and cotton?

RA: Corn, cotton, sorghum, Louisiana cane, watermelon, (2:03), you name it. As far as row crop, it was corn and cotton, though, basically. Later on in the 70s, they went to soybeans.

RF: About how much land was that that they owned?

RA: Basically, on that eighty eight acres, basically, they farmed, say, forty acres of it, but he used to also rent other property that he farmed on also.

RF: And where would they take the produce to market or was there another setup where they sold their produce?

RA: I don't really know about that, but as far as the cotton, I know he would—all I know is he would take it to the gin and he would go somewhere and sell it. As far as the corn, the corn was used basically on the farm for the feed for the cattle and horses and hogs and chickens and different things. In the summertime, it was used as a source of food for the family.

RF: And do you know, when your folks bought the land in '51, did they know the family they were buying the land from? Was it a neighbor of theirs or--?

RA: He knew the owner of the property before because as far back as I can remember, the man that he bought the property from financed it for him and he paid the man on a yearly basis until he paid him out. So evidentially, he had to know him for the man to finance the property for him.

RF: Sure. Had they rented that land before they purchased it?

RA: No, no. My father used to own parcels of land in the delta and he sold it and moved in the hills and bought this up here. So he didn't. There was no connection beforehand.

RF: Where did he live in the delta?

RA: Tchula, Mississippi.

RF: Sure, okay.

RA: I don't know the exact area. At the time, a farmer was allowed to take thirty, forty acres, I don't remember, and a house, but he said it wasn't very productive down there and he sold his property there and moved up here and bought this. And when he moved, he said the people there told him he'd never make it, he'd never make it in the hills because somehow, the people in the delta had a concept that they couldn't make it, they couldn't live in the hills. And this is call the hill country. I just remember him saying things like in about four years, he had paid that loan off for that eighty eight acres. In four years, he had paid it off. And the reason I can remember that is because he had a sister that was living near where he had bought his and some twenty years later, they had never paid off their land in the delta.

RF: In Tchula.

RA: They had never finished paying it off and when their son went to the army, went to Vietnam, he sent money back to pay that property off and so that's how I can remember that being said.

RF: Why do you think they were more successful up around this area in the hill country than in the delta?

RA: You know, I really don't know because at the time, I was a kid and I didn't understand that. But knowing history as I do, I'm just saying that when he was working, when he moved up here, what he made was his. When he was down there, it was kind of like sharecropping in a way. Someone else always was getting more of it than he was and so he said he just didn't see a future in it and he sold it. He found a buyer however and sold it and moved up here and bought property up here, and in four years, paid it off.

RF: Wow. So as a child, did you start working on your parents' farm pretty young?

RA: Oh yeah. I don't even remember the age, but as far back as I can remember, four or five years old, we had chores to do. You either had to feed the dogs, the hogs, the chickens, cows, or get firewood in. There was always work. You didn't get too little. There was something you had to do and so until I grew up and graduated from high school and left, I had a job. There was always something to do to contribute to the farm.

RF: What was that like? Did you get up at sunrise or before sunrise?

RA: In our house, you got up at sunrise and you got busy and you stayed busy until the sun go down when you wasn't in school. There was always something to do. If you didn't have nothing to do, my dad would find something for you to do.

RF: You said you fed the cows. About how many cows did you all have growing up?

RA: Not many. I can remember five or six because back then in the 60s, there weren't really black farmers didn't have beef cows. We had milk cows. That was a source of food for the family and I can remember we had three or four cows to milk at all times and there were some that maybe didn't have their calves. So it was like five cows, to the best of my knowledge, and calves. But

we didn't have beef cows. We had dairy cows. They wasn't really all dairy cows, but if she was there, she had to produce milk for the family.

RF: And you had quite a few chickens?

RA: Oh we had, oh yes, probably a hundred chickens, plenty of chickens, ducks, and things when I was growing up. That's why I like having them now because I grew up around them.

RF: And of course, you ate the eggs and chickens, killed chickens for meat?

RA: Yeah, that was a source of food. We had to kill the chickens for food and we used the eggs as food and my mom used them for cooking. We didn't buy eggs. We didn't buy too much of no food because we killed four or five hogs every year and we would hunt and so there was always plenty of food.

RF: What kinds of things did you hunt for?

RA: My dad used to love to coon hunt. So we would coon hunt, squirrel hunt. He never was a rabbit hunter, but we would kill a rabbit occasionally, but basically, coon and squirrel hunting. That was it. There wasn't much deer hunting going on back then. For us, there wasn't. I'll put it like that.

RF: And you had a garden as well that you got food from?

RA: We had a huge garden. Early in the year, we had white potatoes and onions and turnip greens, collard greens. About the time spring came, then there go, we had another garden which was, you name it, it was there. You name it, it was in there. And so that was our source of food. There wasn't much need for a grocery store back then in that day, other than salt and maybe rice.

RF: Salt and rice?

RA: Salt and rice and sugar maybe.

RF: Did you churn your own butter as well?

RA: Yes, yes, done that many days.

RF: Another chore.

RA: Oh yeah and when you get through all your chores in the daytime, when late evening comes, you get your chair and sit there and do the churn, churn until your arm gets tired and you go to sleep. That was part of it, best butter in the world.

RF: Let's see. So you had siblings?

RA: Yes, I had two brothers and at the time, there were six sisters and everybody had a job to do. The boys' job mostly was the outside work. At the time, we didn't have running water in our homes. We would bring water. We'd get the water and bring it into the house for the girls and my mom and get the firewood and stuff like that, while the girls, they would basically milk the cows and do all the cleanup work and washing and stuff. But everybody had work to do. There was no sitting around watching TV and playing on the computer and shopping like now. We had work to do.

RF: Did most of your siblings stay in the area?

RA: You know, as we got grown, every one of us left and went to Chicago to stay and I still have, let me see, well, one of my sisters passed, but the other girls are in Chicago, except for my two baby sisters. They moved back and all three of the boys, my brothers and I, we moved back. The city just wasn't for me. I'll speak for myself. It's okay for a visit, a short visit, but I love the country. I love being out in the country myself.

RF: So when did you move to Chicago? So you went to high school? You finished high school here?

RA: I finished high school in 1972.

RF: In Lexington?

RA: Yes.

RF: Okay.

RA: I went to Chicago that summer and came back the fall and enrolled at Mississippi Valley State University, stayed there for two and a half years. At the end of the first semester of my sophomore year, I had gone to summer school that year, but at the end of the semester, I went to Chicago basically to work for one semester and maybe get me a car and save a little money. So I got up there and it took me a little while to find a good job. I found work, but nothing that I really liked, but I had to work and it was really a full year before I got a good job. So therefore, my little one semester was gone out of the window, you see. And once I got that good job and a good-paying job, I just didn't come back until five years later when I got laid off. And when I got laid off, my boss gave me two weeks' pay, two weeks' vacation pay and two weeks' severance, just a two week bonus. So when he did that, back to Mississippi I came.

RF: Where were you working in Chicago?

RA: I worked at a law firm. I was a clerk at a law firm. I really just came for a visit, but after I got down here and got to looking around, I went back and stayed. I found a house that I could rent while I was here because I was here for two weeks. I went back and stayed two weeks and came back and been here ever since and love every moment of it. I just don't want to live in the city anymore.

RF: Even when you were in Chicago, did you miss the country? Did you miss Mississippi?

RA: I did. Every vacation was spent here, every. I spent one vacation in Detroit. And every vacation, I came home to Mississippi. The fresh air, the sound of the birds, the crickets, that's just what I love. Some people would want to know, "Where are you going on vacation?" I'd say, "I'm going home." And they knew where I was going before I even said that because yeah, I missed it.

RF: Did you follow your siblings up to Chicago? Did they move first, some of your older siblings?

RA: Yeah, because my five sisters are older than I am and two brothers are older than I am. When I went there, I'm trying to see, all of them was there. Yeah, all of them was there, right. I went. Then later, I have two sisters younger than I am. They followed after I was up there and then eventually, my older brother, he moved back home to Mississippi, and I and one of my sisters, my younger sister next to me, we came back during the same time. And I'm trying to see. My other brother, he came in '91 and my baby sister moved back in '95, yeah, 1995. So we all ended up. I still have, like I said, sisters up there, but my brothers, they're all here.

RF: When they came back, did they go into farming?

RA: No. Well, like I said, not row crop farming now. We all have horses and cows and so cattle farming, yeah, but not the fields. I don't think we want to return to that.

RF: And as soon as you got back, did you look into getting your own herd? Was that the first thing you did?

RA: Well, maybe not soon. Let me see. It was two or three years because my dad had a stroke and I was taking care of his cows and at that time, he told me something that really made a lot of sense. He said he was going to sell them and I said, "No, just keep them and I'll take care of them." He said no. He said, "You have to learn in life when it's time to give up something." He said, "And it's time for me to give it up." I said, "Well, okay." So we sold his cows, but in the meantime, I had already, he had given me one and I had purchased probably four or five. And when he sold his, so that's when I started to increase my herd.

RF: Did you help out on your parents' farm when you came back?

RA: Sure, sure. Matter of fact, I did most of the work because, like I said, he had had a stroke and he wasn't able to do it anymore. He did, but he just wasn't able to get out there and do

much. So I would always. That that I couldn't do, I would get somebody to help me. Yeah, I did most of the work.

RF: Going back to when you were growing up for just a minute, you said there's no time for, well, of course, there were no computers, but you didn't play on a computer or anything like that. What did y'all do, you and your siblings do for leisure, any down time you had?

RA: It's strange when you look back at it. All the neighborhood kids, we was in the same boat. We worked the fields. We worked the pastures. We did whatever we had to do to survive legally. We just worked because there was no games and stuff in our community. And on a Sunday afternoon after church, we'd all get together out there in the pasture. We had a baseball team. We played baseball. There was no basketball. We didn't have a basketball, but we had a baseball, hit it with sticks, whatever you had to hit it with. We didn't have a baseball bats, whatever stick you could find. We played baseball and we played touch football. I guess leisurely that was the only thing that we could do. We would get together and go. We went to church and kept our spiritual lives growing, but there wasn't much to do, but we didn't get into trouble. None of us has been in jail and had trouble with the law or anything. So I don't think, I missed nothing. Kids now, they have to have too much and they're still not satisfied. So I don't miss nothing in my life. I enjoyed it. Sometimes I think the old ways are the better way, I really do.

RF: The baseball team, was that just sort of pickup baseball? Did you end up playing teams from other towns ever?

RA: No, no. What I meant is that the community.

RF: Oh the whole community.

RA: The whole community. There was twenty, thirty families within a four or five mile radius. The guy, I'm just saying that the closest neighbor to us, maybe we had a team that would go

over and play two or three other families. And since we had a big pasture there, a lot of times they would come to us and play. When you've got eight, nine kids in a family, you can almost have a team yourself. So there was two families, the Johnson family that lived next door there, and I think there was about, yeah, three girls and about ten boys. So with nine in our family and ten in that family, it wasn't hard to have a baseball team right there. No, we didn't play other teams. It was just we had our own team.

RF: Your own family team.

RA: Yeah.

RF: So the guys and the girls played on the same team?

RA: Well, the girls were there. They weren't as tough as we were, but they were good.

RF: So the other families that played, these are mostly black families or—

RA: Yeah.

RF: Were there white families as well?

RA: No, they was all black. There was white in our neighborhood, but they was elderly and they really didn't have any young kids. At the time, when you think about it, we was teenagers and below. The white kids in our area was in their 20s at the time. So they was considered grown. So we really didn't have white neighbors to play games with and stuff like that. We knew them and we was close. The whites that lived in our community, like I said, most of them was elderly. We would go and help them gather their gardens and things and crops because they was really, especially there was this one neighbor that had a lot of fruit trees and we used to love to go help her gather her fruits because that was a good time for us too. She loved for us to come because she was too old to get out there and gather and couldn't carry the bale. It was a good day. It was a good time.

RF: Since it was a family affair with baseball, was there food involved? Did your parents cook for the other team on a Sunday afternoon?

RA: Well, no, not really. When you think about it, it was summertime. We just had fun. There was fruit trees and things. Back in the old days, we didn't worry about it. We had so many watermelon, my dad would actually go over in the field and get a wagonload of watermelon, park them out there under the tree.

RF: That was all you needed.

RA: We ate watermelon, cantaloupe. We had an abundance of food in the summertime.

RF: And all that came from your field.

RA: And we didn't sell it. It was just for the neighbors. So that's what we ate. If you're out there playing ball, you don't want no hot food anyway. Hot dogs was a thing of the future back then.

RF: You mentioned this was usually after church. What church did you attend coming up?

RA: At the time, we was at, it was a church, our community church, Rockport Missionary Baptist Church.

RF: Rockport, okay.

RA: Rockport. That was basically the only church in our community. There were basically thirty, forty families there at the time. They all have gone away and moved on now mostly, but that was the church.

RF: And you mentioned touch football as well. Was that as frequent as the baseball games?

RA: Well, yeah, because sometimes, like I said, there was just so many guys. We just had games going. I'd be over here playing baseball and somebody would be over there playing football. It was just that was the only source of recreation on a Sunday when we didn't have to go to the fields. It was our only source of recreation. So if it's twenty or thirty guys out there, there were no

fighters. We was just there to entertain. Sometimes the guys entertained all the girls with their mothers. They were kind of sitting around after church. So it was all good.

RF: Let me, I'm going to move a little bit closer. It just got a little louder. Let's see. I was going to ask you something else. Were you involved in 4H at all growing up?

RA: No, not really, no.

RF: Was that something that was in your community? Were any friends involved in that?

RA: Well, at the time, we didn't know anything about it. We didn't know anything about it. It was not part of our community. I learned about 4H probably after I became a teenager probably.

RF: When you moved to Chicago, was your idea to make a life up there when you first moved?

RA: Well, actually, when I first went there, I only intended to stay for one semester and after I got there, like I said, I worked odd jobs because I couldn't find anything that I really wanted, that was in my line that I really wanted to do. And I was there a year before I got a full-time stable job with good pay. I thought that I'd be there the next twenty years, but when I got laid off, I didn't even look for another job. I was really ready to come home. So I ended up saying there five, maybe five, maybe six years and that was it.

RF: So it sounds like the community that you grew up around was pretty helpful, lots of cooperation and people helping each other out harvesting.

RA: Definitely. We would help our neighbors. Our neighbors would help us, both white and black. We would help them. And in the fall of the year, basically around Thanksgiving or Christmas, they would donate us food, bring us a Christmas box. Things like that you don't forget about. They would bring us a box of apples or oranges or things like that for the work that we had done for them all year and we was grateful for that because we didn't know any better than helping one

another. That's the way we was raised up and we didn't do it for the box of fruit. It was just their way of returning, giving us something back. It was all good.

RF: Let's see. You said you bought the land you're farming now about eleven years ago?

RA: Yeah, in 2000, the year 2000.

RF: 2000, okay. Did you go through the USDA to get a loan for that?

RA: No, I bought it through the bank.

RF: Through the bank? Okay.

RA: Yeah.

RF: Mr. Hank Anderson was saying that he had had some issues getting loans before. Did you ever come across any issues with that?

RA: No, because I really never had much dealing with Farmers Home. I just always dealt directly with the bank so I could be on a short term. I didn't want to paying on a long term. I've heard of other farmers having problems getting loans through Farmers Home and that was probably one of the reasons that kind of steered me away from it. I even considered getting a Farmers Home house built through Farmers Home, but I didn't want to be paying on it for thirty-five years and so that turned me away from that.

RF: When you were growing up, so the folks you went to high school with, your friends, were their parents farmers as well?

RA: It was all, well, let's say ninety-five percent of them was farmers. There were very few black people back in the 60s that had public jobs unless you was a schoolteacher. They began at that time to hire policemen because my father was a policeman, but there was very few black people that had public jobs back in the 50s and 60s. And so 99.9 percent of the parents were farmers.

RF: It's interesting. You said your father was a policeman. So he supplemented. He farmed and was a policeman as well at the same time.

RA: Right, yeah. He had been a farmer all his life. I guess he had a good, clean life and a good, clean record and everything. The mayor called him. I don't know whether there was a shortage and they couldn't find someone. At the time, he was the, well, he wasn't the first. He was the second black police officer to work in Lexington.

RF: Really?

RA: The first came from out of town. He came in an undercover thing, but I just heard about this. I remember him, but he came in as an undercover cop in the city and broke up a lot of stuff that was going on. He was the first and so after that happened, he got shipped out quick because people wanted to kill him, I guess, and they was looking for a black policeman and at the time, they called my dad and asked him would he do it. Well, this was in the mid-60s and his kids was getting grown and beginning to leave home. At the time, my four sisters had already left. My brother was getting ready to leave. So I guess my dad saw farming kind of going downhill for his help and he saw, so he had an opportunity to go and so he did. He worked as a policeman, then as a deputy sheriff until he retired.

RF: Did he have any military background or he was just a good person?

RA: Yeah. I think they just thought he was a good person and that he was a decent person. My dad was a big man. I don't remember his height, but he was something like 6'3", probably two hundred and sixty, seventy pounds at the time. And I guess they looked at his physical and his way he conducted himself, whatever. They hired him as a policeman. He had no training in law enforcement, but they sent him to the academy and everything. He received training there.

RF: Did he enjoy that work?

RA: I think he did. I think he did. At first, I had my doubts, but later on, it became a part of him. After he worked as a policeman, he then quit. He worked as a security guard. While he went back into farming at night, he worked as a security guard and then as a deputy sheriff, like I said, until his health kind of got bad and he retired. He really never really saw any other job after he got into law enforcement.

RF: How many years did he do that?

RA: Let me see. He entered, I would say, in the late 60s. I'm going to estimate from '67 to '85 or something like that because he died in '87 and first, he had an aneurysm and a stroke in '85 and he had quit working before then because he was sick.

RF: When he was hired as a police officer, did he have to hire any extra help on the farm?

RA: No, because we, my brothers and I, you just think, we was teenagers then. We could handle it. When you've done something all your life, you should be good at it. So no, my brothers did the tractor driving, whatever was done, he did it. And my dad used to have to go to work at four in the evening. So he had a good shift from four in the evening, afternoon, until two in the morning. So he had good hours that he could do some work in the day, plus get him a little rest from two in the morning. Well, he'd still get up early, seven o'clock, something like that, in the morning and he'd get up and work all day, come back in, get him a little nap, and go back and work at night as a policeman. He did that for a good while too.

RF: You mentioned your brother drove the tractor. When you were growing up, did you use both tractors and mules to work the farm?

RA: Right. We had a small tractor. Well, at first it was just the mules and the horses and then I can remember in 1963, we had a very good crop that year and my daddy bought his first tractor in 1963. Before that, the only way we did it was with the mules and the horses.

RF: Do you remember what kind of tractor that was?

RA: Allis-Chalmers with the little narrow front tires together like a bicycle. I never will forget it, an Allis-Chalmers. Then we kept it probably two or three years and it turned over. My brother was coming across a creek area pulling a trailer with a couple bales of hay on it, a couple bales of cotton, and somehow he hit the gear shift and knocked it out of gear coming down that steep hill and the tractor jack knifed. The trailer made a jack knife and turned the tractor over, threw my brother twenty feet probably away from it, which spared his life because everything turned over on it. But when the tractor flipped, it threw him twenty, thirty feet away from it. So my dad then bought a John Deere tractor. So then we had moved on up. But things carry on. There was no problem. We didn't never have to hire nobody.

RF: Were there any serious injuries on the farm with you and your siblings?

RA: No.

RF: That was one of the biggest incidents when he got thrown?

RA: Yeah. It was something to laugh about later because he didn't get hurt. No, there was no injuries or anything.

RF: Do you recall getting the tractor made the work a lot easier for you?

RA: Oh yeah, so much difference in speed and stuff. With the tractor, with the work that you would do with two mules in a day, you probably could do it with the tractor in an hour. So it was a whole lot different.

RF: Do you recall that your father, as a farmer, when he did sell his produce or cotton or anything, do you recall that he was treated pretty fairly by the people who bought his produce?

RA: You know, I really don't know because, like I said, at that particular time, young people didn't get in grown people's business. They say what goes on in Vegas stays in Vegas. My dad, he was

the man of the house. He took care of all that and we didn't know what was going on financially. We thought we was rich and we was poor.

RF: Well, speaking of that, were you more well off than some other classmates who didn't farm, who weren't in public work or in farming?

RA: I think so because I listened to people talk and even now, I hear some of my friends talk and they would talk about how they would go days without food. We never went without food. We had plenty of food. I listen to them talk about what their mamas used to have to do, how she had to work for this person all day and work for this one all night and how she had to slave and this and that. My mama never had to do that. So now that would make me think. That's why I'm saying it was just like we was rich. We didn't have to do that. My mama didn't have to work. She didn't even have to come to the fields because she had small children at home. She was at home and she prepared the food and stuff so when we got home, the food was ready. So there was a whole lot of difference in the way some of the kids that wasn't on the farm lived.

RF: When your father became a police officer, you were a teenager then. Did that affect relationships with any of your friends? Did that affect your childhood at all?

RA: No, no, really because they all kind of looked up to him because at the time, like I said, we didn't have the games and the kids in trouble in our neighborhood. So the parents loved it. My neighbors' parents loved it because they figured when their kids are out, they had him to watch over them and keep them out of trouble because they always figure a boy is going to get in trouble.

RF: So he was Lexington's first uniformed black police officer?

RA: Full-time.

RF: Full-time, yeah, okay.

RA: Because the one prior to him, like I said, he was brought in under an undercover thing. I don't know, back in the 60s, they probably didn't call it undercover then, but he was brought in as a plainclothes man. I think it was to eradicate whiskey stills and stuff, people that were bootlegging whiskey. And after he got here and they broke up a lot of that, then he stayed on as a uniformed cop for awhile, but he wasn't from the area. So he had to leave.

RF: So what's different for you now that you're cattle farming or raising cattle? What's different from growing up and row cropping? Is it less intensive, more intensive, or more intensive in some areas than others?

RA: Well, more intensive in some areas than others because with the economy as it is now, you've got to know, I guess farming was the same way, but you've got to know when to row them and when to hoe them because if you sell them at the wrong time, you're going to lose and if you sell at the right time, you can make good money out of livestock. But it's a gamble because you've got to make sure that you've got the proper nutrition for them and feed for them year round. So it's just like farming. You've got to have the proper fertilizer and the proper water and stuff on your crop, irrigation or whatever. If you don't, you won't make a good crop. So it's the same thing with cattle. You've got to make sure their upkeep is taken care of also.

RF: And you have horses as well?

RA: Yeah. I have horses. I don't ride because I was in an accident when I was young and I don't ride, but I just, the love for horses has always been there and I just love having them. I go out and rub them and feed them every day and talk to them. My daughter, she loves to ride and so I keep them for that reason.

RF: Do you raise them to sell?

RA: I do, I do, but there's sometimes you get attached to some of them and you've got some you just won't sell. I try not to get attached to them because I sell. That's what my daughter says. I won't keep them myself. But we've got some that, I've got one horse that I've had probably for six, seven years, and that's about as long as I've had any one horse. So basically, they're for sale.

RF: About how many head of cattle?

RA: Well, at one point, I had forty-two head of mama cows and a bull, two bulls, and their calves, but I had a problem with deer hunters. Deer hunters purchased eighty acres of land next to us there and for some reason, they want to plant their winter grazing for deer close to the fence and when cows see green grass, it's hard to keep them out of that fence. The people that bought the land, they're the type of people that don't want a cow on their property and they don't want you on their property, but they come up on our property and deer hunt and kill deer and cut the fence and come on over with their four wheelers and get the deer and never fix the fence back and when you don't fix the fence back, what do you think the cows are going to do?

RF: Of course, yeah.

RA: That's what I can't get them to see. No one wants to admit to it, but the four-wheel tracks are there off of their property. The fence is cut. Who did it? They don't allow anybody else on their property, but they're always in denial when it comes to something like that, but they don't want cows on their property. At one point, I had to sell like thirty-something of my cows because I just simply couldn't keep them from over there. I had to get a guy with horses and dogs to come in and catch them and as I caught them, I sold them because it was going to be a problem. Someone was going to end up getting killed or hurt and it wasn't worth it. It wasn't worth it.

RF: That's too bad about the neighbors. Do they live on the land too or is it just hunting?

RA: No, they just bought it. From what I understand, the owner is a doctor. I never personally meant him and they live in a different county and he sends people down to hunt and they're not from the area. So they stir a lot of emotion that don't need to be stirred when they go to talking about you not coming on their property, but they feel like they can come on mine. So that's getting to the point where somebody's going to get shot.

RF: Yeah. That's a bad situation.

RA: Yeah, and it's not worth it. I don't like to live like that.

RF: Goodness, let's see. What are some questions I haven't asked you? I know your dad was a police officer too, but aside from always having food on the table, did you feel that because your family did own land and they did farm it, it gave you a more comfortable life that some other people in the county might not have had?

RA: I think so because a lot of people put emphasis on where I live and what I got and this and that. The only time that I didn't own where I lived is when I lived in Chicago. As long as I'm here, I own the property. I own the home that I live in. When I lived in Chicago, I lived on somebody else's property. So I had to go to somebody else to get food. Whatever I did, I had to go to someone. Here, I own. If I wanted to go kill a calf, kill a hog, whatever, I can do it as a source of meat. Or if I just want to go camping or fishing or hunting, I've got somewhere to go. So that's way I love the life, the country life.

RF: Were your parents encouraging of you and your siblings when you left for Chicago? Is that something they encouraged?

RA: They did, they did, because they always felt like you want to get out the house and experience some things in life, and it was a great experience. It was a great experience, but like I

said, there's nothing that I want to return to. Now this is, okay, it has been, I'll tell you when it was, 1977, since I've last been to Chicago.

RF: Oh okay. Let me pause this real quick and we'll get back to it. Sorry, is that alright?

RA: Okay, no problem.

(break in conversation)

RA: He could probably tell you some stories about being discriminated against and stuff because he used to be. He was farming in that area when he was denied financing and stuff.

RF: That's Henry's father, okay.

RA: Right.

RF: And I didn't catch his name. Is he also--?

RA: James Anderson.

RF: James, okay, James Anderson. Okay. It sounds like I may interview him.

RA: Here goes another gentleman right here you need to interview too. Now he could tell you. Come here for a minute. He could tell you. He's doing an interview on black farmers and stuff.

?: How are you doing?

RF: I'm Rob Ferguson.

RA: And he could tell you some stories from back in the 60s and beyond that too. So I wish you could all could set up a date.

RF: If you're interested, I'd be happy to sit down with you. It's for a oral history research project on African American farmers in the South.

?: Oral history?

RF: It's through the University of North Carolina. We've got a research grant to travel around the South and interview African American farmers about their experiences.

?: Are you doing an oral history?

RF: Yeah. It will eventually go into a publication. It will be several years in the making probably, but two professors who are heading up the project and they're sort of co-authoring a book about black farmers in the South.

?: We just done one or actually we're supposed to be doing one.

RF: This actually tells you a bit more about it. That's sort of a letter of introduction for me and this is my name and number at the top, but that tells you a little bit about the project and the contact info for one of the professors who's heading it up is at the bottom there. So that's my number and I'm around for the next few days.

?: Can I have one of these?

RF: Yeah. That's yours to take, yeah.

?: Read it and I'll give you a call.

RF: Great. I'll be in town until Thursday morning, so anytime before then. I know it's kind of short notice, but if you have any free time, I'll be happy to talk to you.

?: Okay, alrighty. Alright, I appreciate it.

RF: Thank you.

?: Thank you, Roy.

RA: Alright, man.

?: Alright, y'all have a good one.

RF: You too.

RA: Take care.

RF: I forgot the last question we were--.

RA: I forgot it too.

RF: Let's see. You said your folks were supportive of you moving up there, alright. But I'm interested in this notion of you always wanting to come back to the land and to Mississippi and feeling that was a sort of a part of your life that was missing, I guess.

RA: Yeah. I guess it's the dirt, man. It's just old mother nature. I love doing things. Like I said, I love doing things in the soil, growing things in the soil. It's just something that to me the city can't provide. It's raising your children. It's a different environment. It's a different culture, I think the best in the world. When I got married when I was in Chicago, I told my wife before we got married, I said, "Now look, I'm not staying here." And I wanted her to know before we got married, I said, "Because I don't think this place is fit to raise a dog because you've got to raise him in the house and I don't want my kids raised here." So we had a clear understanding that that wasn't where I was going to stay. We was getting married there and I was going to be there awhile, but don't think this is going to be home. So I didn't want her to--. I wanted to be here. I've been other places. I've been other places, but to me, no place like home, no place like home.

RF: Your wife, was she from Chicago?

RA: My wife was originally born in Clarksdale, Mississippi, but had been in Chicago since she was two years old, knew nothing about Clarksdale. Her parents moved up there when she was young. She didn't even know where Mississippi was until we came down here together.

RF: Do you think that your children will be involved with the land somehow?

RA: I have one daughter that loves horses and cows and she helps me in the garden, but I don't think that'll be part of her future, but if she would, say, if she ever would get married to someone that likes the things that I like, I think she'd be a great partner. But you don't find that too much in young people these days, but she likes to do it. She likes the chickens and the things like that. Most of the things that I do, she likes, but I don't think that'll be--.

And I have a son. My son lives in Denver. When he lived here when he was young, it was never an interest of his and when they don't want to, you can't really, you can't make it. You can't make them want to be that way. No one made me. My parents didn't make me want to live on a farm or want to live in the country. It was a choice that I made and I experienced living in the city and different places. I lived in Detroit, I lived in Chicago, on a college campus in Jackson, but I was never satisfied until I got back home.

I got to even Thursday of this week, we're leaving and going to Chicago to visit my sister that is in the hospital. My brother wants to stay until the fourth, Monday. I'm trying to get him to wait until Friday because I don't want to stay four days. I want to go see my sister, but I don't want to stay for that long. I want to get back where I can deal with my horses and chickens and things when I get home. It's just my love for nature and the animals and the way God made us, I guess.

RF: How often do you get to do things like go fishing and stuff like that? I know you've got to be busy.

RA: That's a tough one there. I haven't been fishing since 1995. So that'll tell you.

RF: Okay. So it's been awhile.

RA: It's been twenty-something years. Every year, I say, "I'm going fishing this year. I'm going fishing." My wife says, "Yeah. You said that last year." I haven't made it there yet because when I go fishing, if they're biting, I can stay, but if they're not biting, I don't have the patience to sit there all day. But if I'm getting hits, I stick around, but if I don't catch a few fish within thirty minutes, an hour, while I'm there, I'm gone. I've got better things to do.

RF: And is hunting the same way?

RA: I don't hunt anymore. I used to. I got bad wheels. I've got slow blood circulation in my legs and I can't stand up a long time and therefore, I can't do a lot of walking. So I don't hunt. I

gave up night hunting for that reason and thought that I would deer hunt. So deer hunting, I went deer hunting twice after I bought my gun and everything. Four o'clock in the morning, I'm out there freezing, waiting on a deer, and my mind is thinking, "Man, I could be at home in my bed. It's warm." So I went one more day and after that, I sold everything.

RF: That was it.

RA: Deer hunting was gone for me. I killed more deer in the broad, wide-open daytime than I do sitting out there at four o'clock in the morning, waiting until he comes out of his den. I just gave up deer hunting after two or three days. So I really don't do any hunting. I love fishing, but I really just don't take the time to go like I used to. Like I said, it's been 1995 since I really did some fishing and I'm planning on going this year.

RF: Yeah?

RA: I'm still planning on going.

RF: What do you think you're going to fish for? What do you prefer to fish for?

RA: You know what? My favorite is a China cat and a bass, but a China catfish, it doesn't have a lot of bones in it and that's real good eating.

RF: Well, I try to ask a similar question of everybody I'm interviewing, but if you could tell a younger generation or a generation that comes after you, who's maybe listening to this interview or a historian who's listening to this interview, what farming and owning land meant to you and your family, or means to you and meant to your family, what might you say?

RA: As for me, I think real estate, land is the best investment that anyone can make. Reason why? It's going to be here when everything else is gone. You can buy a hundred-thousand-dollar car. In a few years, that car is ready for the junkyard. You purchase a hundred acres of land and when you're a hundred years old, that land is worth ten times as much as what it was when you purchased

it. So this is what God gave us and we need to take care of it and cherish it. I love it, wouldn't trade. Some people might call my lifestyle country or whatever. I wouldn't trade it for a million bucks. I wouldn't trade it.

RF: Actually, one more question occurred to me. Are most of the farmers in the area that you know of, are they mostly doing cattle now?

RA: Right, they are because it has gotten to the point now where small farmers can't make it, can't survive. You've either got to be big or you've got to be out. And there aren't any small row crop farmers anymore. You've got to have two, three, four, five hundred acres even to be considered a farmer now. But there are small farms that are just like gardening and things like that, vegetable farmers, I'll put it like that, but when you go to dealing with cotton, corn, or soybeans and to the row crop farming like that, you've got to be big. Small farming, I remember the day when I was a kid when there were some elderly neighbors, had five acres, and that's all they farmed. Of course, we couldn't understand because my daddy had eighty acres here and forty acres here, but he had nine children. They were old men that had no one but themselves, but they had to farm to survive. They had five acres and they would plant corn and cotton on those five acres and that was their way of surviving. Now I don't know how much money that they was getting to plant that, but that was their only source of income. I don't think they even had, I don't know whether they even had Social Security and stuff back in the 50s and 60s. I don't know. All I knew was people had to work for what they had. I knew no other way and I don't know any other way now.

RF: Alright. Was there anything else that I haven't asked you about farming that you want to tell people that might be listening to this interview about owning land or raising cattle?

RA: Well, like I said, it's a good way to live, in my opinion, but you've got to love what you're doing. You can't do it on the hope that daddy did it or my granddaddy did it. If it's not what you're

doing, if you don't enjoy yourself, you're not going to be successful in it because it requires a lot of your time and a lot of work, but it pays off in the end because, like I said, just being happy. Happiness, you can't buy it. And when I walk out and look at my animals, if I drive by in my pickup truck and sit on my tailgate and talk to my horses and they eat out of my hand, you can't buy that. That's peaceful to me. I'm trying to think of the word. Anyway, I'm not worried about anything. I don't have no stress. I'm not stressed out about anything. To me, animals is a source of therapy. I'm just at peace when I'm with them and they're my therapy. So I'm not stressed when I drive out there and sit on my tailgate up under a shady tree and the cows will come up and the horses will come up. I have no arguments, no disagreement. So I'm at peace. So what better can a man, what else can a man expect?

RF: And that's something you couldn't find in the city.

RA: You can't find that in the city. I lived in the city and I went to the park. You park and you sit out there for a moment or just concentration. Here comes people cursing and saying all kind of evil things and smoking joints. There is no peace. In the country, just total peace. I love it. Like I said, what more can a man look for than to be in a peaceful surrounding? That's what I love about it.

RF: Yeah. I understand. Well, I'm out of questions unless you have anything else you want to share.

RA: I'm finished. I think I probably talked too much.

RF: No, no, no, it's great.

RA: I wish we could get more kids involved in farming of some sort. I don't expect them to go back to chopping cotton and picking cotton, but some sort of nature involvement with animals and things. I heard someone said that kids in a wheelchair or something like that, what a source of therapy a dog is to them or something like that, and I understand because I knew a little boy that

had cerebral palsy and he just loved animals. He couldn't talk, but his expression, and it seemed like the dog knew his expression. That peace of comfort makes me wish that all kids had some experience of country living, even living in the country for a week or something, eating the food that they eat. We eat raw food off of trees and raw food off the vine that kids think only come out of grocery stores. And chicken, the eggs from our chickens and things, I give my neighbors some and they say they don't want those eggs: "A chicken laid those eggs." I said, "What do you think, there's a factory that produces eggs? They've got to come from some chicken." They think there's a factory out there that produces eggs. So I don't know. I just wish everyone could really experience what I've experienced in life. I've enjoyed every moment. I don't pretend. I'm for real.

RF: Well, thank you very much for talking to me. Go ahead.

RA: I'm fifty-seven years old and I would say fifty-two of those years was spent in country living. I wouldn't trade them. I wouldn't trade them. If the Lord gave me another fifty-seven years, I wish I could spend them in the country. I really do.

RF: Does your son enjoy living in Denver?

RA: You know, I think it's the same situation I was in when I first went to Chicago. It was all about the job, the money, and making a living, but there comes a point in your life when you realize that if you're not happy, it's not worth it.

RF: Does he come back here for vacations like you did?

RA: No, not as much, not as much. He's in a different generation, but he understands me. He understands that's what I like and he understands that's what his mother likes. And so I know they say the apple don't fall far from the tree. He's okay. He wants to know about this horse and that horse, how everything is doing. So it tells me that it's on his mind even though he's not here. He has

a little girl and she wants to experience. I wish she could and I keep trying to get him to let her spend the summer with us after school.

RF: That would be great.

RA: I wish she could. I'd spoil her rotten.

RF: How old is she?

RA: She's born in 2001; so she's ten. She's ten. She turned ten on April the fifteenth.

RF: So did you have to convince your wife of moving back down here from Chicago? I know she's from Clarksdale.

RA: Well, that's a different story now.

RF: Okay, but she likes it. You said she likes it.

RA: Yeah, but we're no longer together. We divorced.

RF: Oh I'm sorry. Okay.

RA: No, well, we're the best of friends.

RF: Okay. I'm prying. I'm sorry about that.

RA: No, we're no longer together. We divorced and I remarried. She didn't. She is a mama's child and I always told her that. Her mother had been living in Chicago for fifty-something years and when we moved down here, I told my wife that I wasn't going to stay up there, but then when we moved down here, she got homesick. She wanted to go back and be with her mother. So she went back supposedly for a visit, but she didn't come back. About a year later, my mother and I was talking and her mother told me, she said her husband had had a stroke too and they had been working on that job thirty-eight, forty years. The job left Chicago and went somewhere else and that broke his heart and he had a stroke. So she said, "Find me somewhere to stay." She said, "We've got to get out of this place and we're tired of sitting up here and looking out the windows."

And he just wasn't used to not working, but after he got laid off and had the stroke, he wasn't able to do anything. I thought she was just kidding. She had been to Lexington one time in her life to visit us. So I didn't do anything about it. I didn't react on it because I thought she was just kidding. Two weeks later, she called me and said, "You ain't found me nowhere yet?" I said, "You were serious?" Because her daughter was back up there. I'm her son-in-law still. So I knew several times. So I went out and I found her a place and called and told her about it. She flew down and they went and looked at it, bought it, and two or three weeks later, they moved here.

RF: No kidding.

RA: So she died last year, but in the meantime, what I'm saying is they moved here and I said I'd give her, I was referring to my ex-wife, I'd give her two years. She ain't going to stay away from her mama. So once her mother moved here, well, I was wrong about the two years. It was a year and a half. She was down here and so she's been here ever since. But we're the best of friends and that's my son's mother. We're still tight. We talk. I remarried. Matter of fact, we talked on the phone this morning, but we're close. We're good friends. My mother-in-law died last year of cancer and she's still here and everybody's surprised that she's still here because she has no family here. My son's in Denver. The rest of her siblings are in Chicago and the suburbs, but I said she's not going anywhere. Her mama is still here and she's not going anywhere. Her mama is buried here and she's not going anywhere. She's still a mama's child even though she's fifty-five years old. She's still a mama's child.

RF: And her mom had lived in Clarksdale.

RA: Her mom was raised in Clarksdale, but she had been in Chicago ever since fifty-something years because my wife is fifty-five years old and she went there when she was two years

old, maybe forty-something because she had been back here ten years before she died, but then she wanted to come back also. So she moved back.

But it's a good living. It's a good living. It's all what you, you get out of life what you put into it.

RF: It sounds like a good living. I'm envious.

RA: I love it. Even here in town, we're hearing all these trucks and things. When I'm out at my place, I don't hear all that noise. When I lived in Chicago, I lived two blocks from a fire station and a police station. All night, all day long, their sirens weren't going off and on. It's gets to the point where you don't hear them because it's just common. So I'm sitting here with all these trucks coming by and it's the same thing. I don't even hear them, but they're noisy to your mike there. But out at my place, I live in the country. I don't even hear all that. My house is back off the road. It's a nice distance, within seeing distance, but I don't hear all the traffic. I hear birds cricking all day, frogs at night. It's what a person likes. I love that.

RF: That's a relaxing sound.

RA: It is, it is, it is. I love it. I could sleep out on my deck all night with no light on, just peaceful. I don't have to worry about nobody coming. I could leave my door open. I don't have to worry about my neighbors. They don't bother my home. I don't bother theirs. We watch for each other.

RF: That's good.

RA: If I see a stranger come to her house, I'm not being nosy. I'm just looking. I want to know what color the car is or something and she's the same way. She'll tell you, "A red truck was at your house." But we watch for each other and I think that's the best thing in the world.

RF: My parents and their neighbors are the same way.

RA: You're not being nosy. You're just being watchful. And that's the old saying about it takes a village. It takes a village to raise a child. Well, it takes a village to watch out for each other. That way, everybody is--. Back in the old days, we didn't have locks on our doors, but everybody knew you. Like I said, everybody knew each other in the neighborhood. If a strange vehicle come in the neighborhood, then everybody in the neighborhood saw it. But those days are gone now.

RF: Alright. Well, again, thanks for speaking to me.

RA: Thank you for interviewing me. I enjoyed it.

RF: Good. I'm glad.

RA: I hope you got something fruitful out of it and it helps somebody.

RF: I think it was really fruitful. Yeah. I think it was a great interview.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Emily Baran. August 2011