

**ODIS O. RHODES**

**Interview 232c**

**June 12, 2006, at Chamber of Commerce Building, Lufkin, Texas**

**Angelina County Historical Commission Meeting**

**Patsy Colbert, Transcriber**

**ABSTRACT:** For the June 2006 meeting of the Angelina County Historical Commission, Dr. Odis Rhodes and other members of Lufkin's African American shared their stories about growing up in a segregated society and coming to an appreciation of their race and heritage during the Civil Rights movement and desegregation. The program is moderated by Dickie Dixon and several members of the panel and the audience speak about their experiences. Most of the voices are not identified, but R.L. Kuykendall and Barbara Thompson are identified.

**Dickie Dixon (hereafter DD):** He is really an accomplished educator and as he says taught at every level of education that there is, even doing some post doctorate work in Indiana. I really look forward to hearing from him and I know you will. Before I sit down let me tell you about the meetings that will be coming up. In July Mel will be with us to sign his books. I think he will have some copies with him at that time. Joe Carter Denman is going to talk to us about his World War II experience. He was a squadron leader during World War II. I have tentatively set an appointment with my grandsons to go and talk to him. When you go in his office you know there is a plane above his desk and my grandsons put a motor on everything there is so, they are really going to be excited to get to talk to him. Joe, we are going to have to ask him back for some other ones because his family really goes deep in this community. In August Mel Johnson is going to have the program to himself. He is going to talk to us about the history of the Mormons Church of Latter Day Saints in Angelina County. There was in addition to the church that is here now there was one near Shawnee Prairie at one time earlier and in doing some work out at Red Town, a call that we received, I discovered that according to this source there was one out in the Cheese Land area at one time too, a much earlier date. Mel is going to consolidate those together. This will be a part of a larger program that I hope to do later on religious diversity, The Growth of Religious Diversity in Angelina County, including Mr. Fenley's work with humanitarians and other groups that have come along as well. Right now I am going to turn it over to Odis and let us tell him about his speech "As I slowly turn black."

**Odis Rhodes (hereafter OR):** Thank you for that generous introduction. I am going to shed my coat here. That is another symptom that I have turned black. (laughter) If you notice the letter it said "As I Slowly Turn Black" but that should be in past tense "As I slowly Turned Black." Because I think I wrote this back in 1972 and at that time the metamorphosis had just about completed itself. I had written it somewhat earlier than that it would have been most appropriate to use the term "turn" because I was in the process of turning. Now, you will note that the later portion of this little exposé had been updated just a bit from what it was in 1972. Now, back in 1969 I believe it was I was affiliated with a project that was funded by the Federal Government. The project was entitled

Project Philemon. I'm sure we have a lot of bible scholars in here. Project Philemon was taken from the book of Philemon based upon the book of Philemon. What was the name of the slave that ran away from Philemon?

**Unknown:** Onesimus.

**OR:** Onesimus ran away from his slave owner and ended up in jail with Paul I believe and while he was in jail with Paul, Paul converted him to Christianity. After Onesimus had been converted to Christianity he was in some sort of a dilemma. He didn't know whether he wanted to go back to his slave owner or whether he wanted to continue to exercise that great feeling of freedom. I think Paul persuaded him to go back and if I remember correctly Paul either wrote Philemon a letter or called him by telephone or used email or something. (laughter) Anyhow, he got the message to Philemon to accept Onesimus back but not to accept him back as a slave but to accept him back as a brother. And this is in essence what the Project Philemon was attempting to do was to alleviate all the problems associated with integration at that time. You might recall Lufkin was one of the last schools districts in the State of Texas to desegregate. I won't say to integrate because they didn't really integrate they were forced to desegregate. They were offering help in how do we somehow emolliate these two races that are so distant and apart for all these generations and centuries you might say. And how can we now learn to live harmoniously to get better. So working with this project I came up with little topics and task and speeches trying to somehow relate to the other world what it was like to live in a world of blackness. In so doing I found myself becoming even more black than I had been in the past. I came up with this little talk that I'm going to give you in just briefly. We should be through in about five minutes. I entitled it "As I Slowly Turn Black."

Now when I first heard the once popular hit tune by James Brown "I'm Black and I'm Proud" I don't know if any of you listened to it back in the day, I was somewhat miffed by that song at first and somewhat repulsed by it. Because I looked into the mirror and I asked myself proud, proud of what? At that time it was difficult for me to see anything that the black man had to be proud of for at that time I was blind and I was not black. I was blind because I was not aware of how the black man had helped not only shape America but had helped to shape the entire world. And though the color was there I was not black because I didn't think black and I wasn't particularly proud of the fact at the time that I had been born black. There were two basic reasons why I had this attitude. One was a society that discriminated against her black sisters and brothers and hid, distorted or even stole the contributions that blacks had made to this nation and to the world. And the other thing that caused me to have this kind of attitude was the insistence of a dominate culture that unless you were like it was you were somehow inferior, inadequate and virtually no good. Therefore if you wanted to be looked upon with favor back in those days, and if you wanted to make it in that society you had to emulate the dominate culture all the way from the way you talked to the way you combed your hair and if you didn't you didn't stand half a chance to make it, so to speak. So we as black people became so brainwashed that even to us black was bad, black was no good. And many of us did everything we could to get rid of that blackness.

We read the description of our hair in the dictionary and it was described as kinky, knotty, nappy and the dominate society said that is bad hair. And we ourselves began teasing and poking fun at our own selves if we had hair like girls. We said “that kinky, that knotty, that twirly hair that is some bad stuff.” And we did all we could to get rid of that bad hair. Now we fellows, I wasn’t quite old enough at the time but the older fellows would go down to the store and buy some Irish potatoes, some lye, and some stiff grease and I don’t know exactly what the composition is but they would mix it up and smear it on their hair and in about thirty or forty minutes that hair would begin to crinkle and curl and straighten and then they would wash it out and comb that stuff back and it was straight and wavy and then they would say “I got some good hair.” And we called it honky back in the day and this is one I tried to have some ointment they called black and white ointment. The first half of the box was black and the other half of the box was white and the idea was if you used this black and white ointment just watch yourself go through this metamorphosis. That old black skin you got it and use it long enough, keep washing and wiping and one day you’ll look up and you’ll be nearly white. I even spent I don’t know how much money on Black and White Ointment in order that my skin might be light. Now for the girls or women there was this great invention called the straightening comb. We had that little metal comb that we would put in the fireplace or on the heater and later on we got sophisticated, beauticians had the little gas...what did they call them?

**Unknown:** Burners.

**OR:** Burners, get those straightening combs you could lay them on top of that little gas burner and heat that comb up and put it through that hair and after awhile the black ladies too had that beautiful straight hair and they said “that is some good hair.”

This is the kind of mindset that we had been led to allow ourselves to get into. But one day when they said check out the hair of a black man. That stuff it could rain on it and it just sets there. It gets more stuff, the wind could blow it and it just sets there. You notice the other race it come a rain their hair is all down on their face, can’t do anything with it. Look at that black hair, that black hair is stubborn. It just sets right there, that is some good hair. That hair shall not be moved! So I began to make the **translation** black is bad, black is no good until black is wonderful. As I continued to follow the question I truly had not made the total metamorphosis yet because again I would look into the mirror and I would see this black face and I would reflect on this song “I am black and I am proud.” And again I would ask the question proud, proud of what? Proud when you are cursed with a skin that a dominant culture tells you that it is the very epitome of evil. That black skin is the very epitome of gloom and doom. A long, long time ago we as a people were assigned labels and clichés’ that suggested to us that the color of black is bad. It is no good. And to convince us of that we came up with all of these old sayings and clichés and whatever like black cat is bad luck. All the different colorations of cats in the world, black cats. Even my Grandma, bless her heart, we would be going to church on Sunday morning and a black cat cross the trail and “oh my gosh bad luck is coming, bad luck is coming.” Now if we were able to back up and go out around and get around that black cat you were all right but, if that black cat took off across the road and we had to cross the

trail lord watch out because we were going to have it the rest of the day 'cause the black cat done crossed the road.

**Unknown:** Especially going to the left.

**OR:** Especially going to the left. Now if it went to the right it is not going to be so bad. You are going to have a little bad luck but if it went to the left the folks might die or the mules might die. I don't know what is going to happen but we are going to have some bad luck. That is how they had brainwashed themselves. And the child in the family who caused all the heartaches and headaches you would call the black sheep of the family. You don't want him to come around. "Stay away from me boy, you the black sheep." So many bad things and you got on the bad list of people, "I'm going to put you on the black list." When you consider that that Friday whenever went wrong "this is black Friday." Everything bad was associated with the color of black. How many black kids and black folks could avoid having this brain set this mindset of "I'm no good because I'm black" and we trying to get away from that. But somewhere along the way somebody began to emphasize the positive aspects of the color black and we were told that one time the rarest flower in the world was a black orchid. And at one time the favorite story of all children back in the 1950's or 1960's was black beauty, this black horse, this black stallion. The most satisfying condition of the budget is when we can say it is in the black. I got some money in my pocket. I paid all my bills, paid my house note, my car note, a house full of groceries and I still got a little money. I'm in the black. I am in good shape. And when the foreman wants it to rain his most welcome sight is the black cloud drawing up over the horizon. I'm saying that the most expensive pearls, I'm not sure if that is the case but it was the black pearl because you very seldom find a black pearl. Once you come upon a black pearl you have a fortune.

The third time I stared into the mirror and I asked myself why? Why what? Why when you come from a race that has contributed little or nothing to the building and shaping of America and has contributed little or nothing to the building and shaping of the world proud of what? We had been told by the white man that we were mere savages in Africa and we were captured like cats, loaded on ships and brought over here to the land of opportunity to the land of plenty. We should be proud of the fact that we had been rescued from the wilds of Africa. That is what we were told because we were told that everybody in Africa were savages, unlearned, unschooled. Then one day somebody suggested to me that I read books of true history and as I read books of true history we discovered that thousands of years before there was a United States of America there were black nations in Africa living at the very highest level of civilization. We were never told that. Senegal, Ghana, Mali, all these nations dealing with nations of the world at the highest level of intelligence, highest level of commerce for that day and I began to take pride in my African Heritage as I slowly turned black.

Contrary to popular belief the first black man to set foot on American soil was not a slave but an explorer Pedro Alonzo Nino. If you speak Spanish please don't question my pronunciation of that. He was a navigator on one of the ships that sailed to the New World under the command of Christopher Columbus in 1492. When Balboa discovered

the Pacific Ocean in 1513, thirty black men were with him. My history book never told me that. The windy city of Chicago was said to be founded by a black man, Jean Baptiste du Sable. When the British soldiers fired into the crowd in Boston, Massachusetts on March 5, 1770 one of the first persons who fought then was a black man, Crispus Attucks. So, from the very beginning of America, black men and black women have paid installments on this Nations freedom through sweat blood and tears. We don't have...we don't have to go back to the 1400's or the 1700's to find blacks who have made and are making great contributions.

Several years ago the Citizens Chamber of Commerce here in Lufkin presented Dr. May Jameson as its key note speaker. She was the first black female astronaut to go into outer space. General Colin Powell was the first black to serve as Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff and as we know as we continue as Secretary of State for the United States of America, now Condoleezza Rice serves in that same capacity a black woman. Tiger Woods has so revolutionized golf until he has everybody watching golf and trying to play golf. Even I am trying to play golf. I have even seen my friends Brother Yancy trying to hit that golf ball primarily because of Tiger Woods. My wife even watches golf and she says one day she is going to try to hit that golf ball. So, we can see that blacks are making contributions in every aspect of American life and though many people have made great strides there are still miles and miles to go before we realize true equality. There are forces that are tempted to see that that dream of equality of a black man will never be totally realized but as I take notes of such accomplishments as I have just mentioned I can truly say today that I am black and I am proud and today I have totally turned black. Thank you!

**R.L. Kuykendall:** Dr. Rhodes you don't remember but I was also part of the program.

**OR:** That is right. Mr. Kuykendall was part of this program for me.

**RLK:** I never felt badly about being black but after you finished that day I was more proud of being black because especially today, some of the things you said I was aware of after reading. I am kind of a history buff. I read it and I don't know whether I remember it but I read it. That that you mentioned this morning maybe one day it will get in the text book. Whoever writes that text book will never make any money not with that in it.

**OR:** Probably not. That is probably why they never did it.

**RLK:** This is so true, because the truth hurts.

**OR:** Not in one of the major text books anyway.

**RLK:** Well not school text books anyway.

**OR:** Oh no.

**RLK:** It will never get in the school text books because then you have to change the minds of students you are listening and the doubt in their minds because of what they were told prior to. Those things you pointed out but I was very, very, very, whatever the word is when you finished. I didn't know you well. I had just been here four or five years. We went to the same church and still didn't know you well, but I was very proud of what you are giving to the background of Philemon, just like in the Bible. We read the Bible but we don't remember certain things. It's still there too.

**OR:** It is still there but we don't understand certain things.

**RLK:** You can read it now but we may not see the same thing you said. I just wanted to make the statement that is all.

**OR:** Well thank you very much. You are very kind to say that. I have a good friend she comes from up around Beaumont, Orange, that area originally. Weren't you born in Orange or Beaumont?

**RLK:** No, Galveston, Houston anyway.

**OR:** I have a good friend in Nacogdoches who is married to a young lady that comes from the Beaumont-Texas City area and she could not quite relate to a lot of the things that I was saying. For some reason or the other I guess segregation was not as harsh.

**RLK:** It was worse.

**OR:** It was worse?

**RLK:** It was worse. Beaumont, Port Arthur, all down there it was worse.

**OR:** I thought it was. Maybe she is in denial or something.

**RLK:** She is in denial.

**OR:** She couldn't relate to our going through the back door. Why?

**RLK:** Oh come on, they had a race riot in Beaumont in nineteen what?

**Unknown:** Forty something.

**RLK:** So, I don't know where she was then.

**OR:** I couldn't quite understand where she came from. I kind of asked her what planet were you living on back then?

**RLK:** She is so close to Louisiana and we know that was horrible.

**Unknown:** You ever ride in a car you get on the back seat you didn't ask any questions.

**RLK:** Yes, that is right.

**Unknown:** Dr. Rhodes one thing I would like to say I enjoyed your speech very much. When I was growing up or when we were growing up we were referred to as Negro and of course when I moved to Lufkin I understand that a lot of people did not understand and decide to call it Negra and we didn't like that and they changed the identification to black. I had a very hard time relating to being called black. My mother always told me you had the right to your ethnicity you had the right to American Negro. It wasn't until one of my professors, Dr. Bullock at Texas Southern who is now deceased, he said black and then I finally accepted it. I just refused to accept being called black or being referred to as black.

**OR:** I would say prior to 19...not sure I can pin the year but prior to 1964, maybe prior to 1954, if you called a Negro "black" you had a fight on your hands.

**Unknown:** That is right.

**OR:** And one of the worst things you could say to the Negro or say to another "you old black thing" and you are fixing to go to fist city. Don't call me black. You are right. I had difficulty accepting that because of just what I'm saying. We had been convinced that black was bad so don't call me black.

**Unknown:** Do you think that Africans changing that terminology to black helped you to accept your blackness?

**OR:** Yes it did.

**RLK:** More positive things began happening for you so.

**OR:** Black began to be looked upon as a positive, as a plus.

**Unknown:** If I may first of all I enjoyed your speech too and secondly when I was working on my masters at SFA my professor at A&M said "I want you to go ahead and graduate and I want you to go to SFA and get you a sociology course, I don't care what it is." So I just went over there and the head of the department said we got one open class and he told me the name of the professor, Mr. Cross who they had had a lot of problems with. He said "he pretends now, if you can stand it because he is going to probably get after you that he cannot say Negro, he says Negra." Well one day in class he did say that.

**RLK:** Was it Dr. White?

**Unknown:** It was Dr. Wade, M. D. Wade. And, I said...the black terminology had come into play and he asked me a question and we were talking about cultural problems and he said, "what about the Negro" but he said "negra." I said, "well Dr. Wade, I said the black

people in America and I went on to expel and after that he started saying black. I had to get a resource person and guess who I got?

**OR:** Him?

**Unknown:** Mr. Cross.

**OR:** I have had one person that used the term Negra that I think sincerely thought he was using the right pronunciation because when I told him it was offensive he cried.

**Unknown:** Is that right?

**OR:** He cried, Dr. Payne.

**Unknown:** Is that right?

**OR:** He said his mother had taught them all of that, don't refer the colored folks as niggers. Don't do that, how would you like to be called that. She said, call them Negra's they are not niggers they are Negra's. And he had been taught that was the appropriate way to pronounce it. He was sincere. But now, these others especially the one that was here in Lufkin he knew better. He had...he knew...he intentionally...our little Negra children or our Negra teachers. He intended and when he suggested that I find somewhere else to work he said Stephen F. Austin should be ready for a Negra professor.

**Unknown:** No.

**OR:** I said, "would you mind me calling them." Excuse me but I thought I saw a hand and I think his hand a long time ago.

**DD:** Now can you tell me what time period in your life you identified with the African Nation? The reason I'm asking that question I was reading a book by Klessinger and Klessinger maintained that in the Kennedy administration they approached the African American community and with the term African American and the African American community rejected that.

**OR:** I'm pretty sure they did.

**Unknown:** Not wanting to be identified with the African nations at that time.

**OR:** We knew nothing about the African nation, we knew nothing. We had the same text books you were getting after you had tore them up we got them.

**Unknown:** That is right.

**OR:** And I am sincere. We didn't get a new book at Dunbar or any school. I never had a new book in my hand at a public school student.

**Unknown:** We didn't get a one when I was at high school.

**OR:** We got them when they went out of adoption when they got tore up over at the white school they sent them over...I'm not going to use that term but, we got them.

**Unknown:** That made us always be five or six seven years behind.

**OR:** Be ten or twelve years behind. We knew nothing about the African nation.

**Unknown:** That is right.

**OR:** How could we identify with them in a positive way? We didn't even know about them.

**Unknown:** Dr. Rhodes I hope I can...I was running late and I apologize. I heard so much about the speech I wanted to be here to hear that and I couldn't get it in. But, anyhow I just wanted to elaborate on something that Mr. Kuykendall had mentioned and I got in on it in the back...Mr. Kuykendall he always talked about Dr. Rhodes. Y'all were talking about going through the back door. I'm from Arkansas and I don't know how old this lady was that was talking about it that she had witnessed that...

**OR:** Older than I am. (laughter)

**Unknown:** ...let me tell you my experience then when I lived in Arkansas. And I remember hearing people talk about going in the back door when I lived in Arkansas. I must have been...I was a teenager for sure, I can't remember from the time I lived in Arkansas ever going to the back door or having to go to the back door. Now, as I thought about that and was talking to my relatives about it because a few of them remembered that I think a lot of it has to do with age. And, another thing a lot of it has to do with also those things we noticed after my mother explained to me the reason why I didn't see that is because she didn't send me on errands. You see what I mean? I was thinking maybe the young lady then it was very well there I just didn't experience it. It was going on I just was not a partaker in it because she did all of our running around and she was a homemaker so it was my older sister that was like ten or twelve years older than me that had to do the errands and that experienced that because I didn't. They went to the downtown businesses and those and they named the places like Pappy's restaurant was a restaurant that everyone liked their chili at this restaurant. Well we got chili there all the time and my mother from time to time was a cook there. I never knew they had to go to the back door. I never went there. I never ever went there. It was always brought home to me, you see. So, getting in on that part and then you told me that she was older than you I didn't believe her and when people would say things like that and the people that were around me that was my age we didn't, we didn't relate to that either but it was going on. The reason why we didn't know it was because we were not partakers of it. We were not able to go downtown and go to those places. We were not of the age that our parents would let us do that so, when people talked about different things like that it wasn't

because it wasn't going on it wasn't happening we were not partakers in it for a lot of reasons that I mentioned.

**OR:** Okay, were you aware that it was going on?

**Unknown:** No.

**OR:** Oh, you were not.

**Unknown:** No, I was not aware that it was going on.

**Unknown:** Her parents kept it hid from her.

**Unknown:** What did you say?

**Unknown:** I said your parents kept it hid from you.

**Unknown:** I don't know if they kept it hid from me more so or my mother just sent other kids around it.

**Unknown:** I don't know your parents or if I've met them but that is one of the reasons they didn't let their children especially you at your young age, go out into the community because it might. I was born in Karnack, Texas. Lady Bird Johnson's daddy, grew up under him and the nicest person you would ever want to meet when it came to the way he treated you but then you had to abide by some of those black laws they had set up. One of them was if you went to the front door or rung the door bell or put your knuckles on the door facing, the lady of the house would come and raise up the little flap to see who you was and she would say, "Oh you got to go around to the back door" and that was just that. My daddy and I did some work clearing out a fence row, they give us our dinner. Where did they give it to us?

**Unknown:** Out the back steps.

**Unknown:** Out the back door and we set out on a little bench under a shade tree.

**Unknown:** Yes.

**Unknown:** So, they just kind of kept you...they probably didn't want you to know this.

**Unknown:** Yes, but she, my mother, explained it to me such that I didn't know about it. I just didn't know about it because I was always at home. I was the youngest of my family.

**OR:** It is quite possible this lady did not experience this herself but I guess I presume that she should have known it was going on. Maybe she didn't even have the opportunity to encounter anybody that...because her dad worked for AMOCO Oil and they were

considerate and well even if not they were one of the wealthier blacks you might say. So, they were kind of the upper crust so it is very possible that she never encountered those kinds of things.

**Unknown:** Yes, but you know what? Because it was never brought to my attention I never thought about it and I would remember when they integrated the schools in Washington I thought it was different than talking to a lot of people in Lufkin and even in Dallas that when they integrated the school, they had a lot of confusion. In this town where I lived in it was the churches and this movement that is why I didn't know about a lot of it because the transition was so smooth more or less. We didn't have any fights or anything like that. The only difference we had a year before to make up our minds to go there on our own to witness it and I was one of those people that went over there.

**RLK:** Ma'am do you know the name Daisy Bates?

**Unknown:** No.

**Unknown:** You know people talk about Arkansas, Arkansas wasn't as bad as Texas and some of the other states even though Governor Fall had his way it still wasn't as bad as Texas and some of the other states when it come to desegregation-segregation.

**Unknown:** It wasn't as bad but remembers we were bussed and the State of Texas was right there with Memphis, Tennessee and right there with...I mean Arkansas was right in between those areas of Texas. Remember, Martin Luther King did a big march and everything down there where we were but I'm just saying at that time, you know, before this Martin Luther King and all this came up before Dr. King did his march and all that, but I didn't realize it.

**OR:** What year was Central High forcedly required to integrate in Arkansas? That was under Dwight Eisenhower's tenure as president.

**RLK:** In the fifties.

**OR:** In the early fifties so Arkansas early on had encountered with this and that sort of put them in the forefront of this thing. Texas dragged and dragged and kicked and pried until the very last. And, Lufkin after Texas said okay we have got to do it and Lufkin says uh-uh we are not going to do it, we are not going to offer acceptance. And this is the position the school board took I think at the time. I don't know if you were on board at the time, but it came out in the paper. If you want us to present an acceptable desegregation plan write it for us. We don't intend to prepare one that will be acceptable to the Justice Department. So the Justice Department wrote it for them and we stayed out for thirty years.

**Unknown:** That is right.

**RLK:** Dr. Rhodes, remember the number of private schools that opened up in Lufkin?

**OR:** Private schools started popping up all over the territory.

**RLK:** Church and private schools.

**OR:** Unfortunately the church schools opened up not to teach Jesus Christ. They opened up to keep them black folks out of here. (laughter) Now, let's tell it like it is. It wasn't to teach the gospel it was to teach us how to keep them folks away from us. Amen!

**Unknown:** I went to college in Camden, Arkansas.

**OR:** Yes sir?

**Unknown:** How did your community view segregation at the time it was coming back?

**OR:** Well when you are born into a condition and you don't know any other kind of way you learn to cope with it in that way and you kind of assume this is just the way it is supposed to be. So, you didn't like it and I didn't like going to the back doors, I didn't like being called those ugly names. I didn't like not having these opportunities, I didn't like it but somehow or another you just learn to cope with it because this is the way it is. I guess this is the way it is supposed to be. I don't know why it is like this. I didn't view it as harshly and with as much hostility, you could say, as I do now because I was born into it and I didn't know any other way. Probably a lot like the folks in Iraq. I suppose they haven't missed freedom and liberty because they don't know what it is. When I was a little boy I didn't miss integration I didn't know what it was. It was something I had not had. I just wanted to make the best life with what I had right there and we had biscuits and syrup and pork bones and butter and I'm satisfied. That is all I had.

**Unknown:** Butter and bone killed meat.

**Dickie Dixon:** I was going to say in light of what you said my father growing up we had a man working for us and my mom and my family would treat him different than the dominate culture would treat him at that time. But, he had been brow beaten and he would resist that and he would not want to do that I guess because it was not safe of how other people might perceive that. So, that probably was true for him and true for others in breaking out of that would be very difficult.

**Unknown:** It is what you call Uncle Tom.

**OR:** If you claim Uncle Tom that is when you saw the plate up to the white man so you could get some papers from it and the black folks knew...

**Unknown:** How did folks in the community know?

**OR:** You just had him isolated but he probably got it also for his papers and had money in his pocket and probably did better than most of them because he played the game of

Uncle Tom. You play up to the white man, strike your head and bow to him and you know, don't stare him down, look down on the ground, play pitiful and you did do Uncle Tom. But, I discovered when I got into the integrated world all of us play Uncle Tom to a certain extent. It's not based on necessary race it was based on who has got the money.

**DD:** I don't think he was doing that. I really don't.

**OR:** Well he may not have had to.

**DD:** He and my father were a very long way back and he was very loyal. It was not ineffectual, it was real because it came out on other occasions where he defended my father so, I don't think...

**OR:** Well that relationship developed back during the slavery time between blacks and whites. That was genuine. Genuine love developed between some of those people, so that happened. I can recall there was one...I picked cotton all over East Texas, and as he was pointing out when you got ready to eat you had to get up there and go to the back door and they had some of these peas that got bugs in them, "y'all can eat that because I was going to throw them away anyhow" but, there was one family that lived out on Hwy 21 West, and I got to find out who it was, they had a screened in back porch and they would always let those cotton pickers come in and eat on the screen porch with the open cool breeze blowing. And that is the only white person I can ever recall allowing us to come into his house virtually and feed us. The rest of them you had to go out under the tree or on the wagon or wherever but not in my house. I don't know what his name was. I'm sure he is dead but I would like to find out who that family was and I want to commend him for at that time bringing those black field hands into their screened back porch and feed them, decent food, the same food they was eating.

**DD:** Let me ask you a question about the song you brought up "I am black and I am proud." Was that the emphasis for the black is beautiful movement or was it the crystallization?

**OR:** That was at the beginning when blacks first began to feel proud of themselves, when the afros started. Boy I wish I had that afro today. (laughter) It used to be we were ashamed of that old hair.

**Unknown:** Keep that sun off.

**OR:** Keep that sun off. When James Brown came out with "I'm Black and I'm Proud" folks started letting that hair grow as big as you can. We ain't ashamed of this hair no more, let it go and so that was at the beginning.

**DD:** I was just trying to find out if it was the beginning or whatever.

**OR:** That was at the beginning. "Black and I'm Proud" came out at the beginning of this black prideful movement I would say.

**Unknown:** Remember it wasn't "Black and I'm Proud" it was "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud."

**OR:** That is right. He said "Say it Loud."

**Unknown:** "Say it Loud" came out very emphatically before you said anything.

**OR:** That is right. You are right. Say it Loud because we used to say it loud. "Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud." Sing it to me. (laughter)

**Unknown:** I see a lot of these young ones now they didn't see any of these things that you are talking about.

**OR:** You are right.

**Unknown:** So they don't relate to what you saw in Arkansas. It is just like a lot of young folks now they don't even believe (unintelligible) in World War II.

**OR:** You are right. Bettie Kennedy and I were talking the other day about how can we educate our young people. What struggles that our forefathers and foremothers have gone through to try to get them to where they can enjoy the opportunities. How can we get it and we are talking about starting some classes and requiring them to come so we can teach them. The good book say teach your children.

**Unknown:** That is everywhere.

**OR:** That is right. All of us need to.

**Unknown:** We got one teacher at Lufkin High School that pushed the issue and I'll be honest with you I'm a little bit surprised he is still teaching out there because of that, trying to teach a black history course and never got enough students to register to make the class. So, he went down to Long Chapel Church and taught it a couple of summers. The kids said they actually learned a lot about their heritage because it is not talked about in the classroom. And, of course going back to talking about our kids, being a substitute teacher at Lufkin High School and been subbing for twelve years, those kids that still, those white kids, that still hold some things against the blacks is because of the fact they are being taught. They are being taught. See a long time ago back down through yonder, Dr. Rhodes didn't have that, but white kids were taught that black folks had tails and they would run around behind them to see where's your tail at. I am serious, because they said we were kin to the monkeys and apes and all those kinds of things.

**TAPE STOPPED  
END OF SIDE ONE**

**Unknown:** ...pick cotton and sing some of the songs and stuff that the whole group might have done while they were picking cotton. They were expected...we called him Cotton out at the mill but, he was telling me that he planted a couple little rows of cotton in his garden. I think he had found some seed in a boxcar. They were cleaning out some boxcars out there and getting them ready to put paper in and all that stuff. And when it got up and the rows opened up and all he took some of his grandkids out there and said "y'all come out here and let me show you what I used to do." He had been telling them stories about it. He said they went out there and looked at it and said "well can you eat it?" He said "no you can't eat it." "Well we don't care anything about it then."

**Unknown:** That is probably the truth.

**OR:** Surprisingly enough at one of our family reunions last year some of the young ones were just in ear shot of some of the older ones talking about things happening and they said, "Why don't ya'll tell that to us in kind of a formal fashion to the whole group. We want to" most of them were born in the city they didn't know nothing about making syrup or killing hogs. They say, "Ya'll keep telling about hog killing time did y'all kill hogs down there?" Yes we killed them. "Tell us how y'all did that making syrup. Tell us what y'all did back there before all y'all die off."

**Unknown:** So it's not a matter of formal class it's a matter of passing on.

**OR:** That is it. Passing tradition on down, explain to us so we can understand it and pass it on down to our kids. When you talk about all this stuff you did years ago we don't know what you are talking about, explain it to us.

**Unknown:** They never saw when those old hogs would come up and eat out of that slop.

**OR:** No they haven't.

**Unknown:** They would leave that (unintelligible) down there and overnight it would ferment and all that stuff and you would go down there and those...you would find them old rooters running into the trees.

**OR:** That is true.

**Floyd Yancey (hereafter FY):** I had a guy tell me the other day that a hog was one of the biggest drunks. They would partake but at any rate I've enjoyed it. Y'all talk about Lufkin, working for the Texas Agriculture Extension Service and having got a masters from Texas A&M University when they got ready to integrate the extension service they had problems. They didn't invite us to the campus of Texas A&M. They invited us...they got a black church in downtown Bryan for all the black agents in the State of Texas to show up and they were going to try to decide what kind of title they would give us. They never did come up with the right title and they finally told us we would be associated with the white extension agents. And, Preston Pool who deceased a few years ago was county agent down at Galveston he said "I will not accept that." And they thought he was

going to...he sued A&M and Board of Regents and A&M's extension service is still under the contested list. That is why when Charles Arnold went to the Exposition Center on paper they made me the head agent in this county. They didn't have no choice because I didn't back down. They tried to get me to back down and I didn't so they tried to show me where they were definitely going to have to hire another white agent and the white agent didn't want to pull up stakes and move from another county to come to Angelina County for lesser because the position was made for the white extension agent.

**DD:** When you told us one time two things that changed when they integrated and one was you had a separate office from them didn't you?

**FY:** Our office that operated the black extension service operated out of Prairie View. When I came to Lufkin yes, the white agent was on the second floor here at the court house annex, the old county jail across the street from Lewis Furniture and we were on the third floor.

**DD:** Yes, and you said too that they wouldn't let you serve white clients right?

**FY:** Yes, that is right. They told me they said "we are sending you up there to Lufkin to serve in the black community and the black community only and don't solicit white clientele." Mrs. Irene Johnson had a radio program on KTRE and she started sharing it with me and the white clientele started coming to me. I didn't go to them.

**Unknown:** Well they couldn't do anything about that.

**FY:** If you asked me to come but I wasn't suppose to put up a sign so to speak soliciting you to come to me and let me come represent something to you. But, if you call me and say "Hey Floyd this is Glen Miller I need you to come out here and look at my cattle, I got some Longhorns out here" or whatever, yes I could do that but not until.

**Unknown:** What year?

**FY:** I got hired to the Extension Service June of 1962 and I served here in Angelina County for 31 years and nine months.

**Unknown:** I visited you on that...

**FY:** You visited me a lot of times.

**Unknown:** This is directed for Dr. Rhodes. You made a comment on the changes, you know, something that you had been used to how did you know about it? What were the changes when you weren't aware of something? Getting back to our young black people now I think it is the same thing we are dealing with. How can we teach them and get them to understand how our forefathers came and I'm not saying I lived in Arkansas but I wasn't ever discriminated against. There was some discrimination I wasn't aware of, you know what I mean. But, getting back to our children now if they have never experienced

it and if they have never gone through that their thoughts are a lot of times I don't know about it. I don't remember that time why should I have to deal with that.

**OR:** There are a lot of things I want to know about. People talk about going back to the good old days no, I don't want to go back to none of that but I would like to know about it. See there are a lot of things I would like to know about Africa and my heritage. I wouldn't want to go back there. I wouldn't want to live there but I would love to know about it and I think the kids should want to know what it was like back there when my parents and my grandparents were coming up. I would just like to know and it seems to me that they would like to know. No, I don't want to go back. I don't want to suggest that but I think they could have a much better appreciation for where they are now if they understood what it was like back there when their parents and grandparents were trying to come up.

**Unknown:** I agree with that.

**FY:** I told my son and they would ask my wife "is daddy telling us the truth." I used to tell them how we would take that buttermilk and tear some cornbread up in it and how daddy couldn't wait until it got a cool snap and he was hoping that cool snap would come before Thanksgiving so he could kill a hog. "Momma is daddy telling us the truth?" Well she didn't know because she didn't come up like I did.

**OR:** This good friend of mine I keep referring to...

**Unknown:** But that is not racism. That is just something that everybody went through it wasn't so much discriminating.

**FY:** Well what he is saying is he would like to know and that is what I did to my children.

**Unknown:** Yes, okay.

**Unknown:** Hey Floyd they never drank any of that milk before the cream rose to the top did they?

**FY:** They called it clabber.

**DD:** Hey ya'll Barbara has an event on Wednesday she wants to tell us a little bit about before we go.

**Unknown:** Thank you Dr. Rhodes. (clapping)

**Barbara:** We are having Main Street is presenting our 27<sup>th</sup> annual Flag Day, the program we have downtown and it is going to be at Louis Bronough Park. It used to be called City Hall Park. It is right across from the city hall across from the drive through part where you pay your water bill, just park over there.

**FY:** Where the old cotton gin used to be.

**Barbara:** It used to be called the City Hall Park now it is the Louis Bronough Park.

**END OF INTERVIEW**