Interview with Maurice Lucas

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Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South
Renova (Miss.)

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BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW:

MAURICE LUCAS:  Maurice Lucas and mayor of the town of Renova, Mississippi located about 90 miles south of Memphis in the heart of the Delta.  Sure is.

MAUSIKI SCALES:  Where were you born?

MAURICE LUCAS:  Actually, I was born here.  In terms of the hospital, we used to have a black hospital in Mound Bayou and I was actually born in the hospital at Mound Bayou about 8 miles north of here.  We had a black hospital at that time.

MAUSIKI SCALES:  What was the name of your hospital?

MAURICE LUCAS:  Mound Bayou.  Toborgan Hospital.

MAUSIKI SCALES:  Toborgan Hospital.

MAURICE LUCAS:  Uh uh.  It was a privately owned hospital owned by black folks.  The old structure is still there.

MAUSIKI SCALES:  How long had that been established?

MAURICE LUCAS:  It was established in 1936 by a fraternity
called the Knights and Daughters of Table. It's an old black fraternity.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When did the hospital go out of use?

MAURICE LUCAS: It went out of use some 10 years ago. Yes, it's been about 10 years ago. They really didn't have money to upgrade it and so forth and all of the modern hospitals they come on line and people were used to going everywhere else. So they ceased to function then, but they still have a little insurance business.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So was that the only black hospital in this area?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, except in Clinton, that's the nearest one, was 90 miles away in Vicksburg. That was it in this county. That was it. I didn't even know there was a local hospital in Cleveland until I was grown. Everybody went to Mound Bayou to the hospital.

MAUSIKI SCALES: And I imagine they had an all black staff.

MAURICE LUCAS: Everything. Best surgeons in the country. McHarry did all of their, medical school did all of their
internships and so forth in Mound Bayou, because they had to do their interns at black hospitals in those days in the south. So we had some good doctors.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did they have mid-wives in this area? Were they ...

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, I think I was the first child in my family born in a hospital. The two older ones were born by midwife. Sure were. That was very prevalent in the black community. Every community had two or three mid-wives.

MAUSIKI SCALES: How did they learn all that information?

MAURICE LUCAS: Trial and error. Trial and error. Normally, a old person, a young person would train with them just like an intern practice with a doctor now. Same process.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Could you describe Renova when you were growing up.

MAURICE LUCAS: Basically this community was all black. It was incorporated initially in 1920, but they ceased to function in 1933 after, during the depression. They quit holding elections and so forth. So as a youngster, actually I grew up two miles
across the highway from here, but this was our community. My family and all belonged to church here. My granddaddy was on the school board here. We had our own little school and everything and so this was like home. And it was all black. We had our own school. A matter of fact, my mother graduated from high school here. We had our own high school then, but when I came along it only went through the 8th grade.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What was the name of the school?

MAURICE LUCAS: It was just Renova Elementary School. And in 1959, the school board merged with the Cleveland school district. But growing up here, we didn't have it as bad as a lot of blacks because we owned our land. I was fortunate. We owned our own land. My daddy owned 80. My granddaddy owned 80 and my granddaddy's brothers owned land all around. And this little community was owned by all black folks. So we had our own church. The only thing white folks owned here at that time was the store. They did own a store here, but we had three little black stores and now black folks own all the stores. But it was basically a poverty community though. Even though we owned our own land it still was a struggle. No industry in the area. Everything was farming. If you can imagine this community with all outside bathrooms. No public water facility. Everybody had pumps and so forth. So it was a struggle, but we made it. As a matter of
fact, that's how I got into city government, into restructuring Renova. My wife didn't like living out on a farm. So I built a house here and I got here and I told my wife, I said, oh, baby. I messed up. I done build a home out here and we ain't got no water and no sewer. Well we did have a small public water system at that time, but all the sewer was running down the ditches. No laws. No nothing. So I applied to the chancellor clerk and we reincorporated Renova in 1978 and since that time we've done over $10,000,000 of improvements. Put in a new water system with an elevated tower. A new sewage system. A 48 unit housing complex. We demolished all the old dilapidated houses and built a 24 unit senior citizen house. We built 39 self ownership homes in the Glenova Heights addition. We got a new trailer park. A new ball field. We made a lot of progress in the last 15 years. All the streets were pretty much dirt when we were growing up.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What did your parents and grandparents do for a living.

MAURICE LUCAS: All of them farmed. My grandparents before I was born bought their own place, but I understood they did some sharecropping before 1944, but most of my folks have, my granddaddy on my daddy's side bought our property in 1903 when they moved from Amen County here. And my grandmother was an educator back in those years. I came out of, my family was pretty
much educators. On my grandmama's side and father's side was farmers and on my mother's side was all farmers. But Big Mama was an educator in 1903 when she came here. Sure was.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did she share any of her experiences with you.

MAURICE LUCAS: As a matter of fact, that's how Big Mama and them got up here. They had an incident in Amen County where a white guy and it's document in the history of Amen County. As a matter of fact, this is one of the lynchings listed in the lynching books where Big Mama's cousin was a Mr. Hood. He and a white guy were teaching school and it was a problem they couldn't work. The white teacher couldn't work and he was right down the road from the white teacher, he was a black guy, he worked the problem. So on the way to school he was telling this white teacher that's the way things are. Ya'll don't have the sense, but yet and still you make all the money. And they got in a squabble about that. The next day they came to lynch him and he killed, they never listed how many white folks he killed down there. Never listed. They wouldn't even let them print it in the books down there and they only way they got him a bullet jammed up. He had all the children lying on the floor. He killed some white folks and horses. And the next night all of them caught the train in Amen County and came to Mound Bayou which was an all
MAUSIKI SCALES: What was he working out, a mathematical equation?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, it was a mathematic problem. Big Mama shared that with us. And one of our brothers was reading some history book about the lynchings in Mississippi and it was one of them. I've forgotten, my cousin, his last name was Hood, H-o-o-d, but I've forgotten his first name, but they all came to Mound Bayou. Yeah, they related all those stories to us as children. But I can remember in 1957 daddy joined the NAACP. I had an auntie, daddy's baby sister was in school at Nashville, Tennessee, at Tennessee State and she paid for my daddy's membership in the NAACP and the mailman that delivered it went and told the white folks that Mr. Lucas had joined the NAACP and they came to mob us that night. But one of the white deputies was a friend of daddy's, tipped us off, man, and daddy and them was laying in the ditch with them rifles and started shooting and they haven't bothered us since. But that actually happened just because he joined the membership in the NAACP in 1957.

MAUSIKI SCALES: And that was here?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, that was right here. The old mail man
went and told some people and they were going to come and then do their thing. They were bad about shooting at black people's houses and discourage them if they thought they were participating in any kind of civil rights activity. When I was a youngster, when I first got out of service in 1965 I started to work at Baxter, right down the road here. As a matter of fact, I was the first black employee that they hired on what they called the production line. Everybody else was janitors. My daddy, I think they had 19 blacks at that time. They were all sweeping the floors and so forth. But anyway, they were going to break the plant in with me. So I was the stool pigeon. That was a tough life. Man, they used to put notes in my car. They were going to hang me and they was going to do this and do that, but I kept my gun with me but they never did bother me. Because we had, the Lucas' had a history of not taking no stuff off of no white folks.

No.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Would they have found the right type of heart to confront you.

MAURICE LUCAS: My mama was like that. Mama was a little old half peckerwood. Big Mama was a great big old black woman and she was educated and man, she didn't take no stuff off no white folk and papa didn't either. And do you know white folks know the blacks that don't take stuff off of them and that reputation has
followed us all the way to this day. It really has. We have a reputation of treating folks right, but we don't take no stuff, especially off of the white folks.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Does your grandmother ever share with you any of the other experiences similar to the 1903 incident?

MAURICE LUCAS: Other than my grandmother on my mother's side was predominately white and my granddaddy and he was white. A black lady raised him. His mother and father died. Now I heard, mother did say, my mama's living now, during the depression Daddy Will and mama bought most of the groceries for the people in this community. They could pass for white and grandpa and granddaddy and grandmama used to go to Cleveland and buy all the groceries for folks in this town. They used to call him Gray Mill. He looked like a little white man. I don't have a picture of papa. But now that was fact.

MAUSIKI SCALES: That's how they helped the community.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, because during the depression, man, you couldn't hardly buy anything. But I know they used to buy, go to town and buy wagon loads of food for folks in this little community.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Did people help each other when you were coming along?

MAURICE LUCAS: Very much so. I give you a typical example. I can remember in 1959 my sister got pregnant. She was a senior, no she was a junior in high school, but wadn't no such thing as welfare aid in those days, not in Mississippi. Everybody took up the slack and helped take care of them children. Send those children to school and everything. Families and neighbors were more dependent on each other. See, I can remember the folks across the street, across the road from us, man, you know, every time they cooked they had to borrow some salt or something and my mama and them just shared. Cause we always had, you know, we didn't have a whole lot, but we always had plenty to eat because we raised our own meats and stuff. And daddy, in addition to farming, daddy pretty much always had a public job. Daddy worked at Baxter. He was one of the first black employees there.

MAUSIKI SCALES: The Baxter Grocery Store?

MAURICE LUCAS: No. Baxter was a pharmaceutical industry and they moved here in 1950. So daddy always had a public job in addition to farming and we had our own business too. We had our chicken picking business in the 50s here for about 10 years until the government ran us out of business. We made a lot of money in
the chicken picking industry.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What is the chicken picking industry?

MAURICE LUCAS: Chicken picking industry. We had a plant. We had our own little plant where we cleaned the chickens commercially for people. Just like they do at the big meat packing plants now. We had a small operation that did nothing but chickens and we did them for 15 cents a piece. I never will forget it. And during the Christmas holidays we did turkeys at twenty five cents a piece and daddy would always give us all the turkey money. We'd have plenty of money for Christmas.

MAUSIKI SCALES: You were taking the feathers off?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. Uh huh. You'd take the feathers off and gut them and stick their legs in them and put them on ice.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Why did the government?

MAURICE LUCAS: They came out with this thing where you had to have so many square feet. Your water had to be sterile. And we were out in the country, you know. We just had well water and it was going to cost $50,000 or $60,000 back in those days to continue. So daddy said he had made enough money to pay for his
So we just got out of the business. That's one of the situations where the big fish eat up the little fish. So that's what happened. The government run a lot of small business out of business with all the regulations and stuff.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What other black businesses were here?

MAURICE LUCAS: Now in the earliest, when I was a little bitty child, we used to have several saw mills here in Renova. That was a big thing. Saw mills. We had several saw mills here. We used to have a railroad station here, post office, and everything, but we lost all that during the depression. The saw mills hung on for a long time and the sorghum mill where we made molasses. This little community was pretty independent.

MAUSIKI SCALES: How did your family make it through the depression?

MAURICE LUCAS: I guess if it hadn't of been for them owning their own land and knowing somebody that could buy some things, I don't know how they would have made it. But the fact they have their own land and being able to raise the chickens, cows, hogs, and things was the basic means they made it through. That 40 acres and a mule paid off then. I was looking at that old history of an old lady that used to live here of this community. It was a
black guy from Memphis that sold all this land to black people and white people for the government. Worked out of Memphis. When the government settled all this land, when they built that levee down the Mississippi River so they could start farming this land a black guy out of Memphis sold all this land. Sure did. He finally settled in Duncans. He was a Williams. And started the post office and everything. All the way up and down this Delta which runs about 50 miles off of the river all the way down to Natchez.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Is the land still owned mostly by the black farmers.

MAURICE LUCAS: Right in here. Uh huh. You have pockets of it. A lot of them lost it. These Italians bought up a lot of it. White folks stole a lot of it for taxes and stuff like that. That's how a lot of them lost their land and then during the 30s when the industries started to booming in your home town and in Gary, Indiana, cause I had 8 cousins that went to Gary.

MAUSIKI SCALES: In the 30s?

MAURICE LUCAS: Uh huh. Yeah, Uncle Steve, Uncle Billy. All of them went to Gary and over into Harvard and in Chicago.
MAUSIKI SCALES: When they went, did they come back and visit.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, they'd always come back in them big fine cars and you growing up as children looking at the big car. Can't wait until you get out of high school and go to the city. But that trend has changed now. That trend has changed now, but when we were growing up that's all we wanted to do was finish high school so we could go to Chicago, Indiana, or somewhere and get a decent job.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When they came back, were they looked at differently?

MAURICE LUCAS: Oh, man, yeah. As a matter of fact, when I was a youngster every Saturday and Sunday I'd stand on the highway which is right up there and watch the cars go down the highway and watch all these white folks stop these black folks with these Illinois and Indiana tags. Oh, man. They just mistreated our folks.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So they stopped you.

MAURICE LUCAS: Just because, they didn't even make up something. They didn't have to have no reason. You better be
tipping in your big fine car when you come home.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What was the relationship between ....

MAURICE LUCAS: But you know, I was grown. I didn't really find out why these white folks was so hard on people from Illinois until I was grown and in college and I went to Vicksburg, Mississippi. If you go to the National Park in Vicksburg, Mississippi, you can understand why white folks in Mississippi do not like blacks nor whites from Illinois. It was 44,000 soldiers from Illinois participated in the Civil War at Vicksburg, Mississippi. That whole cemetery out there, that's the national cemetery, 90% of it is made up of dead soldiers from Illinois. And my eyes were finally opened. I said this is why white folks down here don't like white because the white folks from Illinois fought so to free the slaves.

MAUSIKI SCALES: The whites?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, uh uh. They was white folks from Illinois. When I was a youngster, they stopped the white folks just as quick as they would the blacks coming out of Illinois. Yeah. Then you had a few volunteers from Tennessee, but that cemetery down there is made up mostly of Illinois soldiers. And one old professor, he said, Maurice, you finally understand now
don't you? I said, I been looking for the answer to this question a long time. Now I understand.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What was the relationship between the police and the local African-Americans?

MAURICE LUCAS: Do you know other than the fact that most of the police force are made up of some blacks now, if we weren't around to watch them wadn't too much of a change to this day. But now they got to ride with us and, you know, we keep them honest and so forth. Cause just two years ago one stopped me. I was by myself. I had been to lodge meeting one night and pretended I ran a red light, but then when he looked at my license he realized, oh, you're the mayor up at Renova. I said, you got that right. I said, I will talk to your superior tomorrow. Oh, I'm sorry. I said, no. You had no reason to stop me. But the next day I talked with the chief. He wasn't on the force very long. But he had no reason to stop me. He just happened to pick the wrong boy. They still, you know, if we wadn't in a few positions they would be just as bad today.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So did you experience that same thing when you were growing up?

MAURICE LUCAS: Oh, yeah. Every day. That was a monthly

MAUSIKI SCALES: How bad did it get?

MAURICE LUCAS: We had some highway patrolmen. I never will forget, one named Swindall. He had a bad habit. If you had a decent looking girl friend, man, he'd stop you and take your girl friend. Yes sir. He followed my daddy home one night. Run in the ditch. When I was a little boy. Yes sir.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Your father ran into the ditch?

MAURICE LUCAS: No. The white guy, Mr. Turner, ran in the ditch and then my daddy had a tractor and wanted him to pull him out. You ask anybody that's 50 or above around here. Man, these white folks was something. They will take your girl friend. And guess how he died? He was so prejudiced he would not ride in a car with a black guy. He was stopped over there by Mississippi Valley State. Right down the street from Valley State. He had a blow out or something and his car quit on him. A black guy came along and picked him up. Rather than ride in the car ...

MAUSIKI SCALES: A black guy?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. He sit on the hood. The black guy had
to stop sudden, fell off and run over and killed him. That's how he died. That's how. That peckerwood was something. Now that's the facts. Man. I said, but it was one school teacher in Cleveland ( ) one night. I never will forget Mr. Pibbs. Mr. Pibbs knocked that peckerwood out. He don't know which way was ( ) and which was ( ). There's always been a few that would challenge the system. They would actually take your girl friend out of the car, Jack. There was two of them. I don't remember the other one's name, but this one was in particular was named Swindall.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was that something that was prevalent between a black man and black women.

MAURICE LUCAS: That wasn't just here in Brovard County. That was all over this damn state. If you had a decent looking black girl that they wanted, they would take her. Wasn't a whole lot you could do. No sir.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Were black men able to court white women?

MAURICE LUCAS: No, man. Can't do too much of that now. You hear me. They look at you real strange now, Jack. Yes sir. It's a hand full of them around here married to white girls. Handful of them around here dating them, but, you know, it's not no overly
seen thing, you know. People are still reluctant to, even though they go to school together and everything, you know, everybody pretty much hang to them self.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was there ever times when black men had to confront white men on that issue?

MAURICE LUCAS: Naw, it was just common knowledge that you didn't. So you didn't have to be confronted. It was just a no-no. Your parents taught you. You just don't do certain things. They taught you to say yes sir and no sir to them white folks. I remember when I got out of service. My daddy was working at Baxter and I had just started and I was saying yes and no to the white supervisor. Man, my daddy had a stroke. I wish you'd go on to Chicago and get you a job. You going to mess up everything I've built. But I went on to school and I turned out to be one of the top three administrators at that joint before I left. I got a chance to hire and fire some white folks.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When did you first realize there was a difference between blacks and whites and how they were treated.

MAURICE LUCAS: From the time you big enough to walk, cause I'm going to tell you how you find out. We had to walk to school and white folk rode the bus. That's right. I lived a mile or so
across the highway and our school was here. Everybody walked to school here. I don't care if you was five miles or way out. The white folk come by there everyday on their little pretty shiny gold bus. Throw rocks off of the bus at us. Didn't take long. Then you ask a question, why. They got to explain it to you. Yeah.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did your parents explain to you why things were like that?

MAURICE LUCAS: Right. You black and they white. They have to explain it to you, but you learn real fast. You learn real fast. But to me that was the quickest way I can remember learning about that bus situation and we had to walk to school and they rode pass us going to school. Right down the street.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you go to school for nine months out of the year?

MAURICE LUCAS: No. We had split sessions. You ever heard of that. Split sessions? These youngsters these days don't know about no split session. We would go to school, lets' see. How did that thing work. We went some in August. Okay? For so many weeks and then when the cotton picking time come. Like the end of September, October. We would be out for like six to eight weeks
and go back to school by Thanksgiving and go on through the fall and through the spring the next year. They were what they called split sessions. We would go some in the summer. They had a lay-by season. You ever heard of lay-by season? That's the time period between when you quit plowing and chopping the cotton, when it's really making. When it's blooming and it's materializing and so forth, you don't disturb it, see. You got it clean until it's open. That's called the lay-by period and then they let you go to school that period. Okay. And then when the damn cotton open, then they take you out of school and you pick it and you go back to school after you get through picking, after picking season is over. That's right. And that was the norm, cause I never will forget at this school here, my last few years there both of my aunts were the two teachers there. One was the head teacher and the other teacher and they helped farm too because they owned land and shit. They picked cotton. They'd teach school all day and come home and pick cotton in the evening.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What were you paid for picking the cotton?

MAURICE LUCAS: But that was our own cotton then.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Oh, that was family cotton.

MAURICE LUCAS: That was family cotton. But when we finished
that then we would help the other folks. I picked a many a bale for $3 a hundred, but I heard my daddy and them picking it for $1 a hundred and all that. A hundred pound of cotton for a dollar. Yeah. But I could pick 300 easy in one day. So $9. I could make me $9 a day. That was big money, because most cases we picked our own cotton and then we picked enough on the side to buy our clothes and all that stuff. Sure did.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Were there ever any natural disasters that, maybe a drought or a bad storm?

MAURICE LUCAS: I can remember one in 1953 that daddy made one bale of cotton on 40 acres of land, but some of the people that had the high land and got the rains just right would make good cotton. Down here we picked enough for the public that year to buy all our school clothes. I never will forget. We was picked a bale a day.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What type of storm was that?

MAURICE LUCAS: It was just a drought.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Oh, a drought.

MAURICE LUCAS: It was a drought in 1953. I can remember
another small one, but I don't remember what year that was, but that was a bad one in 1953.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you ever have any bad like tornadoes or anything?

MAURICE LUCAS: Uh uh. Never did. Tornadoes and things didn't bother the Delta too, the country too much then. Because, you know, we didn't have running water. We didn't have lights. We used candles. The ice man come round once a week with a 50 pound block of ice. That was your refrigerator, you know, you keep your eggs and everything cool. And milk, all the year. We would gather a gallon of milk a day anyway then, you know. Milk was fresh. I used to milk and slop the hogs every morning before I went to school. Every day.

MAUSIKI SCALES: I've heard of stories where people said there were ways of making storms go away. Have you ever heard of that?

MAURICE LUCAS: No. I've always lived in reality in my world. I ain't going with that. No. But I really think though, it's just a personal opinion with all these things going to the moon and all those things create a lot of those things, cause we never had no tornadoes and stuff in Mississippi like we have now,
when I was growing up.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So too many atmospheric changes?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, too many atmospheric changes. Cause I remember that summer, the hottest summer we've ever had in Mississippi. You remember when the volcano in Washington went off?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Right.

MAURICE LUCAS: Man, and the ashes went for thousands of miles. That was the hottest summer we ever had in Mississippi. I think we had 30 days over 100 degree. I attribute it to the after blast of that. But we, it was a tough life, but we had some good times.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you have to go to church when you were growing up?

MAURICE LUCAS: Oh yeah. You didn't do anything in Mississippi before you went to church here. We all had our own baseball field. Every farm had their own baseball field. It was just that many folks on each farm. You didn't play no ball if you didn't go to church that Sunday or Sunday school. No sir. That
MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you all have revival?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. As a matter of fact, we are having revival this week. I bet you it's been a tradition at our church. What is this, the second week in August? I'm 51. As long as I can remember, it's been the second week in August and our church is like 110 years old. I bet it's been the second week in August a 100 years. I bet you. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Has the revival changed since you were young?

MAURICE LUCAS: Not very much.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Or church?

MAURICE LUCAS: Uh uh. You got them same families. It's probably ten families that make up our church and it's been that way 110 years. It hasn't grown much over 115 members in 110 years.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you still have baptisms too?
MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, we got our own baptistery. Our little old church had a baptistery back in the 40s made out of concrete.

MAUSIKI SCALES: It wasn't a pond baptism?

MAURICE LUCAS: No, my mama and them was the last one I think at the pond. No. As a matter of fact, my mama said she was baptized at our church. Our church has had a baptistery a long time.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was that common among churches here?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, but most of the folks here was baptized in a little old ( ) over here, but our church has had a baptistery for years. Our church is an old church.

MAUSIKI SCALES: You were saying that baseball was the after church?

MAURICE LUCAS: Oh man, yes. Everybody played baseball out here. Every farm had 15 to 20 boys on it. Every thing was done by hand back then. They plowed the land with mules. They chopped all the cotton with hoes and they picked all the cotton by hand. So it took a lot of folks. In Bolivar County in 1930, it was over 300,000 in our county and now you talking about 45,000 people in
the whole county. So that can tell you how many people went north when mechanization took over. Man, 40 acres and a mule. It took a lot of mule to work 40 acres back then and now they take one of these tractors and work 40 acres in 15 minutes. So that was the difference.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you ever hear of people having to sneak away to the north and run out from a plantation?

MAURICE LUCAS: I was big enough to witness some of that. Not that, what happened was a lot of time you would be sharecropping and they'd make a bad crop and they'd owe these folks. Man, these white folks didn't let you leave them when you owed them no money. If you didn't slip off at night, they'd hang yore ass. That was common. Cause I can remember when I was a little boy, papa and them having to go. I had a brother over at a little old place called Marks, Mississippi and Steve got over there and got in trouble. Didn't make a couple of good crops and papa and them had to sneak over there at night and get him off the place. Yeah. Yeah. And put him on a train and send him to Chicago. Him and his whole family. Sure did. That was common knowledge. You didn't work and the white folks feed you all year and all them children and then you talk about leaving.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What was the process of helping someone get
MAURICE LUCAS: They would always find some black that had a car, or a wagon and some mules. And they just went over there at 12:00 o'clock at night and loaded them up. Didn't nobody have nothing. In 15 minutes you could load everything they had. You know. A pot bellied stove and two or three old beds and that's about all you had. And two or three peg legged chairs. In 15 minutes you could put everything on a wagon and be gone and that's what happened.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did any of them ever get caught?

MAURICE LUCAS: A few. A few blacks got killed like that. A few of them had to go back. It was almost as bad as you see in the movie in the olden days where these people would go find folks.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Bounty hunters?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. Almost bounty hunters. I've forgotten that term. They didn't call it bounty hunter when the blacks ran off. It was an older term than bounty hunter, but it was similar in terminology. Yeah. But yeah. You didn't just up and leave because you wanted to. No sir.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Were there ways that people on those sharecropping farms could get them some money under the table without stealing.

MAURICE LUCAS: They do that now. They do that now. I'll give you a typical example. When my granddaddy was sharecropping, before he bought his own land, he sharecropped. He rented some from a white guy. They used to have a big plantation called Smith and Wiggins Marigold. But by the fact that papa owned some land and he was sharecropping, when you sharecrop from a guy, you had a designated place to gin your cotton. You had to gin it at his gin. So papa and them would always gin some of it at the gin where he ginned his own cotton or find him a neighbor that was free and get him to gin it for him. Oh, man. There was a lot of wheeling and dealing going on. Daddy used to haul his cotton everywhere. I never will forget it. Now see, Mound Bayou is just up the road was always free. Mound Bayou had three or four gins around and black people did their own cotton buying and cotton selling. All these black folks that was sharecropping, they would steal that cotton and take it Mound Bayou and gin it. There was some money made in Mound Bayou. And these black folks, they working for these chemical companies and these big plantations is doing it right now. They still stealing beans, and seeds. My little brother farms 80 acres out there. He don't buy no seeds
and poison and all that mess from the man. Man, them folks steal that. That stuff $200 to $300 a gallon, that chemical, and they hauling it out of them places. Sell that stuff on the black market and that just like they was when they bought it.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So it was a common thing for black people.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. Black folks always been hustling. You better hustle.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you think that's why they had those rules to only gin.

MAURICE LUCAS: Exactly. Exactly. That way they kept up with how much you made and then they give you so much for it to keep you in, there was a system designed to keep you owing them. I didn't care if you made 200 bales of cotton. You'd still end up owing them. Well, you know you got $4,000 worth of groceries. You got all them children, Sam. You know we feed them all the winter. Yeah. The system was something. You never got free and I'm talking about 100 years after the civil war. And do you know, even in this day and time on some of these big plantations it's damn near that bad today. I can take you to some places out here, right out here from Renova, a place called Penman Corner. It is black folks been on that plantation for the last 150 years. Some
of the same family.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did they leave?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, a lot of them gone to the city, but some of them are still there. Some of them out of that family.

MAUSIKI SCALES: I mean the ones that are there. Do they have privileges to leave the plantation. ( )

MAURICE LUCAS: It just a part of them. They don't want to leave, but yeah. When they got children off and doing well in different places. They come home, but they still out there on them little shot gun houses. I have a friend of mine been doing their taxes, a tax accountant, and his wife passed the other day and I went out there. Must have been 13 of their children back from the city and they been there on that plantation 78 years and he still work. Still in that little shot gun house. Raised all them children. Got children in Canada making thousands of dollars, but they still right there on that little plantation. I couldn't believe it. I took them a case of coke out there. Man.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did people bootleg liquor too?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. We had a big bootlegger right here in
my community up until about three years. House burned and burned up a still. She was making whiskey right here. In her back yard. Man, when that house burned, you talk about explosions going on. The fire chief said, Mayor Lucas, what you think that is blowing up like that. I don't know. Them whiskey bottles blowing up I guess. Look, over on the river and here in Bolivar County, they have whiskey right here in Bolivar County that's sold nationally. Bootleg liquor.

MAUSIKI SCALES: That's sold nationally?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yes sir. Sold nationally. Got their own brand name. They been bootlegging 200 years right on the Mississippi River.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do blacks?

MAURICE LUCAS: Uh huh and white folks. Uh uh. Yeah. The sheriff know it. Yeah, the sheriff know it. Everybody know it. Shit, my daddy used to ship five gallons whiskey over seas to my nephews and cousins and shit forty years ago. Ship a whole trunk load of damn corn whiskey over seas. They been shipping this whiskey up and down this highway since Al Capone's time. You hear. I bet you can get corn whiskey out of Mississippi in Gary, Indiana right now. I bet you.
MAUSIKI SCALES: So this was a way the blacks were able to get ahead.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yep. But they are real isolated now. You probably ain't got but ten stills in Bolivar County, but when I was a youngster. A little town like Renova, we'd have ten stills in it. We probably don't have any now since Mrs. What's her name passed, that old lady. But Mound Bayou! I bet Mound Bayou had 20 stills. Them people made whiskey in Mound Bayou and hauled it all over this country and that river side at Rosedale, down all behind them levees, man, they still making whiskey over there. A lot of it they making it for the white man though. Yes sir. They got some illegal operation over there blow the top of your head off. The sheriff get rich in this county.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Cause he knows what's going on.

MAURICE LUCAS: He know it and they pay him off. Yes sir. Been paying him off a hundred year. It's common knowledge.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Where did blacks go for entertainment here?

MAURICE LUCAS: They always had them clubs. Like there's a little club up on the north end of town now. The clubs were real
popular up until the casinos came into town. Casinos were draining off their business now. The casinos up in Tunica, and Clarksdale, and Greenville where people used to go to the club and buy whiskey and jump up and down. See now they give you free drinks at the casino. All you got to do is go put your money in the machine. It has really hurt the club. A few of them still doing rather well, but every 40 acres used to have a club. It used to be more joints, man, that you can shake a stick at. It was two 'tween here and the highway. Used to be two on my street before I closed them up. Renova had five little old joints as small as it is. We got one nice sized one now. It used to be a white club and black folks bought it. But Mound Bayou, just looking at Mound Bayou. That's where everybody used to love to go to party. Had one, two, three, we got five here now.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What was the race relations like? Race relations?

SIDE B OF TAPE ONE

MAURICE LUCAS: ... in these communities, in Bolivar County and the Delta they had good relationships with the white folks
were the maids. People that did all of the domestic work. Okay?
That was most of the contact. Now those people, if anybody could get a favor out of them those were the only ones. See, we raised all these white folks children too. Washed all their clothes. Ironed all their clothes. And that's when integration started. They couldn't stand the thought of a black lady that just finished washing and cooking for her last year working on the assembly line with her this year. That was a real problem in the early 60s when integration came, because all of them had little maids and shit. Now these maids were making the same $3.25 an hour she making. That was a real problem. Then they want you to call them Miss So and So. But the only white folks got maids now is the rich white folk. But in those days, all of them, the mediocre homes had maids. Cause if they had a job they were big time.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you know any of those women who worked at ( )?

MAURICE LUCAS: They were the only ones that had a peaceful relationship with white folks and quite naturally, they had a lot of white folk babies too. Yeah. But they got clothes from them to cloth their children and all kind of stuff like that. A lot of hand me downs. But that was basically the relationship other than a few blacks that were butlers and worked at the stores and different little things, and chauffeurs or whatever for white
MAUSIKI SCALES: Now you had mentioned that you were ( ) did organizations like the Masons and Eastern Star play a role in making, helping blacks during those times.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, because we were the only organization that had a little money back then. We pooled our resources back then, but you know most of those organizations were formed to bury the dead. That was basically the purpose of them. It was more of a burial association than it was a fraternity in those days, but they still provided some resources. I can tell you where they played a key role was with the NAACP. The Masons, and the Eastern Stars, and the Herons, and so forth they always gave big contributions to the NAACP to help provide lawyers and so forth. That was the biggest. And we used to have to hide our money from the white folk in Mississippi. Just distribute it around in all the little banks, you know, cause they didn't want them to know we had large sums of money. Kept it under pillows and everything else. Uh huh. Sure did.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did they have black banks to offer?

MAURICE LUCAS: We had some black banks in those days. Used to be a black bank in Mound Bayou.
MAUSIKI SCALES: What was the name of that?

MAURICE LUCAS: I don't remember the name of it, but I think it was like the Bank of Mound Bayou. But it was, the grand master back in 1914 was one of the founders of that bank. He owned a section of land up in Shelby. But yeah, they played a key role especially during the Jim Crow years. And there was a fraternity. They used to be porters on the train and they had their own secret signals they would give each other and stuff. Did a lot of things now to help black folks. As a matter of fact, all the black lawyers in Mississippi was educated through the NAACP legal defense fund at one time which was funded through the Prince Hall Mason.

MAUSIKI SCALES: ( ) like a circle of ( ).

MAURICE LUCAS: We still, we contribute, I bet you $200,000 a year nationally to the NAACP. Sure do. Sure do.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Does that create problems with local white ( )?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yes. Oh, they don't like it even today. Matter of fact, at our national meeting this year we made a
decision to really pump money into the NAACP to help them get out of their, yeah, their dilemma. Because right now with the affirmative action, with the white folk knowing what affirmative action, we going to need it as much as ever. There's some folks in this country that want to turn back the hands of time. You hear me. Yes sir. There's some folks that want to turn back the hands of time. If Newt Ginrich and them have their way, they'd have us back out there on 40 acres and a mule.

MAUSIKI SCALES: That's true. Do you recall your early voting experiences here?

MAURICE LUCAS: The only thing I can remember, they give us a hard time when we first started registering in the 60s. But they didn't give me a hard time. I guess they knew I was a veteran, but before I went in service I would take older people in the 60s while I was in high school and they would ask them all them old stupid questions about how many bubbles in a bar of soap and all those questions. Yeah. How many grains of sand in a can? But, it was always a few people in this community that paid their poll taxes and votes. But let me tell you this though. Even up until the 60s, black folks in Mound Bayou which is an all black town and here too have always voted, but it was a gentlemen's agreement among the white folks not the count the black votes. Ain't that something? They let them vote in the county election and take
their votes to the office and not count them. And, they started counting them, must have been like '59 or '60. It was one white guy that ran for sheriff. He was off the Zombro Plantation. He was a friend of my daddy's and that's when they started making them count them. This black guy won with the black votes and he started making them counting them. It was to the white man's advantage to count them. That's the only reason they started counting them. Yeah, been keeping it up every since. But then right after that the Civil Rights Act started too. White folks used to didn't, I was trying to think of the name of this book over there in the old library, but black folks at one time in this county had all the offices. Sheriff and everything. And they stole the offices by,

MAUSIKI SCALES: During reconstruction?

MAURICE LUCAS: During reconstruction. They stole the offices from them. Guess how they stole the offices?

MAUSIKI SCALES: How was that?

MAURICE LUCAS: The day before the election they had all these big rallies for them and they put croaton oil in the food. Croaton oil. It's something like castor oil and you makes you go to the bathroom and the next day when the black folks suppose to
be going and voting, they couldn't go because all of them had diarrhea. They couldn't go to the pole. That's documented. White folks documented it. That's right. I never heard of croton oil.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Croton oil. And they were sick.

MAURICE LUCAS: They were sick. They put, castor oil is a lubricant. Yeah, cause they used to make us drink it when we were kids to get rid of colds and to flush you out. I couldn't believe that shit. I read that and I asked papa about it and he said, yeah, that was a fact. No, but papa was old enough to remember it. He was a little boy when they did it. Yeah, cause papa was born like 1870 or something. Right after the Civil War. Put croton oil in the food and they'd give all these big parties and rallies just like they do now. Like this week they been having all the big fish fries and stuff for black folks around. They put croton oil in the damn food and you spend the next day in the bathroom.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did they have means of keeping blacks from the polls?

MAURICE LUCAS: Intimidation. Yeah. Man, they intimidated the hell out of us. It was, during the 30s and the 20s, in 1927
they had a '27 flood here. The levee broke over on the Mississippi river. So they, all the citizens of the county had to work so many days on the levee. But papa said they wadn't no problem. On Monday morning there'd be a black guy hanging on a pole on the south end of Cleveland. One hanging on a railroad pole on the south end of Cleveland. You know. They'd be done hung them over the weekend. They'd put them on a pole out there at the railroad so black folk could see them when they going down the railroad and they was going to work for the levee. Intimidation. Uh huh. Common knowledge.

MAUSIKI SCALES: And those were there cause they could ( ) see them going to work.

MAURICE LUCAS: When you leave here, go by the sheriff department. The hangman tome is still in the court house in Cleveland. Do you hear what I'm saying? The hangman tome is still in the court house in Cleveland. It was built when they built the courthouse. A big round drum where they hang you on the 3rd floor and drop you down and pull you out. There's a black guy jailer down there. He'll show it to you. You tell him Mayor Lucas sent you. They'll show it to you. The hangman tome is still down there. Still in the Cleveland courthouse. I think the last one they hung, I done forgot what year it was, but maybe '46 or something.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you remember any other things?

MAURICE LUCAS: No more than what my daddy and my granddaddy told me.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What would they say they usually hung them for?

MAURICE LUCAS: Oh man. They hung black folk for stealing white folk's cows and everything else. Whatever white folks desire. Cause they tried my uncle. Must have been in the 40s. They went to Chicago and got Uncle Jim. Jim killed a man right out here from Renova. But this old white lady that owned the plantation, she went to court with Uncle Jim. The judge said, hang him or let him go free. That white woman stood up and said, "Don't you hang Jim. That's my good nigger." They let Uncle Jim go free. That's the damn truth. Man, these white folks. These white folks do their thing, man.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did that happen often ( )

MAURICE LUCAS: Oh yeah. It was common knowledge. You ain't never heard of black folk saying that. They say if you stay out of jail or something, or the graveyard, I'll keep you out of the
jail or something. All you have to do is be a good mule man, a
good tractor driver or whatever. If you didn't do nothing to the
white folk, shit, I don't care what you did to a nigger. You was
just in trouble. Man, there's more niggers killed each other for
nothing. Arguing over whose mule could out plow the other or
which white man's tractor was strong enough. Shit. Man, that's
the gospel.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Were there any local leaders when you were
growing up that would speak out against injustices?

MAURICE LUCAS: Was a handful. Anson Moore was our local
leader. He was a black man that worked at the post office. He
was always kind of half free. They bombed his house and did
everything, but Anson Moore was. I can remember when I was a
youngster, I was in the 9th grade, I used to follow him around til
my daddy found out about it. He said, boy, you going to get
killed following that man to those code-four meetings. Going
around to them different churches. It was a black guy that was at
Tennessee State. He is still living. He works with this LaRoche
group now. LaRoche's group. You heard of them? His name was
Bevel. Reverend Bevel. I never will forget. He was a student at
Tennessee State back in the late 50s, '58, '59. He used to come
down here and work with Brother Anson's boy who was one of our
local leaders. The rest of them niggers scared to say anything.
Had a couple of preachers that were saying a little bit. But most of them were old. Anson was the only one I knowed that would say anything, except in Mound Bayou. Mound Bayou has always been kind of free. Black folks in Mound Bayou have always said what they want to say. Yep.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So, who did you look up to when you were growing up?

MAURICE LUCAS: Mr. Moore I guess was my idol, cause he and daddy were good friends. Daddy was kind of a passive guy. He didn't let nobody bother his children, but he wasn't going to say too much unless they got personal with him. Yep. I guess I kind of followed Mr. Moore. We got a bunch of folks now that speak up.

MAUSIKI SCALES: ( ) cars here?

MAURICE LUCAS: Man, I can remember when there weren't but two cars in this whole community. Now there's two cars in every house, but I can remember when there was two cars in this whole community.

MAUSIKI SCALES: And when was that?

MAURICE LUCAS: And for years, I'm talking about in the 50s,
man. Mr. Hemp had an old truck and didn't none of them have one car. Daddy has an old car. Papa didn't even have a car. I don't think we had but four trucks in the whole town because we'd take them and go to the family, go to the church picnics with.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did your family ever go traveling?

MAURICE LUCAS: No. Man, the first time I saw Memphis I had joined the Army. I graduated from high school.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What would your family do on holidays?

MAURICE LUCAS: We cooked out and did everything everybody else did. We always had plenty to eat, but that's, played ball. Everybody played ball. That was the thing.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Which holidays did you all celebrate?

MAURICE LUCAS: We always worked a half a day on Thanksgiving, but I can remember on Thanksgiving, in all my years of growing up, we always had a football game on Thanksgiving. Mound Bayou would always play Cleveland. We'd pick cotton all the morning and go to the ball game that evening. But 4th of July, I can't remember celebrating those much when I was a kid. We didn't celebrate much of a holiday. Christmas and Thanksgiving was about
I can't even remember celebrating the 4th of July while I was growing up to be honest with you. I think we chopped cotton on it.

MAUSIKI SCALES: You worked on the 4th?

MAURICE LUCAS: Hell yeah. I didn't celebrate no 4th until I went in service and got out.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Would there be any white baseball teams that the black people played?

MAURICE LUCAS: Very rarely, but later years they did. Some plantation would have a little, white teams too.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Now that you are the mayor here do you notice how things are different than when you were growing up. What are some of the differences?

MAURICE LUCAS: Well, I can base it on myself. I participate in practically everything going on in this county now on both sides of the track, white side and the black side. I'm a member of the hospital board which is a predominately white board, but we got three black board members. I serve on the school board which is the largest school district in the county. We got two black
board members and three white. I serve as secretary on that board. I was just elected vice-president of the Chamber and I'm going to serve as president next year. I was president of the organization of the Public Affairs Council and president-elect. I will be the first black chamber president in Bolivar County. You can keep that if you want. And, I serve as treasurer of the United Way. I been serving as treasurer for eight years. I been active in politics all my life every since I was in high school.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What gave you that type of motivation?

MAURICE LUCAS: I always wanted to make life better for my folks. I just love it. I help a lot of folks, man. I create a lot of jobs for black folks and I try to make sure we get our share. That's my whole goal that we get our share of the pie. I'm a Jessie Jackson philosopher when it come to that. I believe in getting my share.

MAUSIKI SCALES: You mentioned that you were in the military. Did you experience discrimination?

MAURICE LUCAS: I didn't experience much discrimination only after I got in while I was going to service and after I, in Jackson I experienced it, but after I got in, my first lieutenant in basic training was a black guy. And then when I went overseas
my officer, all my officers, top officers, were black when I was in service. And I progressed pretty good. Shit, I was sergeant when I was 19. I was pretty sharp. So I didn't experience much then. My unit was predominately black when I was overseas.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you get a chance to travel a lot?

MAURICE LUCAS: Only went to South America, but I went all over South America. I was stationed in Panama for two and a half years. Went to Columbia, Ecuador. I didn't experience much.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you travel in the states?

MAURICE LUCAS: Only since I been out of service. I been to damn near all 50 states since I been out. But even my traveling now with my family looking back in 1976 on, '75 on up when I went to Washington and all those places. Many times we would be the only black family getting on the boat going to Staten Island or whatever we were doing. In Philadelphia at the Met. Black folks ain't going nowhere. But I never experienced any problems though. Sure didn't.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When you were growing up here were there places that you couldn't go because you were black?
MAURICE LUCAS: Oh yeah. It was common knowledge. Place right here on the highway was our biggest liquor store in the county. They had colored on one side white on the other. I tell you in 1965 when I started to work for Baxter they had a colored bathroom. One of the white supervisors, I went in the white bathroom to take a leak, asked me what you doing coming out of that bathroom. They still thought we was suppose to go to the colored bathroom even if they had painted over the door and you could still see the colored up under the sign when I started to work there in '65. Sure did. And my father-in-law and all of them, they couldn't adapt to the change either. They still went to the colored bathroom. Boy, they lied on me. Those peckerwoods. They would fill up the sinks full of tobacco and I'd go in there and take a leak. Oh, that colored boy filled them things up full of tobacco butts. White folks some low down.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Even when they took the signs down you were still expected to go?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yes sir. That was fine. And the black folks supported them. Til I come along and they called me a racist. But they finally changed. I never quit though. Never quit smiling and kept my knife in my pocket because if they mess with me I going to cut everything that come up and go put it in the car. That's right.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you ever have to defend yourself?

MAURICE LUCAS: Uh huh. White folks ain't going to jump on you one on one. They got to be a whole mob of them. Shit. No sir.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Were there bad sides of town?

MAURICE LUCAS: No, was just white side and black side.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was there something that let you know that you were going from one side to the other?

MAURICE LUCAS: The railroad track. Damn near every community in the south has a railroad track. You hear me? The railroad track, Jack. As a matter of fact, the railroad track is the dividing line for the school district right now. Yes sir. That railroad track. That's what they used. The railroad tracks and the highway. But, I hate to say this, but I take my wife riding every now and then. White folks take care of their own now. You can come across that railroad track at 12:00 at night and just as sure as you hit you going to see little children walking stuff up and down the street. I mean just for one side of the railroad to the other. I said, damn, why come we can't be
like this. How come we can't keep our children at home. I get a little disturbed sometimes. Shit. But any day of the week I can show it to you.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Show the differences between them?

MAURICE LUCAS: Between the neighborhoods. But then I think economics has a lot to do with it, because I can go on to an integrated neighborhood that's predominately black and you don't see no whole lot of children on the street and stuff. So I think economics probably has a lot to do with it, but still we could do something for ourself though. But the minute you cross that railroad you can see it. Ain't no excuse for them children being out all, two or three o'clock in the morning.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When you were growing up what type of opportunities did they have here for young people that had finished school?

MAURICE LUCAS: Nothing. Oh, like my oldest brother when he finished high school in '57, he went in the Navy and he ended up in Chicago. Out of eight of us, he's the only one that left home. The rest of us stayed and toughed it out and jobs were a little more available when we got out of service. But all the older kids wasn't nothing available except to do janitorial work and that
kind of stuff. There wasn't any opportunity unless you taught school or was a preacher. Then that was it. Only the domestic folks that had decent jobs with the white folks where took care of the washing and ironing for the white folks were the only ones who had a decent place to stay unless you owned your own land or something. That was it. The only people you saw with shirt and tie on through the week was a school teacher or a preacher. I guarantee you. And if them white folks caught you with a shirt and tie on they wanted to know what the hell you was doing. Yeah. Boy, are you a preacher? That's the gospel. This was the 60s and 70s.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yeah?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. Boy, where you teach school at?

MAUSIKI SCALES: ( ) assumption ( ).

MAURICE LUCAS: Yes sir. Yes sir. You didn't see no nigger with no shirt and tie on during the week. No sir. I never will forget that. Man.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did they have blacks in positions of power when you were growing up?
MAURICE LUCAS: Uh huh. We had a black superintendent of education, but it was known he was strictly over at the black school and he wasn't allowed across the track unless Mr. Charley and tell him what he want him to do to these children and these teachers over here. You didn't rock the boat. Mr. Charley tell you to do it you did it and if you didn't your house got burned up and you were in it most of the time.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did the Ku Klux Klan have a present for you?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, they were pretty presents. It wouldn't surprise me if a man was due through here now. Wouldn't surprise me one bit. As a matter of fact, four or five years ago I was coming right on through Aberdeen right on the main section of Highway 8 and Highway 8 and 51 in Grenada, the main intersection. They had a Ku Klux Klan taking up donations right in the middle of the main intersection.

MAUSIKI SCALES: How long ago was that?

MAURICE LUCAS: This was like four or five years ago. On the 4th of July, because I was coming from my wife's home. My son's eyes got as big as a ( ). He said, daddy, that's the Ku Klux Klan. I said, damn if it ain't. But they wasn't stopping any black cars taking them donations. I mean with they robes on,
Jack. I had my pistol under my seat. I just eased it on top of the seat. I was driving that big Lincoln. My son said, daddy, what you going to do. I said, I'm going to run over them if they mess with me. I said this Lincoln going to take a whole bunch of them. But that actually happened. So they still present. That was kind of, I took it pretty good, but that was kind of a frightening experience. I never will forget. My son's eyes got as big as a ( ). Gee, daddy. What you going to do? I said, I'm going to get my share.

MAUSIKI SCALES: You would be driving around through the state back then how would you ( ) stop for gas and things ( ) paid for ( ).

MAURICE LUCAS: It's amazing how you learn to take care of yourself. I wonder how all these big conventions, you know, like take the National Baptist convention. Take the Mason. When we go to Jackson now to a state meeting, we meet at the Temple. They've always met at the Temple since 1954. But before then they met at different churches as they went over the state. But do you know, black folks housed all those people. Some of the old folks go to the meeting down now they still be looking for housing around there with the old folks. All the rest of us stay in a hotel. I had a friend of mine told me last year was the first time he ever stayed in a hotel and he was 72 years old. I said, see where you
stay here. Well we always paid $4 and went to Miss So and So for three days. So you just think about these big black conventions now and the NAACP when they used to go from city to city, how they used to have the meeting at the black churches and they stayed at all the black folk's homes around town. That's right. And now you just drive up to the hotel. But the only traveling I did before things got better was my wife was in school in Tupelo, but I'd always go down and come back the same day. I'd gas up here and I could go to Jackson and back on a tank of gas. We always had a black service station in Cleveland, but we had probably more independent black business before integration than we do now. Now that I look back on it. We always had one or two black stations in Cleveland. Sure was.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So they way you would get around and you'd gas up or stay with ...

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, you stayed with your own community. And then before integration, all these little old black communities had their own snack shops and stuff. And if the white ones had, they had to go to the back. The colored. The theater we had here. It had the colored upstairs. The drive-in we had with the two back rows was for blacks and they had the back of the concession stand. They had a colored window. Yeah. It was common knowledge. That's where you go.
MAUSIKI SCALES: People were going to the same drive-in and drive in the back.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah, like if you had 20 rows of drive-in movie. You had to go to the two back rows. Black folks was all the way at the back. Yeah. We could only go to the two back rows. Oh, that was common knowledge now. And when you go to the theater down town all the blacks was upstairs. We had three theaters in town. All of them had upstairs and upstairs was for the black folks.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What was your favorite movie you saw back then?

MAURICE LUCAS: You know, I really, I don't know if it was The Killer Mocking Bird or what. I believe that was it. But shoot-um ups was the thing back then. John Wayne and Danny Ford, or somebody. That was the thing back then. Wadn't no black movies.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Images like Mammy and Sambo, did that bother you?

MAURICE LUCAS: It was common. Andy and Amos was the famous
thing on the radio or tv then. It didn't bother me until I got grown, cause that was the normal then.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What type of courting practices did they have back then when you were ready to take a young lady out?

MAURICE LUCAS: Man, you had to go get permission. You had to get permission, cause I dated a couple of young ladies, but most of the time we was, friends of the family. It was pretty relaxed, but you always asked mama and daddy could you take them out. Can I date them or whatever? That was common practice. Everybody dreaded that. But you know that don't happen much now. These kids come to the house. Hey, Mr. Lucas. I want to see so and so or so and so. Damn, these children ain't got no manners now.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So were there specific days you could go visit or?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah man. You didn't have but one day anyway. Most of the time that was on a Sunday evening. Yes sir. Here you chopping and picking cotton the rest of the week. You didn't have no transportation no way. You had to walk. Mama or daddy take you and pick you up. Yeah. You were lucky if you could get once a week. You were real lucky.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Was there a time frame?

MAURICE LUCAS: Uh huh. I had most of the time then was on Sunday evening from like after church until it got dark. It was time for you to go then, Buddy. Yeah, and when you got to where you could take one to the movie, you was about ready to get married then. I guarantee you.

MAUSIKI SCALES: At what age were you considered a man?

MAURICE LUCAS: Peer. I don't know. I guess, I went in service when I was 17, but basically 21. Yeah, basically 21, but shit, I was a man every since I was 17, 'cause I was paddling my own canoe. I was grown all my life.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Out of your experiences like the ones that you told me and others that you remember which one do you think emphasis should be placed on in regard to history. What do you think should be emphasized about those times as far as people trying to understand life then.

MAURICE LUCAS: People. Young blacks need to understand the struggle that we went through. To give you a typical example, we have an election here tomorrow. Youngsters under 30 years old if
they come out to vote tomorrow it's going to be a miracle. They have no sense of value of what we went through in the 50s and 60s. When they see, my son look at that shit on tv, he said, daddy, that didn't actually happen. I said, yes it did. But he's 26 now and work for the telephone company. He's beginning to experience some of these things now with the white folks. He's been looked over a couple of times for a promotion. But I wish they could understand some of that while they are young and growing up. We don't teach children enough black history like the older folks did. You don't find parents sitting around telling the children these stories like I told you. That actually happened. My son picked up bits and pieces. We be traveling on trips and stuff like that, but he hasn't been exposed to very much racism until he got grown. He experienced a little in high school, very little, but in college he picked up a little bit more but he went to a predominately white school, so. I wish he had went to a black school. I wish all black children could go to black schools. I really do. I made a mistake. I wish I had encouraged them to go to Ercorn, or Jackson State, or Tupelo or something or Valley State. He does too now that he's out. You get a different perspective when you go to a black school. You really do now. So most of my nieces and nephews now, we are encouraging them to go to, you know, some of them are going to private black schools like Rush, Tupelo, but they just seem to do better. The white folk's college is alright, but it still ain't the best for us.
MAUSIKI SCALES: So what would you say your recipe for making it good all the time, your family had?

MAURICE LUCAS: The closeness of the family really. Most of our families were big back then. You always had somebody to rely on, a big brother or sister or something. Family ties. We always had a big family so we were all close. Don't be for that you don't make it. You don't make it, but we still need to instill in these youngsters it's important knowing your heritage now. We have come a long way and these young folk don't know what we came through. To instill that in them to the black children is the most important thing I think. Cause I'm in the school system and I see it. We got predominately white school. We got all black schools. We got all mixed schools. Got some 50/50 and I see it on both sides.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was Black History taught when you were coming up?

MAURICE LUCAS: No. It's being taught now. As a matter of fact, at the high school my wife works at she teaches black history. What do they call it now?

MAUSIKI SCALES: African-American.
MAURICE LUCAS: No. They don't even call it that now. Oh, they got some coo-coo term they call it.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Cultural living?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. Let's see what. It's not black history. What is the name of it now. Is it multi-cultural relations or something, you know. Call it what it is. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was there a need for you to learn that from your parents and grandparents?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. I guess because Big Mama was an educator and five of my daddy's brothers and sisters were teachers. So we learned a lot that way. Sure did. Sure did. That was one of the reasons I guess we was up to date. We always had books. Access to a lot of books. And being church going, the church always had a lot of books too. That was the basis for a lot of education for black folks was going to church. Did you know that? A lot of black folk need to get back in the church. I believe they'll be better off. Cause Aunt Janie will still take care of your butt pretty good in church.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Did the church have activities outside of...

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. We had Vacation Bible School. We always had something. Church picnics. If we didn't do nothing but get down on the ground and build hot dogs and stuff. Now that I think about it the church paid a big roll in those days and our church is still very active.

MAUSIKI SCALES: You say your church is 110?

MAURICE LUCAS: 110 years old. Sure is.

MAUSIKI SCALES: That's a long history.

MAURICE LUCAS: And we've always had a lot of educators in our church. This building next door was a teacher's home when I was a kid. Sure was. Sure was. And it belonged to the church and when we merged the two school system the teacher's home reverted back to the church and the church sold it. I remember when we incorporated. The first five or six meetings we had we met in the church. We had city meetings in the church. Then the Masons owned this building. Then I, by me being in the Masons I got a long term lease. City Hall right here. This is owned by the Masons.
MAUSIKI SCALES: City Hall is owned by the Masons?

MAURICE LUCAS: That's right. I had a long term lease from the Masons.

MAUSIKI SCALES: That's alright.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. That's exactly right. That's how we got started.

MAUSIKI SCALES: That seems like something significant to the network you started.

MAURICE LUCAS: Of the black organizations. Yeah. There used to be a lot of networking in the olden years, cause I hear older people talking about the Knights and Daughters of Tabor which started a hospital. The Masons. And then they had what they call the Woodmen's and unions and they all network together. A lot of the membership was the same and they pulled their resources. They bought land. The Masons started two or three different schools in Mississippi. That Campbell College that used to be right across from Jackson State was Mason's that they started. I'm trying to think. I was looking in that history book. Yeah. So there was a lot of networking in those days.
Sure was.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Got anything else you'd like to share at this time?

MAURICE LUCAS: Nothing in particular. It was a struggle. It was a struggle. That split session in that school. I hadn't thought about that in a long time. That brought back a lot of memories.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you all have the same resources that the local white schools?

MAURICE LUCAS: Uh uh. It was common knowledge, as a matter of fact I brought it up. We had a called school board meeting yesterday. We were trying to figure out some money to save some people. And we got to talking about supplies and I told these two white girls was at the meeting. I said, man when I was growing up, I can't ever remember getting a new school book. See that railroad track. There's the white high school and the black high school. Every book I got from school had Sally Jane, Mary Jane, or some little white boy or little white girl's name in it. They used them three years and give them to the black school. That was common knowledge. You go in and ask any of those folks there. They'll tell you right now.
MAUSIKI SCALES: So you were getting old information.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. Uh huh. But if you got a book it had been used. Didn't get no new books. And that was common all over the Delta.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you remember any teachers or lessons you got?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. All the black folks were well prepared. I think before integration black folks got a better education from these folks than they getting now. Cause white folks took all our better educated folks. They teaching their children. I really do, because there was a whole lot more concern. I just look at the number of black lawyers and doctors came out of our high school in the early years before integration. Most of our teachers now are white and half of them want to draw a check. That's right. That's the problem. I hope the other parts of the country ain't experiencing what we're experiencing with that. That is a problem. That really is.

MAUSIKI SCALES: The family members that you have that were teaching talking about their challenges.
MAURICE LUCAS: Uh huh. Most of them had to struggle. Most of them went to Ercorn which 140 miles away. I remember Marstella telling me it took two days to go to school back then.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Two days?

MAURICE LUCAS: A day down. It took a whole day to get back. She graduated in 1925 from Ercorn. Yep. She sure did. She taught here 40 year. Eddy finished at Ercorn in '52. Uncle Billy was down there in the late 30s and my sister went. I ended up going to school here. I went to a predominately white school. Yeah. Went to the county. It was a struggle too. Wadn't but nine black students there when I went.

MAUSIKI SCALES: And when was that?

MAURICE LUCAS: In '69. Yep. Before then they didn't let us pick up nothing but the paper and do the laundry. And brother, it was a struggle. But where I was working, I was working and going to school and I always wanted a job in the office. They say if you went to one of them black schools they wadn't going to give you no job in the office. So I ended up having

END OF TAPE ONE -- SIDE B
MAUSIKI SCALES: When did you do when you finished college?

MAURICE LUCAS: I worked for Baxter 25 years. I took an early retirement years ago and don't do nothing. I do consulting business now. I got my tax business. I keep books for several small businesses and living off my profit sharing. I accumulated a nice little savings while I was there. Sure did.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you remember your teachers?

MAURICE LUCAS: Man, I don't remember them from first grade on, but my first four years was my aunts. My daddy's sister and sister-in-law. First through four.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was it a very disciplined school?

MAURICE LUCAS: Ooh, Lord, yes. Them old folks don't play, Jack. And they had the open concept way back then. Marstella taught the first two or three grades. Marstella taught like first and second. Aunt Belle taught like third and fourth.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Were they worse because they were your
MAURICE LUCAS: They probably worse on us. Probably was worse on us, but they didn't play games.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Who provided the discipline in your family?

MAURICE LUCAS: Everybody. Anybody who was grown provided discipline. If it was big brother, or big sister or whoever, mamas or daddys. Anywhere. We didn't have no discipline problems then. No discipline at all. I can't remember a discipline problem in elementary school. Man, they took care of their business.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did your mother or father, like you said they are going to school.

MAURICE LUCAS: Everybody. Yeah. Daddy. My daddy didn't whip me but twice in my whole growing up years. Montell used to get me every other day though. Yeah. Cause I was kind of mischievous.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Who made the decisions in your family?

MAURICE LUCAS: Daddy. Daddy made the decisions pretty much
and mama supported him. I never heard my mama and daddy argue. Never did.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When you were growing up, did the community ever experience any problems where people had to get together and decided what should be done?

MAURICE LUCAS: Oh yeah. Yeah. I was trying to think of some examples. Well, a lot of time it was at church meetings. I can remember we had a problem when I was a youngsters about some older whites coming in the community messing with the young black girls. Man, them old folks would get together at the church and they'd have sentinels placed on one end of the street and the other. They'd break up that mess.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So white men were coming in.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. Trying to mess with these little young black girls and stuff. They'd have a church meeting in a minute. Everything in those days was done through the church. Sure was.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Would that be a relationship that they would try to force on young women?
MAURICE LUCAS: Uh huh. Yep. And if they had a black lady that was whoring around with white folk, they'd run her ass out of town.

MAUSIKI SCALES: A black lady?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yes sir. They run several out of this community when we were little boys. Sure did. They sure did. But that was pretty predominate in communities where they were all black communities like here and Mound Bayou. Black folks ain't going to put up with that mess. But we were the boss. We were in charge. Yeah, we were the majority owners.

MAUSIKI SCALES: That had to stop.

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. They had to come to a screeching halt. They didn't play that. And most of it was done through the church in those days. They had strong deacons and what not, man. Whatever they say went.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So, where was it that everyone mostly had a gun?

MAURICE LUCAS: Yeah. That was prevalent. Yeah. That's when Uncle Bob shot an old man. They called him No Nose, cause
somebody had cut his nose or something. And, him and Uncle Bob, the one I was telling you about earlier where that white lady told them don't hang him. That's right up the highway up there. They had gotten in an argument out here in town that morning about some old woman and old man No Nose told him, said when I see you again you better have you a gun. Shit. Uncle Bob ambushed him, on the way home that evening Uncle Bob jumped out from behind that house with that 38. Said I got my gun and I shot him off that horse. He had pulled his two guns. Papa said them guns fell off in the mud. Yeah. Uncle Bob. They put Uncle Bob on a train.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So No Nose was a white man?

MAURICE LUCAS: He was a light skinned man, but he was a black guy.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Oh, he was a black guy.

MAURICE LUCAS: No, Miss Ann would have let him hung if that had been a white man. Shit. Yeah. They put him on a train and sent him on to Chicago, but they went and got him two or months later, but he could plow them horses for Miss Smith. Miss Smith done let him go free.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Could people on those plantations vote?
MAURICE LUCAS: Black folk couldn't. Only folks voted was the black folks in Mound Bayou. No. And you know during the civil rights struggle, a lot of these plantations still didn't let the folks come on there and get these black folks and register and vote. Man, shit, it was way up in the 70s 'fore they probably got all them folks registered to vote. And some of them still ain't voting, Jack. Trust me. Them white folks still intimidating some black folk out of these plantations. Might not be but a handful of them, but there some of them still going through it. Yes sir. Some of these houses you see some of these folks living in you wonder how they live in them don't you. I'm telling you about it. In 1995, that is something. You've gotten all my knowledge today.

MAUSIKI SCALES: I really enjoyed talking to you

END OF INTERVIEW