Interview with Richard Rose

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

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Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South
An oral history project to record and preserve the living memory of African American life during the age of legal segregation in the American South, from the 1890s to the 1950s.

ORIGINAL PROJECT

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BEHIND THE VEIL:
DOCUMENTING AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE
IN THE JIM CROW SOUTH
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:
RICHARD ROSE

AUGUST 3, 1995

CECIL, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

INTERVIEWED BY:
PAUL ORTIZ
PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, could you tell when you were born and something about the area that you grew up in.

RICHARD ROSE: Yes. I was born September 13, 1935 in a little town, a community at least called Cecil, C-e-c-i-l, Alabama. And then my mother and her father moved to another community called Madison Park. That was in Montgomery County. Okay. My grandmother passed when I was two years old so I don't remember much about her. Anyway this community was mostly a farming community and I can remember my grandfather, he wasn't a sharecropper but he was renting and he was trying to farm, well, he was farming, and when I got about seven, I'll say seven years old, he stopped farming and got a public job to support his family. School. Let me go to school then. I attended elementary school which was about three miles from where I lived and we had to walk whether it was raining, snowing, or sleeting. We didn't have buses. Very few people in the neighborhood had cars at this time. But I do remember that the whites in this area had a school bus and I couldn't understand this. At that young age I just couldn't understand why we didn't have a bus and they had one. Anyway, when I finished elementary school and went to high school, junior high, they gave us a bus and I can remember this bus that they gave us it was a small bus. It had two long seats on this
side and then a split one down the middle with the two posts. Every time the driver would pull off you would slide forward. Then when he stopped then you would go the opposite direction. There were about twelve or thirteen students riding that bus to the junior high school and high school in Montgomery, Alabama which was seven miles away. Later after the students increased in that community they gave us a larger bus that would hold approximately forty, maybe forty-five students. A good friend of mine which was also a student drove the bus. He was the second bus driver in the community. Wait a minute, let me back up. No, we had a lady, had a man that started out driving the bus and then a lady took over because she wasn't working. The man was working and he just started the route. Then after that we had a student to drive and then I followed the first student and I drove for two years. After that, let me just back up just a little. Well, let me tell you a little about the working conditions. As I stated, my grandfather did farm and a lot of his friends and small farmers in the community were farming. They didn't have tractors at this time. So they had to use mules and horses. And the main crops were cotton, corn, potatoes, peanuts. Things of this nature. And then we would, after my grandfather stopped farming we would go and help friends, you know, work down in their crops. You probably have heard of chopping cotton. That's one phase where you have to chop it to thin it out and to cut the grass out from it. I wasn't too good at that. I couldn't keep up. So I asked
my grandfather let me do anything except chop cotton. So I would plow sometimes. And then once we'd help the friends you had small black farmers, but the white farmers were much larger, their farms were much larger. Then we would go to make money by working for these white farmers. I can remember back then. I do remember working all day for something like $1.50 and then if you were picking cotton back then they were paying like $1.25 for a hundred, a hundred pounds if you picked it. They would pick you up. They would have a driver to pick you up on a flatbed truck and transport you to the field and then back and forth to the field. If you didn't carry your own lunch, lunch was provided. You could go to this farmer's store and buy your lunch. And in a lot of cases if you didn't pick very much cotton you would end up eating or spending that on food for lunch. So in some cases you didn't make very much money and then later on when I got in high school. Well, you will have to put it together. When I stopped driving the school bus in '55, I went to Tuskegee Institute on what you call the five year work plan. And knowing the situation in the south through the school a lot of students were able to get summer jobs working upstate New York. For example, one year I worked on Long Island. Another year I worked on Shelter Island as a bus boy and I worked one year up in the Catskill Mountains. Had a summer camp. All these were summer camps. I could make much more money upstate New York than I could in Alabama. I made enough money to buy school clothes and still have some money left
over. And I met some real nice people there. Different nationalities. I noticed that the people in these areas didn't treat you like the whites in the south, you know. The situation, the condition was much better. What else you need to know?

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, I wonder if you could back up a little bit. You said originally your family was from the community called Cecil and then you moved to Madison.

RICHARD ROSE: Okay. That was in Montgomery, Alabama. All of it was Alabama.

PAUL ORTIZ: And why did your family make the decision to move to Madison Park?

RICHARD ROSE: Okay. That's kind of hard to say, but I imagine my grandfather got tired of living in that particular area and he decided to move to a new location for I guess, work. I imagine, I don't know. I was about three years old when they made that move. So I'm assuming that he did this to be closer to town another reason probably and to, I guess the farmers, the land was better for farming. That may have played a role in him making a decision to move. And then another thing maybe he wanted to get a little closer to town, because where we were in Cecil that was about, oh, 20, about 30 or maybe 40 miles from town.
PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, you've talked a lot about your grandfather. Did stories about his experiences pass down to you or your parents about how he had come to that part of Alabama.

RICHARD ROSE: I regret it. My grandfather and I was real close. I do remember him telling me that his mother was in slavery, but I know he came from Rome, Georgia and I don't remember what he told me about why they made the move to Alabama. We would sit down and talk sometime, but we just didn't get into all that. I regret it. Just didn't do it.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, what kind of values did your elders bestow on you.

RICHARD ROSE: Number one, my mother, my grandfather, my uncles they all played a part in raising me. So number one I was taught that if something didn't belongs to you not to bother it. Not to steal, ask for what you want. And then if you were going to succeed you needed to get an education and then if you wanted something then you should work for it and get it. So, and then my upbringing, say in church, started young. Had to go to Sunday school and church. So with a background like that they instilled moral values also.
PAUL ORTIZ: When they were instilling those values did, would they also tell you about how to survive in the segregation conditions?

RICHARD ROSE: Yes, and maybe somewhat in some sense, yes. Well, being in an segregated area like that you learn from experience, but they told you certain things and tried to direct you. For example, if we were speaking to, it didn't matter whether it was a black, an elderly person you had to say yes 'mam, no 'mam, yes sir, no sir. And like when we were riding the buses back then. All the blacks had to go to the back and if the bus would fill up from the front with whites all the way back then the driver would ask you to get up and let this white person sit down. They told us, they instilled in us not to cause what you might say trouble and that way you protected yourself. You wouldn't be put in jail or beat by some of the policemens. Okay? That's about it. They did the best they could. For example, my grandfather didn't get much education. He got to about the third or fourth grade, but he used common sense and mother went, my mother went to, I believe to about the ninth or the tenth grade so she was a big help. And then too, she had to leave that area and went north in order to get decent work. So I mainly was raised by my grandfather and my aunt and uncles.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose what was your first experience with
segregation? When did you first become aware of it?

RICHARD ROSE: When I was old enough, I'd say about nine or ten, if I went to town or somewhere with my grandfather or if an insurance man would come by, instead of calling him by his name they would rather say uncle or preacher and I noticed then something was wrong here. And then this man could be younger than my grandfather and he had to say yes sir to him and he would say yes and no to my grandfather who was up in age. And I said something wrong here, you know. And then when you would get on the bus I noticed that at an early age we'd have to take a seat in the back. So I knowed something was wrong here. And then when you went to the public places like the five and ten cents stores back then you had a water fountain that says white and one said color. Bathrooms. One for black if they had one and one for white. And if you were traveling you couldn't go in the restaurant. You had to prepare your own lunch and, you know, travel that way. What else I notice. I noticed this at an early age and as I got older and started traveling it began to register more, you know.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, was there ever a point when you or perhaps one of your friends growing up said this is ridiculous. I'm not going to follow the rules today and just drink out of a water fountain or?
RICHARD ROSE: Okay. This was while I was coming up. This didn't happen until had to be around '54 or '55 and they started the civil rights movement and that's when the bus boycott started in Montgomery. I was in high school then, but I didn't really get into it because I lived out of the city about seven miles out. My friends that lived in town they'd get involved in it. Once, what her name, Mrs. Park, Rosa Parks, it started from the incident with her and then from there Dr. King came in and then it went on for, several years and then about '59 I got drafted in the army and I couldn't participate in it. But some of my friends did. I didn't get involved that much. Had I been in the city it would have been a different thing. Yeah. But we did, say if they say don't go in this store and patronize them then we stayed away and we shopped at certain stores, you know.

PAUL ORTIZ: Oh, okay. And so that was.

RICHARD ROSE: My way. Uh huh

PAUL ORTIZ: Now was that done just informally or?

RICHARD ROSE: No, that was organized during the bus boycott. If the leaders said and we kept up with the news, if they said don't shop at these places, don't ride, don't use the cabs, don't
use the buses. We didn't do it. It was organized. Yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: So when you went into Montgomery you knew which stores?

RICHARD ROSE: Right. I knew which store not to go in and the ones to shop in. Yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: Okay. Mr. Rose, when you were living at Madison Park could you describe what the black community looked like?

RICHARD ROSE: Sure. This particular community is located about seven miles out of Montgomery and when we moved there it was all black, all black community. It was named after the Madisons because they owned all the land in that area, the majority of the land, and some of them were farmers. One of the brothers was a lawyer. Now in that particular area there were no whites at the time and then about a mile or two miles down then you had a white you had some whites that owned land and one that owned stores. Then this particular neighborhood when I first remember there were no black grocery stores of any kind when we first moved there, only whites and then later on one of the Madisons did build a store, a grocery store. It's a rural area like I stated. At one time there were no lights in this area. You had to use lamps. No gas. No gas lines. You had to use wood or coal for heating.
There was one unique thing about this community they did have a swimming pool and a picnic area. The Madisons, they built this. Later on when I became say about 19 or 20 they did get, well before then. When I got about 14 or 15 they got electricity out there and then after I got grown they got gas lines and we had gas. And then a lot of the people they didn't have inside bathrooms because of the condition. Didn't have the water either.

We got water, gas. We got electricity, gas, and water. And today the city limits is out in that community. You have policemen patrolling out there. You have an interstate that come about two miles, about three miles from where I live. It's right there in the community. You got a four lane which it used to be just a two lane through there. You got 231 and 21 going south going through there and the community has really grown because a lot of the businesses moved out of Montgomery and start moving out in that area. Just recently, last year I noticed they built a McDonald's out there and I never thought I would see that and now that we have a McDonald's you going to have others, going to have competition coming in later, Wendy's and some other businesses. And then about, let's see, what else is in that area, you got a lot of, you got quite a few car dealers out there now. You got a florist. You got a lumber company. Quite a few businesses which I never thought would actually be in that area. Some of the blacks sold their land when they found out that four lane was coming through there and that helped. Let me see if I can think
of something else. That's about it.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, when you were growing up what were relations like between neighbors?

RICHARD ROSE: Okay. The relationship between neighbors was real close. They were closely knitted. If one farmer, I'd say if one family was having problems, if they had a crop and one of them got sick this family or the families in the neighborhood would get together and go to the rescue. They would do what they had to do for him to help him until he got well. If a person got sick and needed wood or food, some people in the neighborhood would get together and they helped each other. Back then they were much closer than neighbors are today. I'll put it that way. They looked out for each other. Today it's much different.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, you were talking about neighbors helping each other if they were sick, what kind of, what would your parents do when you took sick?

RICHARD ROSE: Uh, say a neighbor or just anyone?

PAUL ORTIZ: Oh, sure. It could be a neighbor.

RICHARD ROSE: They would go over, take food, use home
remedies. If they had money, they would share that. Just whatever they could do to help out as far as I remember, yes. Maybe I didn't answer that right. Okay.

PAUL ORTIZ: And what kind of home remedies were ( )?

RICHARD ROSE: Oh boy. Number one, just going back, it's been a long time. They used to make a tea for something out of hog, pig hoof. Yeah, certain kind of tea. If you had a fever and they'd give you that. If you had a cold they would use coal oil. We called it kerosene and sugar and burn it and give you that. Those are just some that come to mind. If you cut your foot or something, they would get the soot out of the fireplace stuff it in there and then pour coal oil on it. Those are just some home remedies that I can remember. I notice one other. My grandfather had asthma real bad and he used a certain ginseng weed that he would beat up or crush up, the leaves and put it in this pipe and smoke. Said that helped him. Those are just a few. I can't remember all of 'em. Yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, were there mid-wives?

RICHARD ROSE: Yes, definitely. I was delivered by a mid-wife. Back then you didn't have enough, well, you didn't have enough doctors to go around and you couldn't get to the hospitals
so you had quite a few mid-wives and they were real good. I can say this they didn't always, they did the best that they could. Babies that were delivered by mid-wives some time had problems especially males. They would have to go in and later on see a doctor. Number one, I don't know if you want to include this circumcision, but the mid-wives they play an important role in the communities back, during that era of that time, yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, when you were growing up were there, did black families have practice crafts like basket making or do quilting?

RICHARD ROSE: Yes, I can remember. There were some families that did weaving. They made ax handles. They made chairs. What you call 'em? They made the bottoms for chairs. Ax, pick handles, different things like of that nature, yes. Some of them were real good at that particular craft. Now my people didn't get involved in that too much but there were so many that did. Yes.

PAUL ORTIZ: One thing I was wondering, Mr. Rose. I've heard about sometimes the basket making would it be mainly women who were involved in crafts or was it kind of?

RICHARD ROSE: It was kind of mixed. Mostly, yeah, I would say it was a mixture of men and women, but for the most part you
had the men doing it more so than the women. Yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, earlier you talked about plowing.

RICHARD ROSE: Oh, okay.

PAUL ORTIZ: Tell me what it was like. Now you plowed with a mule.

RICHARD ROSE: A mule. A horse. Okay. Either one. Mostly far back during that time you either had mules. Most people had mules to work. They said that they worked better than the horses, but then there were some that had horses that they would plow. It was hard work. I can tell you that, because when you got a large area you got to break up for the first time it's like cultivating it, getting it ready before you make your rows. You had to around and take a large what you call, it was some kind of large plow where you had to go round and round and cultivate them. Then you come back and you take a different plow and put a smaller, I don't know what you call it. It was a smaller plow and then you make your rows. But that was quite an experience. And then you had to learn how to handle your mules to keep them going straight, you know. A lot of times you couldn't pull 'em, 'cause you had your hands on the plow handles and you had to talk to them, you know. The older people would say like "gee" and they'd go right and
"haw" he'd go left. Things of that nature. But anyway, that was pretty hard work compared to today you have tractors, the modern tractors. You can put different discs and plows on there and you can cover much more territory in the run of a day.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, did farmers use signs to plant by?

RICHARD ROSE: I'd say yes, most of them did. I can't tell you what signs, but I think the moon had something to do with it. They used what you call an almanac and they would go in there and look at it and go by different signs. That's about all I know. When they plant certain things, yeah. Especially for the garden. I know that. But I don't remember all of them.

PAUL ORTIZ: Through here, Mr. Rose, we're talking about that the whites own the largest land holders. Did that also mean that they owned the best land?

RICHARD ROSE: In most cases, yes. They owned the largest and the best land and that's one reason why my grandfather stopped farming because he just wasn't producing enough to break even. So he had to stop, you know, and go get a public job. Crops just weren't making it because of the land, yeah. So. Yes, they owned the best land and the largest farms, yeah.
PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, when you were growing up, did you think when you were a young man that you would go into farming or were you thinking along other?

RICHARD ROSE: When I was growing up, I never, never dreamed, never had any intentions of going into farming by myself, not after working, no, on farms and working for different people. No. No way.

PAUL ORTIZ: What was your experience of working with different people?

RICHARD ROSE: Some people are hard to satisfy. You couldn't plow right. You couldn't do this right. You know. So farming just wasn't for me. I knew this and that's why I made up my mind. I was going to get as much education. I was going to stay in school and then I was going to go to some college so I could get away from farming. Now a lot of blacks did the same thing. Yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, when you were growing up do you remember racial violence whites against blacks?

RICHARD ROSE: Sure. I, yes. Just one. Let me mention one incident. I've seen this riding the bus. Just from Montgomery to my community we had a local bus that would go, would come through
and for twenty five cents you could go one way to Montgomery. There have been cases where a black would get on and then like I was telling you if the front would fill up with whites and then the driver would ask the next person, a black, to get up and let the whites sit down. So, there was some fellows grown men I'd say had had a drink or two and they wouldn't get up. So then the driver wanted to come back and make 'em get up and that's when you'd have some fights. That's one incident. Another incident, I had a good friend of mine's mother was walking from work. She was working for some whites in Montgomery and they didn't bring her home. She had to walk home and some time it would get dusk dark 'fore she could get off the highway. Some young whites passed by and took a quarter of a watermelon and threw it and hit her and just knocked teeth out, you know. Another incident, if the sheriff would come out to your house for some reason he didn't have to show you a search warrant. He'd just go on in and search. You had a lot of trouble out of that. Oh, I used to work at a short order cafe and they had an area in the back with one table or maybe two about this size and chairs on each side for blacks and they sold beer and sandwiches and, you know, fast food. Short order place. And the bathroom was located in the back. So, on the outside, for the men. So some of the whites, they had to get up out of the living room or whatever they were sitting at the bar and go through where these blacks were to go to the bathroom. So, this particular day this one white guy went through and he made
some smart remark. It was a black soldier in there and they had a brawl. That black soldier got up and told him what he would do and they started fighting. The owner had to go back there and stop them. Then he kind of talked to the white guy, you know, cause he knew the black guy didn't say anything to him, you know. That's one incident. They had other incidents where (pause) whites will not come one on one. Back then they wouldn't, they'd come in a group. They had to be two or three. If you stood up for what you believed and didn't let them run over you they'd say you were crazy. And then if you got in an argument with one and he probably wouldn't say nothing then, but later on he'd get two or three and come back. And that's when you had a lot of trouble. Then they would beat the guy up, you know, the black up and go on. But I can say this, I knew of the Ku Klux Klan, but I never did see a cross where they had set up and set it afire. Never did see that. I never did see any in robes and their uniforms, you know, but we knew they were there. Because of some of the other incidents that happened. I can recall I was real young and I heard my people, my parents talking about it. They made one black fellow jump off into the Alabama River for no reason at all. They just stopped him and made him do it, but these were Klansmen. They recently, oh, about 10 or 15 years ago they recently the attorney general in Alabama there recently sentenced one of them to life in prison but he was an old man then. But anyway, a lot of injustices like that went on during that time. I had an
incident where my uncle and another young black lady was a working for this white fellow that owned a short order, he owned a club. She was cooking. My uncle was car hopping and waiting tables. A white guy was liking the black young lady. My uncle was liking the black young lady. So something happened and my uncle found out about it and he slapped her and she went back and told the white man. That night he sent, the white man sent two car loads of whites. They were mixed. You had men and women like they were looking. They came looking for my uncle. Now my uncle had told my grandfather, his daddy what had happened. Well, when the cars drove up and they asked for him they didn't know that there were two guns on the back of the house pointed at them, but they didn't know that. So anyway, my grandfather decided then that it was time for my uncle to leave and go up east on the east coast because he was going to kill had he stayed there. Things like that and then brutality by policemen. This happened after I left the area. I was in service. If they caught you speeding and they say you were sassing, they subject to shoot you, beat you to death or shoot you. And that did happen in some incidents for no reason at all. And then I was raised up, well I knew this one fellow. I used to work for his parents. He was just a little baby. I remember when he was a little baby and I left and went away and he grew up. He became a state trooper and you talking about hated blacks, he hated blacks. Things like that. There was some, oh one other thing too. Back then they could, well, the whites could
pick up a black young lady and do whatever they wanted and then nothing was done about it. If she could identify him, still nothing would be done. That has happened. There's others, but I won't go into them.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, you mentioned earlier the case involving your uncle and your grandfather where they had to defend themselves literally. Were there other cases of armed self defense that you remember.

RICHARD ROSE: Not off hand, no. Only during the bus boycott. You probably read about it, but after they, before they bombed out the King house. Yeah, let me back up. I didn't notice at the time, but at Tuskegee you had the Army ROTC and the Air Force ROTC and they have a VA hospital there. When that VA hospital was first built, the whites controlled it. It should have been controlled by blacks. It was in the black community and the blacks controlled the little town of Tuskegee, I mean whites controlled the little town of Tuskegee although, excuse me, the blacks made up the majority of the population.

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RICHARD ROSE: Alright. I found out after attending Tuskegee
there for a couple of years that the whites didn't want to turn that VA hospital over to the blacks. So the whites that were working in the VA they could get equipment and everything. So they told the president of Tuskegee Institute that if he didn't do certain things what they would do. They would burn Tuskegee down, so. And then they went back and they tore up these sheets and they made their hoods and everything. They had planned to go through with it, but then by the ROTC being at Tuskegee, both Army and the Air Force and there were a lot of alumni and friends, the word had been sent to them and they were coming to Tuskegee to defend it. So that particular night evidently it leaked out because the whites changed their mind. They didn't carry out the threat, but they didn't know, what they did find out that the ROTC had weapons and they had access to ammunition and they had both the ROTCs and friends and alumnus with weapons ready to defend Tuskegee. I didn't know that for a long time. So eventually blacks did take control of the VA hospital at Tuskegee. What else. And then you had a lot of violence during this bus boycott like before they bombed Dr. King's house and after it got really bad after they bombed Dr. King's house because then they started threatening other individuals. So blacks had to arm themselves and they did. I didn't get involved in it, because at that time I was in service but I do know about it.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, when you were at Tuskegee who told you
about armed self defense at the hospital?

RICHARD ROSE: One of my friends, he was an older fellow, he mentioned it and then I read about it later because while I was there I just didn't have any idea something like that had happened. But he mentioned it to me and then later on I read about it.

PAUL ORTIZ: Oh, he was from Tuskegee?

RICHARD ROSE: Yes, he was from that area.

PAUL ORTIZ: Worked in that area?

RICHARD ROSE: He did. And then, oh, let me mention this. I forgot it. As I said, stated before, whites were in charge of the whole city. The police department, the mayor, the sheriff, and then the ( ). One reason why they made the threat against Tuskegee because some of the blacks that worked at Tuskegee had begun to get a large number of blacks to vote and then the whites knew that this was going to be a threat. That they were going to lose control. So they did these things to keep that from happening and then eventually, the blacks did register and they voted. First they took over the sheriff's department. Then they took the police department and they brought a black mayor in and
he's still mayor of Tuskegee now. And then when the black sheriff came in most of the whites quit. Maybe one or two stayed on. Same thing with the police department. A few stayed, but the majority of them left. They quit. I just didn't realize and then while I was there I realized while I was a student there because at certain times they, it got so bad they told the students not to go downtown. So I know things were getting pretty bad. Yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, did black people in Madison Park get involved in voting or politics when you were growing up?

RICHARD ROSE: Not to my knowledge, because I can remember, I had let's see, one, two, I had two uncles to go serve in World War II and I had several older friends that I remember went in. And once they got out of the Army they still couldn't register to vote. So at that time no one was fighting. Even when I went in service, I must have been what, about 23 or 24 I still wasn't registered, not in Alabama to vote. I didn't register to vote until I got out of service in '64 in state side California, and I walked right to the fire station, signed up, and became a registered voter. And then when I came back here from California and I worked here one year, I know the law, I went to Greenville to register and I had this white lady to tell me, had me fill out the forms and on there it asked where were you born and all that. And then when I filled that out and carried it up there she said,
well, you were born in Alabama, you can't. I asked the lady, I'm sorry. She said you can be fined $10,000 and put in jail. I said, lady, I been living in the state of Mississippi for one year. I am a veteran. I know the law. You let me worry about it. All I want to do is register to vote and she did. And I noticed the way she was talking to a lot of the older people like they were dogs because they didn't want you to register to vote. But to get back to your question, during that time the people weren't fighting it that much. I guess they were too afraid because a lot of the veterans had come back, and you know. I still noticed. I had two uncles. They weren't registered to vote and they weren't pushing and then later on people kind of got organized. But it was so sad and I wondered about that. But I can understand back then it was kind of difficult.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, now you said earlier that when you were thinking in terms of a career or your future that farming was out of the question.

RICHARD ROSE: Yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: When did you begin to think of a possible career?

RICHARD ROSE: Before I even finished high school, during the
time while I was working and especially when I went upstate New York to work a couple of years, cause I met a lot of people. Talked to a lot of people and I knowed then I just had to, you know, stay in school and go to college. And then noticing the way, well, I noticed my grandfather didn't get much education. My mother and my uncles and my aunts, but I was the first one in my immediate family to go to college so I had made up my mind I was going to get out of that mess.

PAUL ORTIZ: At first you went into the service out of high school?

RICHARD ROSE: No. I went to college for two years and then I got drafted. Back then they were drafting you. So I got drafted in '59. Yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: You were in the army?

RICHARD ROSE: I was regular army.

PAUL ORTIZ: Regular army. Okay. What kind of experiences did you have in the army?

RICHARD ROSE: Oh. As far as segregation? Well, when I got drafted I went to Fort Benning, Georgia. That's located in
Columbus, right outside of Columbus. I was fortunate enough to go in with fellows from the north, the east, the mid-west, south. We were all mixed up at the time. So we were kind of even, well, I say we were balanced and we got put in different platoons. They put so many blacks, so many whites, so many other minorities, but you still had prejudice there. You could tell it. Platoon sergeants, platoon leaders real good. Your first sergeants and your COs that were white they still were prejudiced, because if a black did something they put him on the worse detail they could find. If a white did something, they put him on the easiest one they could find. Things like that. Okay. Rank came down and say for example I came up, a black came up for promotion, had the time and grade, had a clean record. The CO and the first sergeant would get together and give it to whites. They'd pull so many whites out and encourage them to go to OCS. Didn't pull no blacks out or Hispanics or some other minority and say you need to go to OCS. Your IQ is high enough for you to go to OCS. Things like that.

PAUL ORTIZ: You had already had college?

RICHARD ROSE: I had already had college. And then one thing about the army too, although you had had college and a lot of my friends had already finished college they'd put you in the infantry, but you're not infantry. I think once you go into
combat infantry is going to go in first. They are going in first after the Marines. They going in first. Then the infantry. That mean you up on the front line. Then they put a lot of white guys in something else and keep them off the front lines. A good example is Viet Nam. You had more blacks killed there because they were all made infantry. Most of them and then put on the front line. I had friends. I was at Fort Ore then. I was out. I got out cause I had served five years and I didn't want to go to Viet Nam. So I started working for the government there and I saw some of my friends that I knew go to Viet Nam, serve 13 months, and come back to Fort Ore, California. That base is closed now. Stay from seven to eight months and they weren't volunteering to go back. They would ship them back over and that wasn't right. You had a few did volunteer to go back but the majority didn't. They were steady sending them back. One good example, I had a good friend of mine. When I first entered Tuskegee, he was in ROTC. He was a junior then. The guy was a mathematician. He was sharp. He finished college. Got his commission as a second lieutenant. Went into the army. He stayed in 18 years. So what happened to him? He and a white, he made major all the way up to major, he and a white major, they were sending them to Viet Nam as advisors. Okay. The last time he was over there after about the third time he got hit and they had to send him back to the states because he got hit pretty bad. Okay. When he got well, they wanted to send him back to Viet Nam but the white major that they
been sending with him they going to give him state side duty somewhere else and get him out of Viet Nam. So I asked him what happened. I said why didn't you fight it. He said, well, I didn't want to go back and I was tired of the system. He say I got out after 18 years. I told him I'd be fighting them right now, because he was a major. They wanted to do something to force him out. He didn't need but two more years and he could have retired, but he said rather than go back to Viet Nam he may not be as lucky. So he got out. Those are some of the incidents. Uh, Korea, Germany. The whites would tell the civilians, especially the young ladies different things about blacks like they had tails. That's what they told the Germans. I don't know if you heard of this or not. They told the young ladies that the blacks had tails and they come out at night and they found out different.

And then the majority of the whites, I hate to say it, but they treated a lot of the Germans real bad and the blacks helped them. It got so bad. When I got there the 11th Airborne, that was a paratroop, airborne unit, they had torn this little town of Oxburg up pretty good. And we got there and if we went to town we had to go in at least two or three because if you went in by yourself you were going to get beat up. You had to fight your way out. It was just that bad. And then you couldn't go in certain bars. You had certain bars for blacks and certain ones for white even in Germany. If you went in a bar where the whites went, man you subject to, you had to fight, but then one or two come in your
bar, your bars where the blacks were, never have any trouble. Those were the things. And then I had it to happen again to me in Germany. I had a platoon sergeant, real nice guy, white fellow from up north somewhere. He used to call me young fellow. Sharp as a tack. He had promised myself and another friend, another black in the unit that we would make, we were all PFCs. We had the time and grade. He said now you next to make Spec 4 like ( ).

Promotion time came around and neither one of us made it. Promoted three white guys and then this platoon sergeant came, went to the section sergeant, told him what happened. Then that platoon sergeant went to the first sergeant and told him just what he thought about him and the CO, but he couldn't change it because, see, they had promoted the guys. So he told them, he say I'm tired of the system. It isn't right. I'm going to have to get out, because I can't keep doing this, you know. So he got out, but that didn't help us any, you know. This white guy probably didn't have as much education as we had. Didn't have the time and grade. We had more time and grade, but they still promoted them. That's the type of stuff. And then if a black got in trouble, the first sergeant and CO would bust them right on the spot. White guy would probably get a little lenient. Things like that. Okay.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, now after you left the service I think you said that at some point you said you moved from California to
Greenwood.

RICHARD ROSE: We moved, yeah. We didn't have any relatives out there. I worked civil service for about two, about three years and my wife was working for the government while she was out there. Since we didn't have any relatives out there we decided, we had some friends here. My wife had worked here in Itta Bena before right at the college here. So a friend called and asked if she would like to come back and that I go ahead and finish school and work. So we decided to come back closer to home and we been here every since. Maybe the next two or three years we going to retire and go back to Alabama, Montgomery. That's the reason, the main reason we came back.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, when you first moved here, I think earlier you were mentioning that you had an experience in racism in voting.

RICHARD ROSE: Yes.

PAUL ORTIZ: What were your other incidents, beginning with your first time in Mississippi?

RICHARD ROSE: No. I had come here to visit my wife before we got married, back in '60, '61 before going to Korea. I rode a
bus. I went to the bus station in Montgomery. Told the ticket agent that I wanted a ticket to get to Itta Bena here. He looked at the map and he said I never heard of it. Say I can't sell you a ticket to Itta Bena. After he found it on the map, he said I can sell you the closest place would be Greenwood. I said, that's fine. So I knew where Greenwood was. I knew it was about 10 miles from Itta Bena. So, I got on the bus and we stopped in Columbus, Mississippi. Never will forget it. We didn't have but about 15, maybe 20 minutes. So I wanted to get a sandwich. As the whites got off and went on to the dining room, I got off and went to the back there, a little hole in the wall and gave my order and the other blacks did too. I never did receive my order.

We got back on the bus and we came on to Greenwood and we got here about ten that night and the bus station was closed and I had heard quite a bit about Mississippi. Alabama wasn't that much better, but that was home. I knew I had to get me a cab and get out of Greenwood. I got a cab and came on out here. And then after I, oh, I drove here once before and I went to the little town of Itta Bena and I wanted to get change for $5. So I went in one of the grocery stores and those people acted just like they didn't see me and the fellow I asked him for change and he told me he didn't have any change. So I walked out of there and didn't ever go back. But I didn't know at the time that they had been having some problems with those two stores there in Itta Bena and the blacks had stopped going in there. What else happened?
That's about all until I went to the post office. That happened here.

PAUL ORTIZ: The post office?

RICHARD ROSE: No, I'm sorry. See I went to the court house to register. That's the next incident. That's about it.

PAUL ORTIZ: When you and your wife had settled down here in 1964 or '65.


PAUL ORTIZ: Did you notice any changes in race relations or anything in particular?

RICHARD ROSE: Uh, there had been some changes, yes, but it was still back in '67. It still was kind of tough. Still a little tough, because a lot of blacks still hadn't registered to vote. I guess a lot of them were too afraid in this area because the majority of them was working for these plantation owners. They were afraid and you couldn't blame them because they had to have a place to stay. If they had gone up there and fought it to register to vote the plantation owner was going to put them out of their home. So I could understand that. And then like today,
even now, come time for election we should have a black major of Itta Bena, should have had a long time ago. The blacks out number the whites, but that plantation mentality and the younger people have registered to vote but they have forgotten what price was paid for them to have this privilege. So they won't even get out and vote. So you still got a white in office up here in Itta Bena. But, things have changed now, but back in '67 they hadn't changed that much.

PAUL ORTIZ: What neighborhood did you and your wife settle in, Mr Rose?

RICHARD ROSE: Here?

RICHARD ROSE: We live on campus. So that made a big difference. The only time we got involved or came in contact with other people a lot of it was when we went into Itta Bena or Greenwood. Yeah.

PAUL ORTIZ: So there were a lot of activities on campus?

RICHARD ROSE: Sure. Sure. We used to have our own movies right here in the auditorium. So we didn't have to go into
Greenwood. The school and the college provided that. Had a bowling alley. By the time I got back here we had other activities that we could, you know, participate in. So that helped quite a bit.

PAUL ORTIZ: So the extent of the campus was like, kind of like a community.

RICHARD ROSE: Yes. Uh huh.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, I know it has taken up a lot of your time. I have a couple of more questions. When you look back on your life and life history, what have been some of the things that have changed in terms the black community and what have been the other things that haven't changed?

RICHARD ROSE: I'd say there had been quite a few changes. Number one, I think the majority of the people that were my age back at that time during that time decided that they needed to get an education. They wanted to be successful and they felt like they could make a difference. Help change some of the situations. So I know a lot of my friends did go on to college and they were successful. Some of the things that haven't changed is number one you still have so many blacks that dropped out, continue to drop out, continue to drop out of school, even high school and never go
to college. And some of them could have made it, but then you have drugs. When I was coming up you didn't have to worry about drugs. You may drink a little wine or a little beer or something like that, but that's another obstacle, drugs, crack cocaine. Marijuana first and then what else, crack and whatever you have, and that's really hurting our race of people. Not only the black male, it's affecting the black females too, but most so the male.

We seem to get the idea at an early age now if the drugs why go to school if I can get out here and make $400 or $500 a day or more. I don't need to go to school. That's quick money. Yes, but it's not going to last long. And then soon or later if something goes wrong that young man is going to get killed or he's going to, yeah. He's going to get killed or he's going to kill somebody and end up in prison. So there have been a, that's one big change we didn't have to worry about. I'm trying to think of something else. Oh, one other thing. We didn't have to worry about diseases such as aids and, number one is aids now. A lot of the younger people don't seem to take it seriously, and then they, with drugs being involved and I guess alcohol play a part too, but more so drugs. We're not practicing safe sex and that's bad and that's killing a lot of young blacks out too. Male and female. That's one of the big changes that I've noticed. And another change. When I was growing up, we wanted to find a decent job. Now we got a lot of young blacks that don't want to work. Males anyway. They don't want to work. They want to live off of
others. It goes back to drugs again. We didn't bring it in here now. The white man brought it in. He's found something, I hate to say it, but he's found something that's really getting rid of the males. Black males I'll say now. They use it too, but not, they're not killing each other like we are and that's the problem. Right here in Greenwood and they don't say nothing about Greenville. Every weekend somebody's getting killed, blacks. And the top man is white. They're making the money. You got some foreigners dealing it too, but getting it here. They can't stop it. They may be able to, but I don't think they can. They don't want to stop it, cause too much, there's a lot of money involved. I hate it, but then I got some first cousins, not because they're on it, I got several first cousins on it right now. A lot of friends. I got one cousin overdosed. Well, he got some bad stuff about eight years ago, took him out. Those are just a few of the things that I come up with.

PAUL ORTIZ: Mr. Rose, if you were speaking before an audience of young black children and were sharing some of the most important experiences of your life that you thought would teach them what would be those experiences that you would share. What would you tell them?

RICHARD ROSE: Number one, I would tell them, number one, respect their parents, stick by their moral values, get a good
education, stay away from drugs, and try to help the younger generation, and then fight for equal opportunities, and then be ready to help your neighbors. That's important. Those are things that I would speak to them on. Yeah. Like when my people coming up, the neighbors like they say back then, they love each other and they helped each other. Now we don't do that. Your neighbors can see somebody ripping you off and they didn't see anything when you ask them, and that's bad. Back then, well, when I first came here, I could walk out, we did in fact went home one Thanksgiving holiday. I forgot to lock the back door and the wind, evidently the wind got real strong and blew the door wide open. We came back and went in the front door and I checked and looked and the back door standing wide open. I looked around and nothing was missing. Now you got to put bars and everything on your doors, because they going to break in and rip you off. Quick money. It goes back to drugs. I hate to keep saying it, but they will steal from you and sell your valuables for little or nothing and get a quick high for what? Ten or fifteen minutes. It's just their bag. The one time, we pretty lucky on campus. We hadn't had, I haven't had a break-in. Cause if anyone wanted to come in my house now all they had to do was take a pen knife or a stick and hit this door, this glass. So much of it and reach in and come on in. I been trying to get them to change that, but so far we've been pretty lucky. They have had some break-ins on campus, but I think they knew who did this and those persons are not around here
anymore. They've had quite a few in Itta Bena. And there's a road that goes down to Itta Bena that has what, one, two, three, three new houses. A good friend of mine just recently built a house, about two years ago, he's been there and he's been broken into about three times, but they watch and they know when there's when no one's home and they go in. Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW