Interview with H. J. Williams

August 8, 1995

Transcript of an Interview about Life in the Jim Crow South

Yazoo City (Miss.)

Interviewer: Mausiki S. Scales
ID: btvct04042
Interview Number: 520

SUGGESTED CITATION


Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South

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

INTERVIEW WITH:
H. J. WILLIAMS

AUGUST 8, 1995

YAZOO CITY, MISSISSIPPI

INTERVIEWED BY:
MAUSIKI SCALES
BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW:

H. J. WILLIAMS: ... there have been progress made up until this time there have been some progress made with the black communities and the Negro race.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So were you born here?


MAUSIKI SCALES: Could you describe how it was growing up in Yazoo City.

H. J. WILLIAMS: I wasn't growing up in Yazoo City. I was in Yazoo County.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yazoo County?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah. That's where I was born at. Yeah, I can describe it because back in those days in 1910 why it was prejudiced and it wadn't complete slavery, but it wasn't much different then. You had to be ( ) by the white man. Whatever it was. He was the boss of everything at that time.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What did your family do for a living?
H. J. WILLIAMS: Farm.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Farmers?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yep. We farmed. My daddy would rent land. Had his own team. He worked on the fourth and that's the way, if you made three bales of cotton, four bales of cotton the man get one. You get the three. That is the fourth. So that is the way my daddy worked. We were living on the farm out there in the country and that's the way my daddy worked and that's the way a whole lot of them with the biggest of the black people worked. Some of them worked on sharecroppers. That's right. Half and Half.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Could you describe how that worked? Sharecropping?

H. J. WILLIAMS: The sharecroppers? They didn't get no more than the man give 'em. That's the way the sharecroppers went. That's right. If they made ten bales of cotton and the people only give them two, if he want to give him two he give him two. If he wanted to give him one, he got one and some didn't get nothing. That's the way it went at that time?

MAUSIKI SCALES: That's the way your folk lived?
H. J. WILLIAMS: No. I'm saying sharecroppers.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Oh, share. Oh, I'm sorry.

H. J. WILLIAMS: That's the way it went at that time, brother, back in those days. And that continued like that up until I'd say the '40s. It made a little change in the '40s after President Roosevelt come into possession. In 1933 we were working for fifty cents a day. 1933. That was.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What were you doing?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Chopping cotton. Plowing a mule. And that's what they paid. That was the wages they was paying. Fifty cents a day at that time in the '30s. And up in the '40s, and like I said after President Roosevelt come in power it was a little change made. They were finally moved up to a $1 a day.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you go to school while you were growing up on the farm?


MAUSIKI SCALES: How long was the school session?
H. J. WILLIAMS: I went to school. I went as high as 8th grade. I didn't complete the 8th grade, but I went to 8th grade when I was going to school. That's as high as I went. As I might have said because of my daddy, we were living on the farm then and we had a bad year and my daddy wasn't able to buy me school books and that's when I dropped out of school. Didn't go no further. I went high as 8th grade. That's as far as I could go. When I was in the 8th grade, I was studying in the books with some of the other children at school what was able to have books and that's where I was studying.

MAUSIKI SCALES: And how long was the school session?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Oh, the school session was, let's see, due to that time the school session, let's see. I think 10th grade, I believe, is as high was we went at that time back in them times.

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


MAUSIKI SCALES: What type of things did you learn in school?
H. J. WILLIAMS: What type did I learn in school? Well, far as jobs and so on like that I didn't learn nothing about jobs or nothing like that at school cause we was on the farm. In other words, they wadn't teaching at that time, they weren't teaching mechanical work, you know, in the public schools. They wadn't teaching that at that time out there. So they'd teach us about agriculture and so on like that, what we was doing, so on and like that. They'd teach us that. So that's as far as we could go at that time what they was teaching. But far as mechanical work and so on like that they wadn't teaching nothing like that at that time.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Were your parents educated people?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Nope. They wadn't. Neither one.

MAUSIKI SCALES: How about your grandparents? Were they?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, the grandparents could read and write. That's as far as I know. I can draw on that.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did they ever talk about their experiences when they were coming along?
H. J. WILLIAMS: Oh yeah. They talked about their experiences because some of the grandparents was under slavery. Yeah. They was under slavery when they was coming along at that time. Some of 'em.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you remember the old stories?

H. J. WILLIAMS: No, I don't think I can recollect the stories what was in the past at that time. I don't think I can remember. I've heard them so often speak about them old time task masters that if they went to pray or praise God, they'd have to put their head in a barrel.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Put their head in a what?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Head. In a barrel where the boss man couldn't hear 'em. Now I remember those stories what the old people used to tell. Yeah, they'd have to cover their head up. Had a barrel. They'd go to that barrel, they'd go to that barrel and lean over and put their head down in there to pray. I've heard those stories.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So they weren't allowed to

H. J. WILLIAMS: They weren't allowed to praise God or say a
prayer. I've heard them stories from the older people, you know. The grandparents and so on. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you remember other stories?

H. J. WILLIAMS: No. I can't bring no more I don't to think to recollection. I don't think I can do that. Nope.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When you were growing up here did the blacks own their own businesses?

H. J. WILLIAMS: No. No black business when I was growing up here. None whatever. Nothing but white was in business at that time when I was growing up here 85 years ago. Nothing but white business.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Were there places that you couldn't go into because they...

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yes sir. Lots of places we couldn't go into and those what we could go into like a cafe or a drug store or something like that the white would be on that side and the black on the other side, the right side. That's the way it was here at that time. Absolutely. And there was some you couldn't go in at all. That's right. And in the bus stations you couldn't drink
out of the water fountains what a white man dranked out of. You couldn't go to that fountain and get a drink of water. In other words if you get on the bus to go, I'll say Memphis and Chicago, or any place, okay. You'd go about middle ways of that bus and take your seat. And, traveling on as many white, if whites get on there, okay, you'd have to continue moving back to the back. Moving back, and back, and back until you get to the last seat and have to get behind this if any more whites got on there. That's the way it was then.

MAUSIKI SCALES: They had room behind the last seat?

H. J. WILLIAMS: What? No, just crowd you back up in the back. That's right. Crowd you back up in the back and you'd have to stand up. You didn't have no seat as long as some white got on there that's the way you were. And it was like that I'd say it was in the armed forces in '43, that's when I went to the army and we had trouble right there in Yazoo City concerning us riding the bus. That's right. Concern of that. They put some colored boys off in Jackson, Mississippi. I come here on a furlough and they put some black boys off the bus because they wouldn't get back and they had us pushed in there like cows and they couldn't get back no further and they put 'em off the bus. That's right. That was the way it was. That was in 1943. Sure was.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Blacks own cars here?

H. J. WILLIAMS: At that time? A few. A few. A very few owned cars at that time in the '40s. A few.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When did you first realize that the way blacks and whites were treated was different?

H. J. WILLIAMS: When I first realized that? Well, I been knowing that ( ) all my days. I realize that all my days when I was a small boy coming up I'd say around 10 or 12 years, you know, I knowed the difference, you know, in the treatments of human beings. I knowed the treatment at that time, but we wadn't allowed to say anything. That's right. We wadn't allowed to say anything. I remember back there in those days and new to that time if you was driving a horse to a buggy, okay, and white ladies was in a buggy, you couldn't pull around them and go in the front of them. Because my sisters did it and the man's place what we was living on was Tom Preseton and his daughter was coming back from Yazoo City, coming back out in the country where we lived. And my sisters was in a buggy and they pulled around. They went home and told their daddy that the Williams girls pulled by them and dusted them up. And they daddy got on his horse and come over there and told my daddy that Miss Letty and Miss Eva said your girls pulled around them and dusted them up. Don't let that
happen no more. That's right. That's just the way it was in those days. Absolutely. That is around about '30, '32, 1932. That's right. So that's the way things was at that time. I realize that, you know, it is nothing but Jim Crow, you know. But years, man, when I was a small boy, but we couldn't say nothing because if you did the first things they'd holler about was a lynching or whipping up a black person. And then just like you see today about the Ku Klux Klan person, it was the same thing at that time. The same identical thing at that time.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did they have lynchings down here that you recall?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Oh yeah, they had some lynchings. Yeah. Sure. I can take you to place right on there on Shorty Creek where they lynched a man. That's right. Hung him to a limb. Sure did. Oh yeah. That's right. There was lynching back then in those days.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Why did they hang him?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Huh?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Why did they hang him?
H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, they claim that he was a friend to a white lady. That's what they claim. Now whether it was true or not, I don't know and I haven't heard anybody else say they knewed, but that's what they claimed and they lynched him. That's right. Well, due to the fact as I was coming up, back in those days I remember this. I remember when, you know, they had a certain law when you get a certain age you got to pay poll tax. You might not ever heard of poll tax, but you had to pay poll tax when you get a man. Not a lady, a man, when they get a certain age, you'd have to pay poll tax. Okay. That was in '33. So the tax collector come by right here in Benton, Mississippi and they assessed me and my brother for poll tax. My brother didn't have the money. My daddy didn't have it. I didn't have the money. Okay. And the tax assessor he take my, it wadn't but $9 he take my brother's bird dog for to pay his taxes. That's right. Take the dog from him. He just, down here was just like that at that time. And I didn't have the money. I caught a freight train right down there in Yazoo City and I stayed away from here seven months. If I didn't have the money, then they was going to put me on the county farm out there and I didn't have the money. I had to stay away from here seven months. Sure did.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Why seven months?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Huh?
MAUSIKI SCALES: Why seven months?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, due to the seven months, you see, they had done abolished that law about poll tax. They done abolished that law about poll tax and that's when I could come back home.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So if you stayed here what was going to happen to you?

H. J. WILLIAMS: They was going to put me on the county farm. In order for me to collect that $7 I had to work it out. It's just that bad. That's the way it went. Sure did. That's the way it went.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Where did you go for those seven months?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Moorehead, Mississippi. That's where I went. Caught a freight train. Went up there. Changed my name. Went up there. changed my name. I went under the name of Will Davis up there. Sure did. Me and another guy, Eddy Shields. He's dead now. They was going to do him the same way and sure enough he stayed up there a couple of months and he got an inkling to come home. I said you going to the county farm if you go back. He said, well I got to go. He grabbed a freight train and come
back here and when he stepped off of that freight down there to the depot they grabbed him. Put him out there on the county farm. Sure did. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When you went up to Moorehead did you work up there?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah. I worked in the name of Will Davis. Uh huh. Well, in those days it wasn't nothing to do but pick cotton or something like that. Now late up in the year like that it wasn't too much of cotton to pick. That's right. That's the way it was.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did many others take off like that?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, I don't think too many of them did, but some of them did and some of them I don't think never returned back here. That's the way Mississippi was.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was that rough work at the farm, the county farm?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah. You was a prisoner. That's a prison. When they put you on the county farm. Yes sir. So, we have come a long ways, but we still got a long ways to go. That's right.
Now, still got a long ways to go and what brought us this far, well, God is in the plan. He's in the plan of all of it. I put that first. God is in the plan. But what brought us this far, other wise, second I'll say brought us this far was the NAACP. That's right. To help us get to where we is today. Now I'm a living witness to that. Why? I left Chicago in May 1969. They started to boycotting here on the 5th and I left and got here on the 10th and I went up to the gym, up on the hill, up to the gym and joined that boycott. Rudy Shields, myself, and George Collins. We was the leader of that boycott and we boycotted here 18 solid months. When I come back here in May of 1969 wadn't no black person in no store on a cash register. Wadn't none working in them stores. Wadn't no black polices in the police department. There wadn't no black in the fire department. There wadn't no black there. That's 1969. As I fore said, we boycotted here 18 solid months. A year and a half. And due to that time we put 26 business stores out of circulation with the boycott.

MAUSIKI SCALES: That started in '69.

H. J. WILLIAMS: That's right. That's exactly right. It started in '69 and due to the fact, that's how many stores we put out of business. Absolutely. So, as I said, the civil rights is what brought us as far as we are today.
MAUSIKI SCALES: How did your family make it through the depression?

H. J. WILLIAMS: The depression?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yeah.

H. J. WILLIAMS: You talking about what now, back in the '30s? '29 and back in there?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yes sir.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, we made it through by the help of God. That's all. That's all that brought us through by the help of God because they wasn't paying nothing for wages, no money. There wasn't no work unless it was farming and after that why as I fore said, Roosevelt took over, taken over. Okay. The white man in the south, we was just talking about that a few minutes ago, he got rid of the labor out there on the farms. You couldn't rent no land from them. They got the white faced cows and fenced off the land out there and put white faced cows in that pasture, you see, and the black people had to move from out there. And when they moved from out there that's what happened. They had to come to the cities or had to come somewhere and there wasn't but few jobs in the city and that's what made it so bad and kept the wages down
so low cause there's so many people here. That's what kept it so low. And that man put them white faced cows out there and then the next step after he did that he went in the machinery business and got three or four tractors and hired him three or four tractor drivers and while they were working, when we had the team out there in the field, he was working probably 100 acres of land, he's two or three thousand acres with them three tractor drivers.
That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So the tractor replaced blacks.


MAUSIKI SCALES: Did a lot of blacks go north?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Some did. Yeah. They went north. But it was where they could go because just like them two houses over there. He told them they couldn't use 'em no more, they wadin't going to rent them no more land. That white man took matches and set them houses afire and burned them down out there on the farm. Sure did. Burned them down. That's what that white man did. Absolutely.

MAUSIKI SCALES: And that's where the blacks were living.
H. J. WILLIAMS: That's where the blacks were living and they had to go, because wasn't going to rent them no more land. No where for them to stay, they had to go. That's what happened back then in those days. Sure did.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Those blacks that went north, when they came back were they looked at differently?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, yeah. They was looked at different. Even now, you take the armed forces, a lot of them first said when I went to the army that there wasn't no discrimination in the army, but it is. It's just as much discrimination in the army as it is right here.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What did you experience?

H. J. WILLIAMS: With the black and the white. That's right, because a white is a white regardless of where he go and he's not going to turn from his own race of people. He's not going to do it. Absolutely. They going to stick together. Yeah, they's looked at different. The first thing a peckerwood would holler, I call them peckerwood, the first thing they'd holler if a black man went north and come back down here, aw, that nigger. He thinks he's a smart Negro. He been to Chicago. He been to New York or
so on like that. He figure he a smart nigger. Yeah, they'll say that. Sure would. Absolutely.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did that ever cause any problems?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, yes it have caused some problems. It have caused some problems and they would pick at a person because he had, you know, they thought he, you know, had learned some things pertaining to equal standards and so on like that. And yeah, they'd pick at him. Sure would.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What was the relationship of the police and the black citizens?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, we got some blacks on the police force now. We put blacks on there when we boycotted. We put the blacks in every position they in now. We put them in there when we was boycotting. They said they was not.

MAUSIKI SCALES: How about before the boycott?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Before the boycott? Didn't have no black police.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Now how did the white police treat the
blacks?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Treat the blacks?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yes sir.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, you can understand that yourself and anybody else. They treated them just like they wanted to. That's right. They was brutish. They was brutish. But you know they passed a law about this brutish that was going on that go for the black as well as it well as it do for the white. But, (interruption)

MAUSIKI SCALES: Okay. When blacks got sick what would they do? Did they have a hospital here?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was a hospital here. It was a hospital back there in that time. They always had a hospital. There used to be a colored hospital here. Dr. Militess. Jerry Hardison owned that hospital. But you still got a colored hospital here and a white hospital too as far as they are concerned.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Who delivered the babies?
H. J. WILLIAMS: The doctors and you know back in those times they had what they call them ladies? Mid-wives. Back in that time before, well, when I was born there was just mid-wives but in the later years the Afro and American hospital that was colored. That was colored.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Who taught the mid-wives all of that information?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Miss Whitaker can you answer that? Who taught the mid-wives?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Older women.

H. J. WILLIAMS: It must have been. Had to be.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did people use plants and herbs to help them when they were sick too?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yes, yes, they did, and I tell you, the older people they mostly used to rely on the herbs, uh huh, and the herbs. They mostly would rely on that more so than they would a doctor. Sure did. The older people.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you remember any of those things that
they would do?

H. J. WILLIAMS: The herbs? You talking about the herbs?

MAUSIKI SCALES: The plants?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah, the plants. Yeah, I remember some of them. Ginseng. Ginseng was one of them and I have knowed them for typhoid and malaria fever I have knowed them to gather peach tree leaves and bath the kids, you know, and boil 'em. And bath the kids in that water. Peach tree leaves. I remember that. So, they had a lot of, you know, ideas about the herbs as far as that goes. And then some of them home remedies was good. They was good. Really was. They were good.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did your family plant by the signs, the almanac?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah, I goes by that today.

(interruption)

MAUSIKI SCALES: You were saying about the signs?
H. J. WILLIAMS:  Huh?

MAUSIKI SCALES:  Planted by the signs.

H. J. WILLIAMS:  Yeah, I plants by the sign.  Yes I do.

MAUSIKI SCALES:  Did your parents and grandparents use those too?

H. J. WILLIAMS:  They used signs too.  Yeah.

MAUSIKI SCALES:  So how did that work?

H. J. WILLIAMS:  Well, it works fine.  Say for an instance.  You see those vines there growing up on them sticks.  Now planting those, if you plant them on a full moon they not going to get much higher than that.  But now if you plant them on the new moon them things will go to the top of them trees.  Sure will.  Willie, will you hand me that almanac in there?  Laying in there.

MAUSIKI SCALES:  So the new moon, that's the time to plant things like that.

H. J. WILLIAMS:  Uh huh.  I'm going to show you if she give me that envelope.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Does that hold true for things that grow...

H. J. WILLIAMS: That's the whole truth. That's the whole truth.

MAUSIKI SCALES: How about the things that grow under the ground?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Under the ground? Dark moon. Plant them on dark moon, cause if you plant them on too light a moon like I said they'll go to the top of the trees. That's right. Okay. I'm going to show you what I'm talking about if she'll get me that almanac. Yes sir. That's what we go by. There's a heap of people say it ain't no such a sign. You plant them when they get the ground ready, but it is a mistake. It strictly is a mistake. Sure is. Okay, this is August. First quarter, you see that. First quarter, the 3rd and the 10th. That's when the moon change and it's full moon. That's when I plant something, full moon. Okay what is that. The 19th, the 1st and the 16th?

MAUSIKI SCALES: The 10th. Is that a full moon?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Uh huh.
MAUSIKI SCALES: The 10th, 1 and 15.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Okay.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So that's the time you plant?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Full moon. If you don't want your plants to grow too tall, you can plant it on that full moon. Now let's see. The 10th, that's a Thursday. See there. Now the sign there that's the water sign. You plant then. Okay.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you plant in the morning or?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Anytime morning or evening.

MAUSIKI SCALES: That day.

H. J. WILLIAMS: That day or that evening. But now let's see. That's the young moon, new moon. What is that the 26th and the 11th?


H. J. WILLIAMS: 25th. Okay now if you plant that day, new moons, that's what I tell you. Whatever you plant, if it's vine
or a stalk of corn or if it's a stalk of cotton it's going to grow up as high as it can go and ain't going to have no fruit on it.

MAUSIKI SCALES: No fruit?

H. J. WILLIAMS: No fruit. Ain't going to have nothing on it. It's nothing but a stalk. That's all. If you plant, if it have a ear of corn on it it's going to be way up three at the top where it tassels. See, I done experienced all of that and it's really true. But now if you plant on those days what I said, now this is a good sign here. If you plant anything on if you get them signs there, okay. That's a fish ain't it?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yeah.

H. J. WILLIAMS: That's a good sign. You ain't going to be bothered with two many inspects you plant on that fish day. That's something like a ( ) sign now. That's a good day to plant on. Now let's see when the flower day is. At a balance sign, there is a good sign to plant.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Oh the scales.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah, the planters. Yeah, that's a good sign to plant on, but that one right there at the top, that lady
with the bouquet in her hand?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Uh huh.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Don't plant nothing that day, nothing, because if you do you ain't be successful. You ain't going to get no yield. No yield whatever.

(interruption)

MAUSIKI SCALES: I've heard people say something about bug day? What day is that?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Bug day. Bug day. Yeah, I just through spraying my garden this morning. That's where I was when ya'll come in. I was spraying my garden for them bugs out there. Now that insect, the bugs it ain't no way in the world you can keep them away unless you do continue to use some kind of chemical. That's the onliest way you can keep them away.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Right. I think that they were talking about one of these being a bug.

is a bug. That's right. Insects is bugs. That's just a sign, you see. Okay. Let's go back here. (turning pages)

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did people use the almanac for things other than the garden too?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah, sometime they do. Yeah. Sometime they do. Okay. See there. Now all them I showed you over here is the same thing. You see in this line here? That's the same pattern. Now those are the twins. That's a good day to plant. This is a lion I think it is. Yeah. That's a good day to plant on.

MAUSIKI SCALES: I think that's a lamb.

H. J. WILLIAMS: A lamb

MAUSIKI SCALES: Like Aires.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah, that's a good day to plant on. Okay, the bull if alright, but now.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What about that one?

H. J. WILLIAMS: That one there? That's a crab. That's
alright. Is that a crab or a scorpion?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Crab.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Crab. That's a scorpion. That's a good day to plant on. Okay. Now that shows you where the sign bes and the blood be in human being. Now you see that Ram, it's in his head. Okay. That cow there it's in his neck. The twins it's in his shoulder. That's where the blood be and that's the way the earth is run. The balance is right in his side. That's balance sign. That's a good sign to plant on. But now when you see this here, that lady pointing at the water, don't plant nothing. And you see that lady with that flower right there don't plant nothing because you ain't going to get no yield from it. Sure ain't.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What about this goat?

H. J. WILLIAMS: The goat? The goat is alright. The blood is in the leg. Well, that's underground crops, you know. Potatoes, and so on like that. Underground. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: And the fish?

H. J. WILLIAMS: The fish? That's same thing. See it says on the feet, on the ground. Uh huh. Yeah, I have planted by this
every since I been large enough to raise a garden. ( )

(interruption)

MAUSIKI SCALES: As long as you can remember you been using that?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Oh yeah, uh huh. I been going by that almanac when I got old enough to read. I been going with it, because my daddy believed in it, my mother believed in it, and I been going by it every since when it come to planting season. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Since I been here in the Delta I've heard stories about how people use an ax when there is a storm.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Where there's a storm?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yes sir. Put an ax in the ground or something like that.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Oh yeah. I have heard them fairy tales, but knowing whether it's true or not I never, you know, practiced none of that. I never practiced none of that. Might be true.
MAUSIKI SCALES: How did they do that?

H. J. WILLIAMS: I don't know. I haven't heard too many comments about that. No, I haven't. Sure haven't.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was there any rough storms or something?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Oh yeah. It was some rough storms come through here years ago. Have tore up a whole lot, years ago. Some rough storms just as they is now. Uh huh.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you remember any of those?

H. J. WILLIAMS: The last storm come through here in, let's see. We were living out there in the country that time. I can't predict the year just exact, but it was back there due to the thirties or right about in the forties the year because it blew our church off the blocks right there one year. That was in the forties.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When you were growing up, was church mandatory for you. Did you have to go to church?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Oh yeah. Yeah. We had to go to church.
When we were kids, we had to go to church cause that daddy of mine he was going to get his book and he's going to say come on, let's go, and we were going to follow behind him. Had to go. That's right. We were raised up in the church. I was raised up in the Baptist church and the Methodist church too.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Okay. And do you remember revivals and thanksgivings?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yes sir. Sure I remember the revivals. They had revivals every year. They mostly had revival in the fall of the year. Uh huh. Every fall they'd have revival. Of course, now they have, it's anytime. They have it in the spring and then have another one in the fall. They have it all the time now, but we ( ) only have revival from church to church due to the fact in the fall.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Have things changed?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Have things changed since then?

MAUSIKI SCALES: With the church?

H. J. WILLIAMS: With the church?
MAUSIKI SCALES: Was it different then?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Considerably. Yeah, they have changed considerably.

MAUSIKI SCALES: How is that?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Because the churches is no more spiritually revived. Is no more spiritually revived no more, because the way they hold church affairs now in the regards of man. The regards of men. They not holding church pertaining to the way the Bible told them to hold churches. That's right. It's not going off of God, man is only speaking from his interpretation. You follow me.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yes sir.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Alright. Of course, you go to church some time, don't you?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yes sir.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Alright. That's it. That's the way the churches is automatically is run today. It's off of man theory. Where you see man theory is a theory of his own. It is not theory of God's word.
MAUSIKI SCALES: People would get the spirit back then.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yes they did. They really did. Absolutely, because in those days people was more solemn. They was more interested in the word of God more so than it is today. At that time. That's right. But you know the Bible say if it be false prophets out there and we got a lot of them today. We got false prophets. That's right. They wanted to show the congregation the place where there is God and they is not God, but the Bible said be aware of them. Don't go to them places. That's right. They be in secret closets. That's what the book says and that's what we's experiencing today. That's what we's experiencing today.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Do you remember any of the requirements from way back then that inspired you or some of the verses that helped you get through.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, only the instructions from the ministers I was under at that time due to that time. I can't point directly to the passage of scripture, but I believed in the Gospel, what he was preaching when I confessed. And that's about
as far as I can go at this time. I believed in it and I confessed because of what the preacher was saying. I had confidence in him and I trusted him, what he was saying. And some of what he was saying, repent ye for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. I can remember that very well. Uh huh. I think that was John talking at that time. I believe in God and I believed in that minister and I confessed. Got on my knees and prayed for forgiveness of my sins and I knewed that it did happen and I'm well satisfied today over it.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did you get baptized?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yes sir. Yes sir. I was baptized. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was it an outside service?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah, I was baptized in a creek. Holy water. That's where they baptized at and then went to the church and was fellowshiped in the temple.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Okay. Did a lot of people come?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Uh huh. Lot of people come to see me get baptized. Sure did.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Is there a difference between the way ministers were called by the spirit then and today how ministers become ministers.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, yes in a way it is. The way ministers come in today and the way it was at that time. Yes. I tell you, I'm going this way with this. By the appearance of preachers back in them times, them day and times, you could look at a preacher. He had a different mark on his face on the expressions in what the preachers have today. That's right. And you could most tell one if you seen him walking down the street anyplace, come to your house. You could see a mark I don't know, of identification I'll say. It was a mark of identification that he was a person, you know, a little different from the average person. That's right. From that mark. Do you remember that Miss Willie? What I'm saying, about preachers?

MISS WILLIE: Yeah. Oh yeah.

H. J. WILLIAMS: At that time. That's right. It was just that much difference, but now at this day the efforts of these preachers as pastors in churches now they just look alike some other man. That's right. That's the way they conduct themselves. Yes sir.
MAUSIKI SCALES: In those times what did it mean to be a man, what was manhood?

H. J. WILLIAMS: What did it mean to be a man?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yes sir.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, I tell you brother, it didn't mean too much to the black race because he didn't have no power to express his self and no position. That's right. It didn't mean nothing in a way to be a man. You was just a person had done grewed up of age and that was it. Just had grewed up of age and that was it. You couldn't express yourself. You couldn't say no more than that man allow you to say. That's the way it was. Absolutely. And I remember back there in those times, when a white boy got 16 years old the boss man would tell the labor or whoever was on that farm or on that place whatever they call him, say now my son is coming 16 years old or my daughter is 16 years old. It's time for ya'll to start saying Miss So and So, Mr. So and So. That's what the boss man did say. The white man would tell the black people and they wadn't but 16 years old and you'd have to be saying Miss So and So and Mr. So and So and So.

MAUSIKI SCALES: And you would be a lot older than them?
H. J. WILLIAMS: Yes sir. You would be a grown man 25 or 30 years old or maybe 50 years old, but you had to say it. And what they used to the black people then was uncle and auntie. That's what they would call the black. Uncle So and So and So and Aunt So and So and So. Uh huh. That's right. In those days. Yeah, I remember that.

MAUSIKI SCALES: How did you feel about having to do that?

H. J. WILLIAMS: You would feel bad, very bad, but it wasn't nothing you could do about it, because if you said anything to them the first thing they were going to do in those days was going to get a mob crowd and come beat that Negro up. That's right. Beat that Negro up or kill him or hang him. He's a smart Negro. That's what they was going to say. Uh huh. Absolutely. Yeah, I remember those days. Sure do.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Because times were rough like that did people ever sneak away at night to go north or what?

H. J. WILLIAMS: No. No. No. Not very much. Not very much. It's just like I fore said, brother, civil rights is what brought us this far and God. You know God was the head of all of it because he give human beings five senses and the knowledge to organize the civil rights platform and that's what brought us this
far is God and the civil rights.

MISS WILLIE: They enlarged the school once for the children too.

H. J. WILLIAMS: I know that, but that was on account of civil rights, Willie.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What did you do for entertainment?

H. J. WILLIAMS: There wasn't none. Wadn't no entertainments at that time. Back in those days in the '30s, the '20s and the '30s, wadn't no entertainment then. Nothing but the church house and back home. That's all. Church house and back home. Absolutely. We'd come to town probably on a weekend, on a Saturday. We drove a mule, horses and wagons or buggies at that time. That's the way we was traveling. We was about 12 miles out in the country and we'd drive them 12 miles with a horses and wagons to come to town on a Saturday. Sometimes. Didn't come every Saturday. That's right. Now that was our transportation at that time.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Now what did you all do for holidays?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Holidays? We didn't know nothing 'bout no holidays in them days back there in them times. Something like
Christmas day or something like that, we'd, you know, prepare for Christmas Day but that was all.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Could you tell me about the courting practices? When you were interested in the young ladies, how would you go about?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Go about courting? On a Sunday, on a Sunday we would walk to the girls's house. 9:00 o'clock it was time for to get your hat and go back to your house. That's right. She can tell you that. Them older people they was going to see to you doing that. They would call them daughters and tell them so and so and so. It's 9:00 o'clock. That girl is going to pass you your hat. You had to go. That's the way it was at that time. But it was more communication at that time than it is now. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Would blacks help other blacks out?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah. Uh huh. The best they could if they had, you know, anything that was worth anything to help them out with they would. But at that time we had some blacks just like it is today. Blacks is not going to communicate and stick together. They won't do it. They did us the same way when we was out there boycotting them 18 months. They put us out of the gym up here.
The NAACP, we couldn't hold a meeting up there in the gym and that's when blacks put us out there because the father put us out and Andrew and Payden and so many more went to Yazoo and saw us up there because the demands, there was a whole lot of demands what we did get, what we had done issued to them we didn't get all the demands what we was applying for us and they put us out of that gym and we had to go 10 miles out of town to hold a NAACP meeting. That's right. sure did. And that's the way they did. And some of them we couldn't get blacks to even take out a membership with the NAACP.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Why?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Huh?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Why is that?

H. J. WILLIAMS: No communication. No communication. Didn't care nothing about it.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Were they afraid?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Uh huh. Looking towards that white man. That's right. What that white man says, no. No, they weren't scared. They weren't scared. Now if I wadn't afraid why is it
you be afraid. See what I'm talking about. In a sense that's the way today.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Did blacks ever have to defend themselves?

H. J. WILLIAMS: We had to do it. When they boycotted, we had to do it. We had a trap door up here at the gym. When the Jim Crows got so thick around that place, we'd have to go down under the floor. Of course, we had guns and stuff all around in there. They didn't never shoot in there. Didn't never break in there. Nothing was concerned. But we'd have to go down under the floor to protect ourselves. We had a trap door. Under the house. That's right. After, but we just had some Uncle Toms. There's going to be some Uncle Toms, brother. Going to be some Uncle Toms as long as the world exists. It's going to be some Uncle Toms and we got a bunch of them here. Right here. They won't follow. They won't follow. They won't communicate. That's right. Whatever that white man tell 'em that's what they believe. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Who were the local black leaders in Yazoo?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Myself, George Collins, Rudy Shields, Anna, two or three more. Luther Trim. He was with us, but not too many was the leaders because we walked these streets night and day to
see that didn't no blacks and nobody go in those stores to trade with them. That's what put them out of business. But just like ( ) saying some of them were scared. And I've told so many why should you be afraid when you's fighting for your own rights. Why should you be afraid. I just can't see that. I told them then. I said Martin Luther King. Yeah, he lose he life. No he died. He didn't lose his life. Uh uh, because he's fighting for what's right and anything what is right a person don't lose. Didn't lose. He lose from the existence of man staying on earth, but he still didn't lose his life. That's right. And that's you didn't get a heap of people to see. That's right. I don't know. I been with that organization 25 years. I'm going to stay with it until I die. The NAACP. Chairman of Political Action for Yazoo County. That was my job.

MAUSIKI SCALES: When did the NAACP come here?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Well, it has been here for years, back there in the '30s as far as that's concerned, but it was under the government. Yes, there's a lot of them had to leave here when they did come to the light and the white man found out that they, the NAACP organization had originated here in Yazoo City. It's a lot of them. This guy you see right over there on 5th Street now. He had to leave. He had his own business. He had a store. Gravel trucks and all of that and he had to leave and go to
Chicago. Jasper Mann. He was another one. He had to leave and quite a few of them had to skip town.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What type of pressure would be put on them?

H. J. WILLIAMS: They'd beat 'em up as far as that's concerned, and Boyd killed some of them. That is all sort of a Ku Klux Klan pursuit. That's right. Yeah, some of them had to leave here, but you know you might have read about Emmett Teele getting killed up here in wadn't it Mississippi? Yeah. But I was here due to that time. That was in '55 and that's when I left here, in '55.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Well, how did people react to the killing?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Who, the black?

MAUSIKI SCALES: Yes.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Just like they act now. That's the reason I left here. I was working at the Redi-Mix plant up there, up north here, and when that happened I packed up by clothes and went to Chicago.
MAUSIKI SCALES: Was that the reason why you left?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Uh huh. That's right. That's right. I couldn't stay no more. I left and went to Chicago and I stayed up there 14 years. I just been back here 25 years. I come back here in '69, in May 1969.

MAUSIKI SCALES: Was life different when you went to in Chicago?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was different, 'course it's different 'cause Chicago is Jim Crow too. Yes sir. It's Jim Crow, but it's in a different form, you see. It's a different form. But it's different. They stabbing you in your back alright enough. All the same time they stabbing you in your back up there, but it's with a grin on their face.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What did you do up there?

H. J. WILLIAMS: Oh, I was a spot welder. I worked in a, the first job I had was in a lavatory. Griffin's Lavatory. Mixed chemicals in the lavatory. I stayed in there awhile and the next job I got was a welder. A spot welder. I did that for 8 years. And a few years up there, three or four years I worked for myself. I bought me a moving van and that's what I did moved people.
MAUSIKI SCALES: What type of discrimination did you run into in Chicago? Like for example?

H. J. WILLIAMS: For example? It's like I said. It is a little different in Chicago than it is here. In Chicago for discrimination they wouldn't come out here in the bold and talking about hanging Negroes and beating them up and so on like that. But now you could still tell it was a disadvantage because they would smile in your face, but if you turned your back they were stabbing you in the back right on. That's right. That was the different. No. It was yes and no and all that kind of stuff, but that means a lot in one sense and in another sense it don't mean nothing. That's right. It don't mean nothing in one sense, because after all if any way he can take the advantage of a black man they going to do it, in Chicago and anywhere else. If he white. They going to do it. So that was the difference in the northern cities. It's just like I fore said a few minutes ago that a black man is a black man regardless of where he go. It's just like that. Yes sir. It's just like that. That's all. It's just like that. And it's going to be. It's going to be. Of course it might be a change, won't make much difference, but it's going to be a long time fore they change the ( ) brother. It's going to be a long time, because it's just like, now you take like things is going now.
(interruption)

H. J. WILLIAMS: Now, what was the question?

MAUSIKI SCALES: We were talking about Chicago and how it was up there.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Yes, I been in Chicago and I been in Tennessee. I been Virginia. All them places up there.

MAUSIKI SCALES: How was discrimination in the army?

H. J. WILLIAMS: In a way, it's just like Chicago. It's just like that in Chicago. It's the same thing. It ain't no different. If you's a black man regardless of what you go army or what not, army or navy or what not. You's a black man. That's right. Sure is. It's discrimination every where. All over. Cause the reason I know it because I have served in it. That's right. I have served in because you taking we be coming out of Springfield, Illinois on the train and we got stopped for lunch. And they wouldn't feed the black in that place until we reported back to our captain. And the captain walked in there and say I said put the food on the table and they put the food on the table,
but it wadn't fit to eat. We was black soldiers. Wadn't fit to eat. Some of it was sour. Springfield, Illinois. That's right.

MAUSIKI SCALES: What year was that?

H. J. WILLIAMS: '44.

MAUSIKI SCALES: So the whites were served at the time.

H. J. WILLIAMS: Uh huh. They served whites but they didn't want to serve no black. That's it. Yeah, I witnessed all of that brother.

(interruption)

H. J. WILLIAMS: I done told you about everything, but if there's anything you want to ask her concerning discrimination or what not we're in the place she can tell you because we have worked together for many years. For the past 25 years and she's secretary of the NAACP of Yazoo County. She is our secretary and we went through many obstacles together with this organization. She knows all about the boycott started in '69 and we held that boycott for 18 solid months. A year and a half. She know exactly about them 26 stores we put out of circulation. She know all
about that, cause she was in it at that time. Uh huh. So she know all about, she don't know much about discrimination as I do because she's not as old as I am. But she know enough about it, but she know enough about it to tell you how discrimination is.

END OF INTERVIEW