

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

DOUGLAS L. ANDERSON

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Douglas L. Anderson and is taking place on January 15, 2009. The interviewer is D'Andra Orey.

Orey: This is D'Andra Orey, chair of the Political Science Department at Jackson State University. I am conducting an oral history with a former state legislator, African-American state legislator, in the state of Mississippi. This is an oral history project with The University of Southern Mississippi and Jackson State serving as co-depositors. At current I will record some vital information as relates to the history and background of the participant. Can you please state clearly your first and last name?

Anderson: Douglas Anderson.

Orey: Your date of birth?

Anderson: February 18, 1939.

Orey: Place of birth?

Anderson: Hinds County here in Jackson, Mississippi.

Orey: Your spouse's name?

Anderson: Josephine.

Orey: And your date and place of marriage?

Anderson: (laughs) The date and place of marriage.

Orey: Place would be sufficient.

Anderson: Yeah, in Jackson, Mississippi.

Orey: OK, your major occupation at current?

Anderson: I'm a Hinds County supervisor.

Orey: And as relates to your education, starting with grammar school, can you give us your background in terms of your education?

Anderson: Yeah, well, I attended Mary Jones School, and later I attended Walton, and then to Lanier, and then I left and went to Louisiana where I attended Dillard [University].

Orey: OK, so you did Dillard for College, Lanier for high school, Walton Elementary School.

Anderson: Yes. And grammar school at Mary Jones.

Orey: Grammar School at Mary Jones. Can you give us just in terms of some principal activities and interests that you had as a child, any hobbies growing up that you remember?

Anderson: Well, I participated in basketball and I was a fairly good checker player, and later I learned to play chess and football, and that sort of thing.

Orey: OK, now in terms of your religious affiliation, are you currently active in any church here in the Jackson area?

Anderson: The Cade Chapel [Missionary] Baptist Church.

Orey: OK. Mr. Anderson, I'd like to ask you a few questions as relates to your political career, and I'd like to go back in time, if you will, as it relates to the first years of you being in the state legislature starting with the House of Representatives. If you can just give us some idea as to one, what drove you to go into politics, particularly the state legislature at that time, and what were those experiences like in the early years? You can be as broad as you like but I would also like for you to touch on the race relation aspect of, you know, Mississippi and the state legislature during that time.

Anderson: OK. Well, I first ran for office in 1975 for the House of Representatives. And the way that I got involved was that the Grand Master, H. M. Thompson, called me on the phone, and I was teaching at Jackson State grading papers, and he suggested that I run for the legislature, that I run for House. And I didn't put much credence in that and we laughed about it, and then the next call came from my brother, Dr. Anderson. And he talked about my running for the legislature and I was saying, you know, "What is this, that people are calling me?" And then David Hickman, who is the chairman of the Mathematics Department, said for me to come down to his office. And I went down there and here he was talking about my running for the legislature for the House of Representatives. And so I finally decided that I would run but it was the deadline date for entering into the race as a Democrat, so I had little choice but to run as an independent,

and so I was one of the few who ran as an independent that year and was successful. In terms of my experiences in the legislature, of course it was very racially tensed. We, the four blacks that were in the legislature at the time, we had great difficulties in getting legislation researched and very few people would assist us in any way in terms of our gaining knowledge of what we were about, in terms of being a legislator. And when I first ran for the office, it was somewhat humorous that I ran on a platform of getting a ditch cleaned out and getting a signal light put on the—at the intersection of Bailey Avenue and Ridgeway right down from my church, not knowing that the legislature had nothing to do with that type of project. And so, but it resonated out to the community because it was a much needed signal light and the ditch there where people were flooding and whatever have you, and so I managed to use that as a platform not knowing that, as I said that the legislature had nothing to do with that kind of project. And then I also talked about placing a bridge over Bailey Avenue at the railroad track at Bailey Avenue. Here again, not knowing that we had little or nothing to do with that sort of project. So we then, my family, there were thirteen of us and at that time there were twelve of us living. And my background comes from a long line of teachers; my brother was the assistant principle of Lanier, and I had another brother to teach at Rowan and then moved to Hardy, and then I had a sister who taught at Mary Johnson. So many, many people knew the family, and my father ran a store, a grocery store here in (inaudible), so we had a lot of contact with people, so I used that as my background. My brother, Dr. Anderson, is a medical doctor and he had worked at Jackson Hinds Community Health Center and he had a lot of connections. And Dr. Aaron Shirley was very supportive of me and that sort of thing, and Alex Waites and that group of people. And so we managed to win the election by fifty-five votes, (laughs) so it was a close race.

Orey: Who were your opponents then?

Anderson: Well, I had two opponents: Hickman Johnson, Dr. Hickman Johnson, and Jobie Martin ran as a Republican, and then we had another person, Hugh Sherer(?) ran also as an independent. So we had three different opponents and a lot of name recognition was out there with Dr. Johnson being the pastor of Farish Street Church, and Jobie Martin who was a TV celebrity and whatever have you.

Orey: Now, given that both of those candidates from the major parties were African American, I'm assuming that this was a majority black district.

Anderson: Yes, it was. We had—Henry Kirksey had already fought the battle of redistricting Hinds County and so the four districts that was created—well, the three districts that was created were predominantly black.

Orey: OK. And as relates to getting legislation passed—or let's back up, in terms of introducing legislation, what drove your agenda as related to setting the agenda as a legislator, did you rely on your constituents from the community or did you understand what the community needed and you decided what types of bills you would introduce?

Anderson: Well, in the first few years of the legislature, we would basically co-sign bills, you know, that the idea was presented by some white legislator and then we would sign on to that legislation. We did have one bill that was on generic drugs that Dr. Horace Buckley presented to the legislature, but it did not get much support that year. And then the following year, some white legislators decided to author the bill and it passed. So that's what we ran into is that sometimes we would come up with the idea and it would get nowhere during that year, but then the next year the white legislators would capitalize on our idea and then they would promptly get the bill passed without much debate. And so the thing that I was most noted for was the, uh, let's see, what's the name? Oh, I can't think of it. Let me—

(brief interruption)

Orey: You had just noted, you were saying that you were most noted for—

Anderson: The Emma Marshall Fund Bill whereas an elderly lady that lived in my block came to me and she was crying and she had a balloon note that was unknown to the black community at that time, and no one had heard of a balloon note.

Orey: The house for a mortgage?

Anderson: Yeah, for a mortgage. And she had never missed a payment on her mortgage and then she got this balloon note after seven years or so where all the rest of the note was coming due. And so I took on that project and we went to Frank Blonson(?) with the radio station, and I decided that I could probably raise some money and then I was going to take my own personal money and help her and assist her with paying off her note. And to my surprise, we started this campaign out there for donations and we raised over \$10,000 which was more than enough to pay off her mortgage. And she finally—we went down on television and paid off her mortgage and she had a young boy who was living, who was wheelchair bound, and we decided to buy him a radio so that he could talk to the public about his experiences and whatever have you, and we bought a huge antenna for his house and he could get out on it, and he was very happy about it because as I said, he was wheelchair bound and could not get out and run the streets and whatever have you. Then finally we had some money left, about \$3,000 left in the fund, and a Mr. Willis Evans, who was a blind man who sent word to me that he was behind in his mortgage and whatever have you. So we managed to get this money and pay it toward his delinquency in terms of payment. And I gathered a plaque from the Mississippi Medical and Surgical Association and what have you for doing that particular deed. And even though the bill did not pass, I was very proud of my bill and—

Orey: So this originally started off as a bill that you introduced?

Anderson: Yes, it was a bill that I introduced into the legislature to curtail this balloon

note payment and because, as I said, black folks was totally unaware that there was such a thing as a balloon note. And so we got this bill out of committee and onto the floor of the House of Representatives, and there everything seemed to have been going well, but the chairman of the committee finally got up and spoke against the bill and that really tumbled my aspirations of getting that particular bill out.

Orey: Now, did you ever find that when African Americans would introduce legislation at that time that it was defeated at every end or was it possible to get bills passed?

Anderson: It was, at that time, it was defeated mostly at every opportunity, except for Robert Clark who had been in the legislature for a while and so they would support his legislation, and he became chairman of the Education Committee during that time, once the chairman had resigned. So, but other than that, Fred Banks, who was a brilliant mind, was often used for his expertise, but he would never get bills out of committees and—

Orey: Go ahead.

Anderson: And the trend was, as I said earlier, was that we would come up with some good ideas but the legislation would get nowhere during that first year. And then the next year we would of course introduce a bill but some white legislators would introduce a bill independent of us and their bill would be the one that would be taken up in committees and passed out.

Orey: There's a book by attorney Frank Parker, *Black Votes Count*. And he talks about Henry Kirksey and the development of all of these majority black districts, as well as all the redistricting court cases that led to an increase in the largest number of black elected officials in this country. As relates to the state legislature and what became the Legislative Black Caucus, can you just give me some background as to how the Legislative Black Caucus evolved and anything else you'd like to add?

Anderson: Yeah, well, we started out, we organized the Legislative Black Caucus when there were four members. And we would meet and discuss legislation, and that was the basic purpose of it. Then the following year we had some additional blacks to be elected to the legislature and so it began to grow. I was one of the first blacks to be elected to the Senate, along with Senator Henry Kirksey. He and I were elected and then—

Orey: What year?

Anderson: That was in '80. So we began serving in '80 and Senator Kirksey was always a gadfly, you know, he would speak out on any issue and we had a good cop, bad cop relationship, you know, that he and I would be there, and if someone wanted some legislation passed, they would basically come to me because Henry Kirksey was so outspoken on every issue that his legislation did not see the light of day. And so I was the mild mannered one and I could get some things done in the legislature after the four

years. But the major difference between the House and the Senate was that you had to respect a senator; you did not necessarily respect members of the House of Representatives at that time. But senators took pride in saying that, "I'm a state senator, you deserve the same respect." Now, oftentimes we didn't get the research that we deserved or wanted, but at least we had the name that you are a state senator and you are due respect.

Orey: So you're saying that other members of the legislature had staff to conduct research on bills?

Anderson: Yes, oh yes, oh yes, they had staff and what have you, and we had basically no staff—

Orey: OK.

Anderson: —during that time. And when I did move over to the Senate, things were a little bit better but not a tremendous amount. What you had was that some senators who had predominantly black districts would then come and help you with some of your legislation. I became chairman of the University and Colleges Committee at a time when they were talking about closing Mississippi Valley State, and I would not take up legislation that dealt with the closing of Mississippi Valley State.

Orey: Can you explain that? Can you expound on that in terms of you being the chair and your role as a chair and how you were able to—

Anderson: Yeah, as chairman of the committee you decide on the legislation that is going to be discussed in the legislative body. So, being the chairman of the committee I refused to bring up any legislation that dealt with the closure of Mississippi Valley State. And of course they dubbed it Mississippi University for Women, you know, as a ploy, but the real emphasis was on closing Mississippi Valley State. So what I did was I formed a committee and I said that we will study this issue over the summer, and I had a pretty good white friend who was also a senator who would do what I, basically what I told him to do because he had been overlooked by the other senators. And so what I did was I made him chairman of the study committee for the closure of universities. And he would, as I said, he would completely be obedient to me because I gave him some status. And so we then went out and studied over the summer months, we visited all eight universities and we came back with a report, and the report stated that compared to where Valley State was receiving the students, that they were probably doing the best job of any university in the state in terms of raising the level, even though the students were received at a low level, but they increased their standards and was able to elevate the black students. And we came out and said that, you know, that Mississippi Valley State was, of all the universities, you know, gave elevation to their students more so than any other university. And that didn't set well with the board, with the College Board and what have you, but I was able to do some things by virtue of my also being appointed to

the Building Fund for the universities. And I managed to get quite a bit of money for Jackson State, Alcorn and Valley. It was called the Building Commission that we were doing, and at that time we had a stadium being built, the first part of the stadium being built at Mississippi Valley State. And what the College Board wanted to do was to give a stadium and, you know, like a high school stadium; if you drop something it'll go all the way to the ground. And so I talked to Ernest Borkins(?), who was president of Mississippi Valley State at the time, and I told him and I told Dr. Peoples and I also told Dr. Washington that, "You-all can say whatever you want to say to the media and to the College Board but just come and tell me what you really want," because I was on the Building Commission and we had a little policy on the Building Commission that the chairman of the committee would make the decisions as to what projects would be funded at the various universities. And they placed me chairman of Mississippi Valley State, Alcorn, and Jackson State in hopes that, you know, I wouldn't rock the boat or whatever have you. And so one meeting I attended and George Payne Cossell(?) and he was saying that, "Well, the committee met and we decided this." And I said, "Well, wait a minute, I'm a member of that committee and I didn't meet, you know. When did you-all meet?" And he said, "Well, what we normally do is that we let the chairman of the committee make the decision as to what projects we would fund." And I said, "Well, do we do that all the time?" And he said, "Yeah, yeah, we do that, you know, pretty much all the time." And I said, "Well, OK then, you know, I vote for that." And so then that gave me the authority to go and do things for Jackson State, Alcorn, and Valley. So we built the veneered stadium, the home side of the stadium at Mississippi Valley State, and then the following year I got introduced the bill that would build the visitors' side of the stadium and it was specified in the bill that it would be all concrete, because the College Board did not want Valley State, and whatever have you, to have anything of any significance. So we managed to do that, and at Alcorn State University, I managed to get the water system down there. They had a lot of lime in the water, and whatever have you, and I got that corrected and what have you, but—

Orey: And this was all in the state legislature?

Anderson: Oh yeah, this was in the state legislature but this was part of another committee called the Building Commission; that's not a legislative order. But at that time, only legislators would serve on the Building Commission.

Orey: Oh, OK.

Anderson: And George Smith was put on the Building Commission initially by Cliff Finch, but he was not a legislator so he had to come off, and I was put on the Building Commission in place of George Smith.

Orey: OK.

Anderson: So it enabled me to do a lot of things for Jackson State and Alcorn and Valley

in terms of buildings and what have you. And if you look at Jackson State, you will find my name on the Science Building, on the cafeteria where the old cafeteria was, and several places on the Fine Arts Building, and whatever have you because I served on the Building Commission. And surprisingly enough, the Speaker of the House, Buddy Newman, he was chairing the Building Commission and he said in a meeting once, he said, “Well, you know, gentlemen, we’ve made a mistake. We should’ve never put Doug Anderson chairman of the black universities.” And, you know, he openly said that in meetings. So I recall that I got some additional monies for Jackson State and I borrowed the money, and I was supposed to pay the money back. It was some \$300,000. But I remembered that the year before, George Payne Cossell had gotten \$3[00,000] or \$400,000 for Delta State University and so he never paid the money back. So when we got there and divided up our money, then I was reminded that, “Well, you know, you owe this money back to the board because you advanced the money to Jackson State.” And I said, “Well, George Payne, you advanced money to Delta State and so we need to pay that money back, too.” And he says, “Just be quiet, be quiet.” And so I was quiet there and I never heard any more about the money. So in dealing with the legislature, we were able to do some things outside of the legislative process, but by virtue of the fact that we were on certain committees, the Building Commission, that we were able to do certain things. For example, we had some money that we were going to divide up among the black universities and where the old penguin—I don’t know, you may not—

Orey: Um-hum.

Anderson: —where the penguin was, and whatever have you, we bought all of that land there and I used one of the tactics because what was happening was that the—Alice Harden and I were the only two blacks. Well, we were there supporting Jackson State. And they wanted the bill to be unanimous in terms of supporting the tax hike, and so I got Alice and myself and we said, “Well, we’re not going to vote for it.” And Alice came to me and she said, “But, Doug, we got to vote for it because it’s going to help education and help other things.” But I said, “Alice, don’t tell anybody you’re going to vote for it, you know.” And so she held out; the other blacks caved in but Alice and I held out, and as a result of that we got the money, fifteen million dollars, to buy property at Jackson State, Alcorn, and Valley, so.

Orey: So what you’re saying is that you-all could use politics to support others’ initiatives and then they would reciprocally come back, and you could tell them that, you know, “I’ll support you if you support me.”

Anderson: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah, yeah, especially on things that they wanted to have a unanimous vote.

Orey: I got you.

Anderson: And—

Orey: What was the significance of a unanimous vote, was it a mandate to—

Anderson: Well, a unanimous vote was to signify that everybody is in favor of this, that even raising taxes that everybody is in accordance with this. And had we not voted—of course I was prepared to vote against it to keep it from being unanimous, but I mean very fortunately we didn't have to because the lieutenant governor called us in and talked to Alice and I about the bill, and whatever have you, and so we went ahead and voted for it with the promise that they would give Jackson State, Alcorn, and Valley the fifteen million dollars. And it was set on me to divide the money because the House of Representatives had already passed the bill and it came over to us, and so I divided it up and we did pretty well, not equal to what the predominantly white universities was getting but we managed to salvage some monies out of that bill.

Orey: And so in closing, Mr. Anderson, was it—I'm thinking about it now; now, I got to ask this question before we close I guess, in terms of comparing and contrasting the monies that were allocated to the predominantly white universities before Ayers. Was it fairly obvious that the state legislature would appropriate more monies to the predominantly white universities based on numbers, enrollment numbers, when compared to the African American or the historically black colleges?

Anderson: Well, not the legislature. We had a college board.

Orey: OK.

Anderson: Institutions of Higher Learning, they had a formula whereas the formula was a formula that no one understood and they determined how the money would be divided. The legislature would appropriate this sum of money and then the College Board would then decide on how this money is divided up, and they used some formula about attendance, and whatever have you, and certain majors, more money would go to science majors or whatever majors and whatever have you. So there were a lot of factors that was inherent in the funding distribution that no one really understood it. And Ted Thrash, who was the director of the College Board, he and I see each other occasionally now at Picadilly's. And he was laughing about that formula, you know, and he and I talked about it and he said, "Doug, no one understood that formula." I said, "No, no one understood it but you." And so the difference was that the legislature would fund certain projects and of course the predominantly white institutions would get more projects funded, but the standard funding for the universities was divided by the College Board.

Orey: Did the state legislature ever pass any type of legislation that would revisit the formula, or if not the formula, the way in which the members were selected? Because it became much more diverse over the years.

Anderson: No, the governor decided who would be selected to the—appointed to the

College Board.

Orey: And that was a big debacle with Fordice.

Anderson: Yeah, yeah, yeah, and now the legislature now is trying to devise a way to appoint some of the members by other means other than the district lines that they have so that we could get more black representation on the board. Right now, you know, what do you have, three—

Orey: Um-hum.

Anderson: —blacks, and Bob Owens and J. E. Magee and—

Orey: One lady.

Anderson: —yeah, a lady. So that's the problem that we have.

Orey: Mr. Anderson, we're going to close and I'd just like for you to reflect. In looking back at where you started in '75 and looking at the state legislature now, do you see any marked differences as relates to race relations? And also, I didn't get this earlier but, you know, Senator Harden was an African-American woman, as a woman do you see any disparities or any—not disparities, but any discrimination, if you will, that we were stronger with her being a black woman or was she just sort of seeing another African American treated with respect in the Senate?

Anderson: Well, first of all, Alice is a strong, black woman who is very, very outspoken. In terms of the blacks in the legislature, we have blacks in very powerful positions; Percy Watson, who's in Ways and Means, and Ed Blackmon in Judiciary. And those kinds of positions put you in a position of power and you must realize that the legislature decides what bills come before its body, the tiers of the committees. And so therefore we are put in some very, very powerful positions and the positions that we are placed in makes the blacks a real force to be reckoned with. You know, the most powerful committee there is probably Ways and Means in the House, and all your tax measures and things go through there. And what this means, of course, is that the chairman of those committees has also influence over other committees because whatever monies is being raised, you got to go and get the Ways and Means Committee to assist you. And many of the bills are doubly referred, say, to Public Health and to Ways and Means. Ways and Means is to decide whether or not it's funded and Public Health is to decide whether it's needed or so. So we are in very powerful positions, and the offshoots of those positions also exert power.

Orey: Such as, offshoots? I know you mentioned the Building Commission that you were on.

(brief interruption)

Anderson: Right now the legislature does not play a major role in the offshoot committees. For example, like the Building Commission no longer has legislators on it. But now you do play a major role in the Budget Committee. If you get appointed to the Budget Committee, then you are one of the ones who decide what is funded. So I served on the Budget Committee for a while. And the Peer Committee where Alyce Clarke is serving, she is very instrumental in letting us know what's going on on those committees. There are certain legislative committees that you get appointed to, but the areas like the Building Commission and whatever have you, no legislators, now, no longer serve on those committees.

Orey: OK, Mr. Anderson, that really concludes the interview. Are there any closing remarks you'd like to make? This is your oral history and we just want to document as much as possible, so if there's anything that you'd like to close with, but if you think you've covered it.

Anderson: Yeah, well, we basically covered it. It's just that I am really pleasantly surprised at the power that black legislators have in the legislature. It is surprising because they have been put on some very, very powerful committees; and the Ways and Means and Appropriations is most powerful.

Orey: I guess I will say this based on what you just said, so the presence of blacks is meaningful.

Anderson: Oh yeah.

Orey: You know some suggest that, you know, when African Americans were not on or in the state legislature that state legislators could say, "Well, we didn't know because we don't live in the neighborhood." And so similarly, you know, your presence on the Building Commission, it seems as though if African Americans are present, they can at least inform their fellow legislators about some of the issues that—

Anderson: Yeah, well, you know, you can speak up for legislation. And not only that, before blacks were in the legislative body, white legislators could come back and say, "Oh yeah, well, I helped and I tried to do this and I tried to do that" and whatever have you. So what we tried to do when there were four of us, we tried to make sure that we were on separate committees so that we could come back and inform the public as to who's doing what, you know. And that's very important for black people, for any people, to be able to know who are their friends, you know. And you know we oftentimes know neither friend nor foe because we're not there and people can come out to the community and tell you, and they're, "Oh yeah, I really tried to help you here and there," and whatever have you, "but I couldn't get it done. But I'm going to try next year." And then you find out that with blacks in the legislature they can come back and tell you who's doing what, and who's attempting to do certain things. So it is vital that black people be

able to participate in government. And there were only four of us and most of the things that the four of us could do was to go back and inform, to inform Jackson State alumni that this guy ain't doing what he's saying he's doing, you know, he's not helping us or you in any way. And so the alumni associations can become a force in terms of electing or unelecting certain legislators who have shown no interest in the black community.

Orey: That concludes our interview with former House of Representative member Anderson and—House and Senate member—Doug Anderson. This is D'Andra Orey signing off at the home of former Senator and House member Anderson. Thank you.

(end of interview)

PAGE

PAGE 12