

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Farrell Race Relations Project

Farrell Race Relations -- 1960's

O. H. 500

REVEREND ANDERSON TATUM, JR.

Interviewed

by

Ronald Rice

on

July 3, 1981

REVEREND ANDERSON TATUM, JR.

Anderson T. Tatum was born in Jasper County, Mississippi, on September 12, 1934. After graduating from Bay Springs Vocational High School in Mississippi, Tatum went to Farrell and got a job at Shenango Inc. as a steelworker. He has worked as a mill worker for the past twenty-nine years. Tatum's memories of living in the deep south remain quite vivid to him today.

While working at Shenango Inc., Tatum received what he calls a "spirit from the Lord" in 1959. He then became involved with the Valley Baptist Church as one of their pastors. Tatum later attended the American Baptist Theological Extension in Youngstown, Ohio for a period of five years and received a diploma in theology. Tatum is married and has a daughter age twenty-four.

Tatum's chief interest outside of his family and church is his community. He has been appointed as a Farrell city councilman to finish a term left vacant by the death of another councilman. Tatum works very hard at trying to better the city of Farrell and help its various residents. He hopes that through his church and by being a councilman, he can be a more effective voice for the black men in the city of Farrell.

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INTERVIEWEE: REVEREND ANDERSON TATUM
INTERVIEWER: Ronald Rice
SUBJECT: Racial riots, bussing in of people, Black Youth
Action Committee
DATE: July 3, 1981

R: This is an interview with Reverend Anderson Tatum Jr. for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the racial tensions in Farrell, Pennsylvania during the 1960's, by Ronald J. Rice at 122 North Main in Wheatland, Pennsylvania on July 3, 1981 at 4:50 in the afternoon.

Reverend Tatum, will you begin by you telling us a little bit about where you're from originally?

T: I'm from Bay Springs, Mississippi. I was born in Jasper County, Mississippi in 1934 and I stayed there until age eighteen, in the Mississippi area. Then I came here at the age of eighteen and got a job at Shenango Incorporated and I've worked there since then. That was in 1952 and I've been there since then.

R: What do you remember most about your childhood?

T: There's so much. I remember quite a lot about it, even when I was very small, before I started school. There are some experiences that I remember, where we lived, it was on a hill, and I remember my sister, she was a baby at that time, both of us were babies as a matter of fact. People coming and picking at me with her because I didn't want anybody to bother her. I remember fighting with people in that way. I remember when I started school doing what we called a funny book, you know a type of the preschool. I remember going with the other kids, going to school. Then not too long after that I remember our house burning down.

R: Your family's house?

T: Yes.

R: Was it arson or just accidental?

T: Accidentally. I was very small at that time. It was a double house, duplex-like. Some of my relatives lived in the one side and we were living on the other. I'm not sure where or how the fire started, but I remember that they had to rebuild the house. The new house was just a small structure and we lived there alone in that particular house until I guess I was about five years old. Then we moved across town and that's where I started farming. I got into plowing; I got into it with my father of course. I remember going to school there.

R: You went to high school there?

T: No, no. It was in the country lines so it was a little country school. It only went through about eighth grade, I think. I didn't stay there that long. Then, not too long after that, the Vocational High School in Bay Springs, which was a central location then of all the various areas, had emerged into this one school and it started bus transportation. We started going to school together at Bay Springs Vocational High School and that's where I went to school from that point on.

R: What was high school like for you?

T: Well, it was interesting, but it wasn't as it would be now you know. Because at that time I didn't really get into it. Because of farming, during that time, the parents would have the children stop school. They thought it was more important to be working than in school, so it made it difficult. But I enjoyed going to school. It was a challenge, in a sense, and I learned a lot, but it could have been much better if I would have been able to put my whole heart into it.

R: You say you moved to Farrell or Wheatland?

T: Farrell.

R: When you were eighteen years old. Did you come with your family or did you come by yourself?

T: My father was here at the time. He was here and he worked awhile. He did not move the family here, but he was here working and sending money back home, you know, to support the family. Jobs, well not necessarily jobs, but it paid much better here than there and therefore many of the people in that area left there and came here for that reason. So that was why he was here. He stayed just temporarily here working, sending money back.

Not too long after I had come here, then he left and went home and stayed, so I was left here alone for awhile without my family.

R: You stayed on your own then?

T: Right.

R: What factors caused you to go into Shenango? Did they hire you at the time?

T: Yes, at the time they were hiring. My father did not work there. There were some people who I knew working there, but they would just hire you at that particular time. You could just go in and put an application in and they would pretty well hire you. You didn't need somebody to pull the leg of the administration to get someone in like it is now. So I had put my application in at several plants and that was the one that called me first.

R: And you've been there ever since?

T: Yes.

R: Well, what factors caused you to get involved with the church and go to theological school?

T: Number one, I was brought up in the church. I had a lot of faith in Christ, in the church. I thought it was the thing to do. But as a teenager I somewhat drifted; I was not as committed to the church. I didn't do a lot of the things that the other young kids were doing, but nevertheless, I was not committed. Then I got married in 1956. Then, in 1959, one evening I felt the spirit of the Lord, really, upon me and then this irresistible urge--which I tried to resist because I didn't think it was my bag as far as preaching was concerned. It wasn't what I wanted to do and I had said to the Lord that I wouldn't. I said, "No!" You know, a flat no, but that urge continued to rest upon me, and I promised the Lord that night that if he would go with me I would commit my life to preaching. That was on a Saturday evening, before I went to work; I had the eleven o'clock shift that evening. That Monday I told the pastor of the church--this church was just the basement then--my experience and he said, "That sounded like the call." So he gave me an opportunity to testify to the church so that the church knew it was my calling and then he gave me an opportunity to preach. After getting into it I continued. I went to classes at various places and it was after I was called to pastor here that I went to the American Baptist Theological Seminary Extension in Youngstown.

I went five years there. Well, I went more than that because one year I had to drop out because of my work schedule. They had me working afternoon turns and there was no way I could get it changed. So then the next year I continued; I went three years and got a certificate in Christian training. Then I finished the five years and got a diploma in theology. That was the way that worked out.

R: What are some of your chief interests besides working in the church?

T: Right now a beautiful challenge that I have is serving on city council. And right now one of my chief interests is to bring more unity to the city of Farrell, to the city administration. There is somewhat of a division in the city administration. Maybe I'm looking at it in the spiritual sense, maybe I'm looking at it in a sense that I believe that it can be accomplished and it might be that others might be saying it will never happen.

I do believe that politics is people doing things for people, not necessarily what other are saying about it. For us to do many things for the people we need to get together ourselves and work together to get that accomplished. It is a great challenge and a great task. The city administration now is something because of the overall administration, you know, the federal administration. So right now that is one of the things that is foremost in my mind aside from the church.

I do believe that I would be able to accomplish a lot in that area. Whether I do all that I would want to do--I haven't done it all here yet--I do believe that I will accomplish a lot in that area, you know, as far as city administration.

R: How long have you been on the city council?

T: Since March.

R: Oh, just recently?

T: Yes.

R: Congratulations.

T: Thank you. I was appointed. Mr. Herbert Williams, who served on council--he's a black man--had passed on and then I was asked to accept the appointment. I, again, tried to refuse because of the schedule I already have, but they kept on and I accepted. Then they asked me to run, to be elected, because this term would only be just the rest of this year. So I ran in the primaries and I was elected. There were eight of us who ran for four positions and I got one of them. I tied

for third place with John Palko.

R: If we could go back to the 1960's now, what was an average day like for you then? You were probably working an eight hour day?

T: Yes, at that time I was working, also I was pastoring. I did some marches. We marched in various places here in our area.

R: Protest marches?

T: Well, I would call them more or less awareness. You know to bring the awareness of our situation to the public and in support of the racial tension that was going on all around our country. Number one, we marched in Farrell. We marched there more than once, but this one particular time we marched, they were getting ready to appoint a school board member and the NAACP was involved in the march. We marched up to the high school first and then we picketed, in a way of speaking, in front of the school while they were having a board meeting because we believed very strongly that there should have been, at that particular time, a black appointed to the school board. We did not succeed at that particular time.

R: There were no blacks on the school board in the 1960's?

T: No. I'm not thinking very clearly on it, but I think Toby Jackson was appointed; I'm not sure. Then he was elected in succession maybe two or three times afterwards. So he is serving on the school board right now.

We had another march in support of the marches that were going on around our country; we marched down in Sharon. I'm not sure, I think this was in support of the march in Selma, Alabama; I believe it was the same thing. Several of us marched down Sharon there. That was one of the marches that we were involved in.

Then the other thing, as far as I'm concerned, that was very sad was when the burning took place in Farrell. It happened at night. There weren't too many who knew about it, those who had gone to bed, but then the next day with all of the stealing and whatnot. It was quite a very tense moment that we went through because we didn't know what would happen next. It was a very dangerous time and it was a very scary time in a sense because we were aware of what was happening in Detroit. It was a very sad time in Detroit and also in Watts, California. It was just someone trying to, I guess, show that they could do the same thing, but it only hurt us really. Yet this was a way that people had in letting off their frustration and their tension.

R: During the 1960's, could you sense any growing racial tension in Farrell?

T: Yes, very much so. It was very dangerous because the whites were getting prepared with guns and what have you and they were talking about what they were going to do as well as the blacks and what they were doing. As a matter of fact, there was a group there in Farrell who had ammunition and all kinds of ammunition.

R: A group of whites?

T: No, blacks. But the whites, I don't think that they had a group as such, they were just talking about it. They were preparing themselves because they didn't know what was going to happen which I can understand very well. They didn't because even we didn't.

We pleaded to various people that this was not the way, but it didn't do any good. You know, they were after getting some blood whatever way they could.

R: Was it an organized group that had ammunition or was it just . . .

T: It was an organized group; I don't remember the name of it now.

R: It wasn't the Black Youth Action Committee was it?

T: I believe so, but it was another name also.

R: Did they have a cultural center?

T: Wasn't it black cultural center?

R: Yes, but I think they went by the title of Black Youth Action Committee?

T: Oh, okay. Yes, that's the group on Stauton. You've heard of them?

R: Yes. I've talked to several members: Billy Samuels, Roger Winston, and several others.

T: Did they tell you they had various ammunition?

R: In a roundabout way, that they were armed.

T: They had ammunition; I didn't see the ammunition, but this is what was said. They were very radical at that time, but now especially those two of whom you have mentioned are much different than they were at that particular time.

R: They even remarked about how they've changed themselves.

Do you think the violence in Farrell was sort of a domino effect throughout the country? Some people feel that it was happening in other cities, and was bound to happen in Farrell.

T: Yes, in a way of speaking, because of the prejudice and the discrimination that goes on. It's more than discrimination, educated or sophisticated discrimination now; more so than just point blank, it is more elevated.

R: Being from the south, some people from the south have told me that discrimination in the south was right out in the open, whereas discrimination in the north is hidden.

T: Right.

R: And it's worse up here than it is down there?

T: Well, I guess the way people look at it it might seem worse, but I think it was just all over. They had a sneaky way of doing it here than there. You know, they have a water fountain and you didn't drink. A sign would be up there saying "white," and you did not drink. Like restaurants, you didn't go in and those kinds of things. When you are on the bus, you catch a bus here when you get to Cincinnati, on that same bus they put a sign up. This is not something I heard about when transporting, I saw it.

R: In exchange?

T: Right. This was the difference between down there and here.

R: Was your life or any of your family's lives ever affected by any violence or direct racial tensions say at work or school?

T: No.

R: How about in your neighborhood?

T: No. I can't say that there were any incidents that were direct results of the racial tension.

R: Any organizations or clubs?

T: No.

R: Any of your friends ever remark to you about being affected some way by it?

T: Yes, in the schools others have talked about how it has been in the schools. The other thing that I've noticed in the school, in Farrell High School, blacks are not involved in the school's teachings, administration, and so forth. Then

when it came to class recommendation, class recognition, and all this, you don't see the blacks. It's just like lily whites all the way through. I am concerned about that. I have talked with Mr. Russell Phillips, who is, I believe, principal at the middle school; he's black. I talked with him about it some time ago about how I looked at it. This is a thing that can ignite a racial violence. Not that, it's a thing that's worthwhile doing; people want to retaliate and then they will utilize this just to do that. He said he has talked to Mr. Morocco about it, but to no avail. He didn't get any consideration of doing something about it. So it's just a matter of . . . it's there.

R: Still today?

T: Today, it's there today.

R: Can you recall anything about some of the burning and damage that was done to some of the buildings on Idaho and in that area?

T: As of right now, it seems vague. But then, several buildings were damaged, windows shattered on Idaho. Some of the buildings are gone now; they've torn them down. Some of them were, in fact, pigsties. One building there now on the corner of Idaho and Spearment is still there; it is boarded up out front. So it hasn't been torn down. I believe the drugstore on the corner of Wallace and Idaho was damaged too, but now it's down. That's the one across the street on the north side of Idaho. I'm not sure the one on the south side of Idaho was damaged at that time.

R: Would you label what happened in Farrell during the summer of 1969 a riot?

T: No, not really. You know I haven't studied the definition of riot, but I would think a riot would be when people would get together and there would be like a war against each other and it was not that. I would say that the blacks were taking out their frustrations on the administration. Well, not necessarily the administration, but on the merchants, the buildings that were there, more so than rioting against everybody.

R: Can you recall anything more about the Black Youth Action Committee, just maybe what their demands were for the city or some thing that they had done?

T: No, not really. I had talked with some at various times and they had mentioned some of their demands, but I didn't keep that in mind.

R: How do you think the Sharon Herald reported the events in

Farrell during the 1960's?

- T: It might be because of my feelings toward the Sharon Herald, but they painted a dirty picture of Farrell any time they got the chance. I think they would exaggerate any time they got a chance to report something. If a couple of windows get broken out, you know, when they get through it's about twenty homes destroyed. This is the way Sharon Herald has done Farrell. Not only that, but then they want to sell newspapers and so they have to make it interesting and it just seems to be that Farrell is their victim, more so than any other area where this happened.
- R: Do you think the reports might have added to the problems, the racial problems in Farrell?
- T: Yes, I do believe that, because when people are tense and involved in racial tension, words can only add fuel to the fire. I do believe that it added in its own time.
- R: How did the Farrell police deal with all the racial problems?
- T: I would say, under the circumstances, that they dealt very well. At that particular time I don't think that our police department was trained for this type of thing. They just had to deal with it as it came up. I would say they dealt with it fairly, under the circumstances.
- R: Getting towards the city government now, how do you think the city government handled the situation and dealt with the racial problems and some of the violence that happened?
- T: I think they dealt with it under the same circumstances, fairly. I wasn't into administration and watching every move at that particular time, but we were able to get through it without it spreading. The police department, city administration, they were able to deal with it in such a way that they didn't allow it to get out of hand. So people don't really know until they get into it. Sometimes you can step off to the side and you can point a finger, but they did this without it exploding and it could have happened in a small place like this, with the people and with the policemen who have not been trained for this kind of thing. So I would say they dealt with it fairly.
- R: Since most of Farrell's population seems to be the blacks concentrated in certain areas, how do you feel about the election system for electing councilmen, the at-large election?
- T: I believe that it would be better so that the blacks or the various area would always have someone represented that they would go to in their area or ward.

R: Wards?

T: Wards. That way you would have someone from all aspects of the community represented on council. You won't have them all from up on the hill. Then when they get pressure they will work from the hill rather than from all areas, but if you have equal representatives from all areas they're going to concentrate a lot of efforts to the area in which they are serving.

R: Right.

T: Therefore all of the segments of the community will be represented and they will get their fair share.

R: I find it odd that most people feel that way, but it has never been changed in Farrell.

T: Right. As far as I'm concerned, it's a very prejudiced reason that it was not. When they finally started the Home Rule Charter, they were meeting constantly, well not constantly, but they had several meetings. All right, this was brought up. I went to a couple of those meetings and it was brought up in that light and it wouldn't necessarily be black from a black area, but it would be a person from that area responsible for speaking for that particular area. Because when elections come if they wanted to be reelected they would serve that area and they would do what they could in that light, but point blank we would have our meetings; mostly blacks attended those meetings. We had our meeting; they claimed they wanted the input, we gave the input. Then when they leave and come back they say, "We're not going to do it." We say, "What do you mean you're not going to?" They came out bold and said, "When we leave here and go to the Golden Dawn or to the bowling lanes and the barber shop, they're telling us different." You have public meetings and if they've got anything to say they ought to come to the meeting. But they don't come to the meeting. And they told us they had to do what they said. If this wasn't prejudice, what was it?

R: Seems like a cop-out.

T: Right, but I never would have mentioned it. They were bold enough to say why they weren't going to do it, because those others out there told them not to and they did what those said. It didn't even come up to give the voters a chance or even vote it up or down.

R: I just find that ironic.

T: Well, that's why.

R: Well, as a reverend at the time or a person, were you ever

asked to become part of a group or movement which tried to better race relations in Farrell?

T: Yes, we had a Minister's Association. We were working at that particular time; we were asked to work for the police department, ride in the cruisers. And this, I believe, worked out fairly well. I never got a chance to do so at the time that I was to ride with them; some of the other ministers rode in my place.

I think that brought about quite a better relations here, by the cops having a minister riding with him when they were on duty, especially when they would get calls and whatnot and they would be right there. Naturally the cop is going to put his best foot forward. Then the victim who is to be arrested, or what have you, most of the time they're going to respect the minister. During that time, I do believe that it brought about quite a better relationship all the way around, and this is good.

We have had ministers set up meetings. People, children who have problems, they would be brought in and we would counsel them, even with the cops. We have been talking with cops and their behavior, and this kind of thing, to keep down racial outbursts and this has helped a lot because there has been several times even since then that it came very close to exploding. Matter of fact, one of the reasons they wanted a black on council was because they saw what could possibly be ahead and therefore they wanted it. I think they moved wisely to look that far ahead in any area that they can to keep racial tensions from exploding.

R: Do you recall any specific examples or racial prejudice in Farrell such as in real estate or economic jobs or socially? Do you think there was any red lining in Farrell of who could buy homes where?

T: Why yes, that's been for years. It wouldn't be like out in the open, but it would be that some reason you know you didn't get funded. I mean your loan didn't go through or whatever when it came to certain areas in Farrell. It's better now, but it's still there.

R: It still goes on today?

T: Right, it still goes on. I live at 310 Hamilton. I saw the lot for sale. I called the guy on the telephone and I talked with him about the lot. He had paid \$600 and something for the lot. He was a real estate guy, nice realtor. We talked on the phone and he said, "Yes, I want to get rid of the lot; I'll let you have it for cost." He just went on and on and on. Okay, I go down to talk to him. When I went down, I checked out the lot. He said, "Oh, you're the guy that was talking

about the lot?" You know, just like that. I said, "Yes, I'm the guy that called you about the lot." He lied all kinds of ways. Then he started, "Let me see." He wanted to charge me \$1,200 and some dollars for the lot. I said, "You told me on the phone that you would sell it to me at cost--for \$600 and some dollars." "No, you must have been talking to someone else." I mean, if it was someone else, how did he know that I was the one talking about the lot. He kept saying that, but he didn't have anyone else in the office; he was the only one in the office. We talked and talked. Then he found out I was a minister and told me that I wouldn't have the money. I said, "Money's no problem to me. Matter of fact, you told me that you were selling the lot for one thing, and now you're saying something else." So we bickered for awhile. I ended up paying \$800 and some dollars for the lot.

I cleaned it off and started to build. In that area where I'm at, it's all whites. They started looking. I guess they really hated it. I started building. I think this was just kids having fun, but they would tear down my bricks, my windows, you know, as I put them up and things like that.

Those kinds of things I went through as far as racial tensions. If it would have been up on the hill, I probably wouldn't have got to do it. So, this is just how it is.

R: Do you think any single group was responsible for all the violence that happened in Farrell? Some people think that people were bussed in from other cities, that caused the trouble.

T: I don't know about being bussed in, but there were some people who were caught who were from other areas who were involved. So I do believe that much of it was stimulated from people outside. Yes, I do believe that.

R: Do you think more recreation facilities in the city could have possibly prevented some of the violence that happened, kept the youth more active? Some people think it was a hot summer and there was nothing to do so the problems there just took off?

T: I don't say that I believe that recreation would have mattered because you're going to get a certain amount of people going to do it and they would tear up recreation material, equipment, rather. So I think it was a thing that was in the atmosphere and it was going around the country and some sort of activity to cash in on. Because of the racial problem that we already had here, they had a seed then to start from and then they started from that and it got going.

R: Do you think the problems Farrell had then were inevitable?

T: Just about. I think the city administration could have prevented probably much of it had they been aware of it, and had some knowledge of these things. More importantly come about, and then begin to work on that before it came. I don't think that the city administration should bow, and this is the thing that I did not believe. That city administration is to protect me and you as well. They did bow to some of their wishes, that I did not agree with. But I don't say that it was just going to be because I think it could have been prevented had everybody been fair across the board. Then that reason wouldn't have been there. This is the way I feel about it.

R: Having the advantage of looking back some ten years now, what changes would you have liked to have seen instituted in the city?

T: Then or now?

R: Then, or would they be the same now?

T: Yes, because it has not moved too far from that now. As far as jobs, I think this is the thing that we're going to have because if blacks were in the administration, they're going to favor blacks. Now that whites are in the administration, they're going to favor whites. When this is done, naturally it's going to give the other one a chance to say, "Well, see I'm discriminated against." That's going to be there and then when that person is unable to get various things that other people get, like jobs and whatnot, that's lying there. It may never explode, but then there's a possibility that it can explode at any time and this is the thing that's happening.

Even right now there are people who would like to really get things going, but are not getting help. You know a person can't do very much alone unless they've got a lot of nerve and just go out and start doing things. People wouldn't do that; they want to work in a group, crowd, and so therefore, I think these things ought to be done in the businesses around Farrell, around our area. Hiring is one of the practices that people use to discriminate against. It is happening where I'm working at now. We have talked to the administration

there, the personnel, and it has been that they would lie backward and forward. So this is the thing that is still in our area and it is a dangerous thing.

R: Overall then would you say race relations aren't much better in Farrell today compared to what they were in the 1960's? Do you think there's a possibility that things could become fair and even out?

T: Yes, I think it's a possibility that everyone could be left alone just as all things are possible for me to believe. I do believe that it can be, but it's going to take a lot of involvement by the people on all sides and if those who are in authority, in a position to do something about it, if their hearts could be softened to the point where they would say, "Let's be fair," I do believe that it could be curved. But getting that person to admit it to himself, and to others that, "I've been wrong. I'm not going to do it this way, we're going to do it fairly," then people are not pressured . . . this is the thing, this is what caused a lot of it. Sometimes it's not so much the person who is in authority or the administration, but is being pressured from the outside. Naturally if you lean this way you're going to lean against this guy and so this is the situation. Unless the person up there will be willing to take the medicine and go right down the road, we're going to have the racial tension. When you've got racial tension there's a possibility of it flaring up at any time.

R: So there is a real possibility that it could happen again in Farrell?

T: Yes. As a matter of fact, when I was asked to accept the appointment of city council they mentioned something about it. Mr. Nath mentioned it to me that if they didn't have a black representation on council, there could be a racial explosion in Farrell. Now he told me that. So he was aware of it. Whether he was doing that to persuade me to accept it or not, I don't know. It didn't work anyhow, because I didn't accept it until the death of Herby.

They believed that Herby would lose the election and therefore they wanted me to believe that I wouldn't. They wanted me to run so that the black would have representation. I said, "Well, we've got a problem on our hands."

He had been in administration here for sometime so therefore if anyone would know about it he ought to because, in a sense, he is the boss of the city. He is the city manager; he is the boss of the city, over all of the departments. He would have a hand on the pulse of the city and he should know what he is talking about.

R: How do you feel Farrell's past racial problems have affected the reputation of the city overall in the Shenango Valley?

T: I don't think it has bothered in a sense that much, but the thing of it is, we have the racial prejudice all around, so if the spotlight can be on Farrell then it's not on the other municipalities and therefore they are laughing. They're saying, "Better you than me." They want everything to focus on that particular thing and when that happens they get by and Farrell is their scapegoat. That's the way I see it.

R: Is there anything else important you would like to discuss that we didn't cover?

T: Well, I would guess not because I'm not into that kind of thing too much. By working, I don't keep up with what's going on that much. I will be doing more of it now that I'm as involved as I am.

R: Okay. Thank you.

T: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW