

LUMUMBA AJANAKU
Meals on Wheels Hot Tamales & Tacos
Yazoo City, MS

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Date: June 21, 2005
Location: Lumumba's Tamale Stand, Highway 49 W – Yazoo City, MS
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Length: 31 minutes, 47 seconds
Project: MS Delta Hot Tamale Trail

NOTE: This interview occurred on a hot, hot July day in the Mississippi Delta. Lumumba had a window A/C unit inside his tamale stand/trailer, cooling things off; he insisted that I conduct the interview from inside, while he answered my questions from outside. Since his stand is right on the highway, traffic can be heard regularly.

[Begin Lumumba Ajanaku.mp3]

0:00:00.9

[Audio opens with Lumumba talking to an acquaintance, who is walking down the street.]

0:00:03.0

Amy Evans: Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance, June 21st, 2005 in Yazoo City, Mississippi. All right, so your name is Ajanaku?

0:00:21.2

Lumumba Ajanaku: Lumumba Ajanaku.

0:00:24.0

AE: Lumumba Ajanaku.

0:00:23.1

LA: A-j-a-n-a-k-u.

0:00:25.3

AE: Ajanaku is your last name or first?

0:00:27.4

LA: Lumumba is my first name, L-u-m-u-m-b-a, Lumumba; the last name is A-j-a-n-a-k-u.

0:00:37.1

AE: Okay.

0:00:36.9

LA: Okay. Lumumba Ajanaku.

0:00:37.7

AE: Got it. And you're from Memphis you said originally?

0:00:40.1

LA: I'm from Memphis.

0:00:43.4

AE: When--when is your birth date, if you don't mind me asking?

0:00:43.8

LA: November 22, 1952.

0:00:48.3

AE: Okay, okay. And you said you learned how to make hot tamales from your mother?

0:00:49.8

LA: Of my mother.

0:00:50.9

AE: Can you tell me about that a little bit?

0:00:52.3

LA: Yeah. She--she passed August 8th of two—of o-four [2004] and we buried her in Arcola, Mississippi, from Leland, Mississippi, which is where I was born. And from Leland, Mississippi, we buried her in Arcola, Mississippi on the fourteenth, you know, in Arcola. And she learned me how to make tamales when I was seventeen [years old].

0:01:18.5

AE: How long had she been making hot tamales?

0:01:20.6

LA: She had been making hot tamales when I was a little boy coming up. So other words, I've been making tamales for around about 35 years.

0:01:26.2

AE: Yeah?

0:01:26.3

LA: I've been knowing how to make them, but I got out of it for a long time due to the fact that I got a hold to a lot of money. I had a lot of money at one time, you know, and I--I just really went through it and messed up, you know. I mean well--mismanaged it, you know, and so I come back here to the hot tamales for now because I got two--I got two daughters. I got a daughter here and soon--she'll be nine around in August. And I want her to--to get into tamales and learn how to make tamales, you know.

0:01:59.3

AE: Do you know how your mother learned to make tamales?

0:02:02.6

LA: No, I don't know how she learned. I don't know--I don't know if her grandmother learned her how to make tamales or how she learned. But she used to make some good ones.

0:02:10.4

AE: Did she sell them also?

0:02:12.3

LA: Yeah, she sold them.

0:02:12.1

AE: In Leland?

0:02:13.4

LA: In Leland. Leland, Mississippi.

0:02:15.5

AE: Did she have a stand or did people come to her house?

0:02:16.8

LA: No, she had--she had a house. They had--my mother worked with another man called Ned. He was a cab driver there; she used to work with him selling tamales. She used--they used to make tamales together and sell them.

0:02:30.1

AE: Would he sell them while he was driving a cab?

0:02:31.8

LA: Well he was--at home; she would sell them at his house while he--no, but Leland is a very small town, so the population is not very large there in Leland, and so they--they would make them, you know, at night or in the morning. You know what I'm saying? And then they'd sell them in the daytime.

0:02:47.4

AE: Yeah.

0:02:48.6

LA: Uh-huh. And at night, too, you know.

0:02:49.5

AE: Do you remember his last name? Is he still around?

0:02:52.6

LA: I can't remember Ned. No; he's--he's passed on.

0:02:55.0

AE: Okay.

0:02:54.9

LA: Yeah, he passed on. He was the cab driver, but everybody--everyone in Leland know him, you know. He--he was--he stayed in Leland all his life, yeah; he lived in Leland all his life.

0:03:04.2

AE: And you have brothers and sisters?

0:03:06.6

LA: Yeah, I have twelve brothers and sisters.

0:03:08.1

AE: Oh, my.

0:03:08.6

LA: Uh-hmm, I have twelve brothers and sisters in Washington--half of them in Washington County and then the other half is in different parts of you know--uh-hmm—in different parts of the [United] States.

0:03:15.6

AE: Uh-hm.

0:03:16.4

LA: All in the states.

0:03:17.3

AE: Do they all know how to make hot tamales?

0:03:19.2

LA: No. [*Emphasis Added*] No. [*Laughs*] I'm about the only one that was--she took--I took out the time to learn how to make them, I think. I used to be right behind all the time you know when she'd go out be right behind her.

0:03:31.1

AE: Uh-hm; and did she have a particular style about making them?

0:03:35.2

LA: Well, she made--back in that time they would take a meat grinder, and they would take a huge shoulder roast and a lot of times they would--they wouldn't use no ground beef. They would use shoulder roasts. And they would ground that meat up, you know, to make the tamales. You know, they were making theirs by hand, you know. See, I'm making mine by machine, you know what I'm saying. So they're making theirs by--by hand and so they had to work longer to get more--to get twenty-five, thirty dozen, you know. So they had to really work to do some rolling. So--so that's how they--that's how they made theirs. And--and plus, they also made them with self-rising Martha White flour. And see, I don't make mines with--with flour; I make mine with masa, you know.

0:04:25.9

AE: Uh-hmm, Mexican cornmeal.

0:04:27.8

LA: More--more like reinventing the wheel—right, the Mexican--the m-a-s-a, masa. So I make mines with--with that, you know, and I make it also with ground beef.

0:04:36.0

AE: Uh-hmm. Now how--explain to me the white flour. How did she use the white flour?

0:04:38.3

LA: Well, the white flour--she would put her seasoning in it, you know. She never did season the meat. She would always season the--the meal.

0:04:51.7

AE: Okay, but she wouldn't use cornmeal. She would use white flour?

0:04:54.9

LA: No cornmeal I mean--not flour—corn *meal*.

0:04:57.8

AE: Okay, okay.

0:04:58.6

LA: That's what she would use. She would use cornmeal but he—Martha White corn *meal* and she--

0:05:01.3

AE: Got you.

0:05:01.7

LA: --and she would season the meal, you know. She never did season the meat.

0:05:06.1

AE: Really?

0:05:06.8

LA: No, she never seasoned it.

0:05:08.7

AE: Because I know a lot of people season the meat and then use the broth from the meat in [preparing] the meal.

0:05:10.9

LA: Right, right, right. But no, she never did do that. She never did season the meat.

0:05:15.5

AE: Okay.

0:05:15.6

LA: She just seasoned the meal. And I found out that's the best way to not to over-season the food.

0:05:22.7

AE: Oh.

0:05:22.8

LA: Right; I found out that. You know that is the best way to do it.

0:05:28.0

AE: Okay.

0:05:27.9

LA: It's like a lot of people [when] they season fish, they season fish, you know, they put the seasoning on the outside of a fish and then some in the inside--sprinkle the salt on the inside and outside on both sides. And--and--and just put flour--the meal over and just shake it up. But I don't season and do mines like that. See, I take my meal-- [*Lumumba calls out to a friend walking down the street. Recording is stopped for about two minutes*]

0:05:50.5

[*Recording resumes*]

AE: Okay—okay, we're back.

0:05:53.9

LA: It's like you know a lot of people season their fish different. You know, they just put the seasoning on the outside of a fish. I don't do mine like that. I take my seasoning and mix it into the--into the meal, mix all my seasoning into the meal and I--I sprinkle just a small amount in the inside and put each fish—if you do the fillet of catfish, I take it and put it in the bag and my

seasoning is already mixed in with my--with my meal, and I close the bag up real good and shake it up real good, you know like you supposed to do it. My grease is already frying real, you know, real hot, and I lay it on the plate, which I do all of it like that. And then I put it into the-- into the grease and it comes out seasoned perfect. But if you're seasoning the meal and then season the fish, it's going to be too salty. It's going to be over-seasoned, you know, every time. So it's--it's--it's a remedy that you can use--a method, you know and I--I--you know I always pay close attention. I've got cookbooks that dates back to 1714. I got from Nacogdoches, Louisiana-- as a matter of fact, I'd like for you to take a look at it before you leave.

0:07:04.9

AE: Yeah, I'd like to see them.

0:07:06.1

LA: And his tells you how to make hot tamale pies and every--and all of that, and it tells you also how to make punch--vodka punch, whiskey punch, and things like that. So--and then plus, I added what my mother learned me, and then I also worked with--I done worked with Tony in Jackson.

0:07:23.7

AE: Okay. Yeah, I've heard a lot about Tony.

0:07:24.6

LA: Tony's Tamales in Jackson [Mississippi].

0:07:26.7

AE: Yeah. Uh-huh.

0:07:25.8

LA: I worked for Tony and sold Tony's Tamales. Okay. I done sold [Willie] Harmon's Tamales--Hot Tamale Heaven in Greenville on--on North [actually, South] Theo--Theobald Street. You've been in that--been up there? Okay, I sold them for him. And then Miss Missouri, the lady that's in the Carrier Inn [?], she's 100 years old almost and it's a place back there [points across the street to Miss Harris's old tamale stand, which is now abandoned and in disrepair] that used to sell hot tamales.

0:07:44.1

AE: Yeah, I just took pictures down there.

0:07:47.4

LA: I worked with Miss Missouri.

0:07:47.1

AE: Did you?

0:07:47.7

LA: Yeah. [*Emphasis Added*] So I've--I have four--with my mother's recipe, I have five different recipes. I synthesized and put my recipe together. You understand what I'm saying? Let me go get this book.

0:08:02.6

AE: Yeah, you took something from everyone. Okay, sure. [*Short pause while Lumumba heads inside his tamale trailer to get the cookbook he was talking about earlier*] Okay. We're back, and I have this cookbook in front of me [*Cane River Cuisine: Louisiana's Finest Recipes*]. Let me see here. Okay, so where did you get your hands on this cookbook?

0:08:22.9

LA: I found that cookbook.

0:08:26.3

AE: Did you?

0:08:26.6

LA: Some people got their—they had their things in storage in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and they lost everything. And I stopped one day [*Laughs*] at a liquor store called Spirits coming up out-- they built a new hospital right across in front of it there. So I stopped there one day and it was so much--things--so many things was out there and a lot of it--I looked--I detected something that I could use and--and I picked it up and it was in that--that book--this book was in that box. And I looked at it and I said, “Cane River Cuisine.” I said, “Wait a minute.” And then I looked back--at the rear and it said Nacogdoches, Louisiana. And if you turn to page 266, you'll see where they learn you how--there will be a version of making tamale pies--hot tamale pies. And then if you-- if you go to page 38 it also shows you how to make vodka punch, whiskey punch, you know, for weddings and things like that, you know. So I wanted--I wanted one of my baby--I want my baby to be interested in it, and she can sell some of them recipes or she can--she can--you really can get rich with a recipe, if you get a good recipe.

0:09:44.0

AE: Yeah, yeah; so can you--you don't have to give me your secrets or anything, but can you maybe speak to some of the things that you took from each of the places that you worked--that you worked into your own recipe?

0:09:53.5

LA: Okay, yes, I--well I also worked in [inaudible], too, with Melvin Smith at Savannah's. It's closed--a bright yellow building coming out of Jackson on [highway] 49. I worked with Melvin Smith; he's from--he's from Greenville, Mississippi. His place is closed now. Okay; I worked for him. I learned a lot from different places. My mother and them were making them by hands, they were making them with ground beef, but it's a shoulder roast and not only they were making the shoulder roast, they was--they were making them with pork meat and--and I don't care very much for pork. I learned from Miss Missouri up here that--that she only made hers the way my mother was making hers and that's by--it's by seasoning the--the masa. Okay. I learned from Melvin that, you know, just with--with ground beef, if you put water in the ground beef, it will make--in other words, you can--you eliminate your meat, you won't have more--nothing but just like meal. He was making his with meal instead of masa. Okay, meal is harder, and when you use ground beef, you know if you put water with it you won't have nothing but a little old line inside of a small ink pen right in the center with the machine. But now if you make them by hand and you take--just take--go to a place like Wal-Mart and they got the five-pound rolls of ground chuck, it's the highest [most expensive] but it's--you know, that's what I use. And if you take it by hand and you take the--the ground beef and you take it and you--and you measure--get a measuring spoon and you put the same amount in each one. And each one of the tamales should

be at least around three inches and a half to maybe say, three and seven-eighths inches long--close to four inches. And if you put it in there, if you--you can measure the amount of meat that you want in each one of yours. And see I got more--more beef in mines than all the people's I done worked with. And mines are close to four--mines are just about between three inches--three inches long--close to four inches--three and seven-eighths of an inch--close to four inches. And--and I learned that if you do it with the machine, unless you got a large cylinder [*he is saying syllable*] you know because all of the hot tamale machines have got cylinders [*he is saying syllables*], you know they--cylinders I mean--you know—right, they got cylinders; they different size cylinders--half-inch, an inch, like this--an inch and a half.

0:12:53.7

AE: So you can decide how fat you want your tamale?

0:12:56.5

LA: Right; and out in California when I was out in California, the Mexicans in California, they were selling hot tamales seven and eight inches long. And I could make them seven and eight inches long, too; it depends on your cylinder. It depends on the--the cylinder, you know. And then it also depends on the corn shucks. See, Wal-Mart has long shucks and they be so long you have to cut them down. You can make two out of one, you know. So I learned from--I learned from Tony about the hot and the mild. See, Tony, he used cayenne pepper, you know, for--just sprinkled it over—it's—it's hot. And see, Melvin, used--he used--we used to use hot--red--that

cayenne pepper, you know, to sprinkle over top of his but the mild we didn't put none on there. But now, I makes mine different from both of them. I take--I take cayenne pepper, and measure it in a measuring cup. I put half cayenne pepper and I put half of red pepper and mix it in with a bag and a half of masa. That's what I do. And I mix it up real good. I mix it--I mix it and when I get through mixing, I take my water--I take my water and--and--and mix it. I get it all hooked--get it in like it—like it should be and--and I don't do nothing to the meat. I just put the meat in the center of the meal.

0:14:38.6

AE: And you say you do use a machine?

0:14:39.7

LA: Yeah.

0:14:40.4

AE: Where do you have your machine?

0:14:41.2

LA: Okay, I don't have it here with me. A friend--I let a friend of mine use it. Uh-huh; I let a friend of mine use it.

0:14:45.2

AE: Oh okay; I see. So can you tell me a little bit more about working with Missouri Harris down the way there? That seemed like it was a booming business in its day. Do you know how long she was selling tamales?

0:14:54.7

LA: Oh, she sold them for years. She made money there. She made some money on that corner. See that's the best—better corner than this here. You know. I've got a lot of work to do here. I ain't been here very long. I just--you know, I just went broke, you know, because of--of some things happened. My little baby was in a car wreck and--my driveway go all the way over to--to that fence over there--right here. There's coverings in there, so I got to cut that grass there and get some dirt to put in there and I've got to buy it myself. The state just won't do no more, you know. They put--they put the coverings--I had to help to pay on the coverings and all the things. You see what I'm saying. And so that's what's going on there. And as soon as I get my hand on me another nice piece of money I'm going to fix this here real nice, you know. I want me another camper. I've been having a camper, and it goes up and down; I'm going to get me another camper you know and--and fix my truck up and even get me a new truck where I can hit the whole highway like I want to. Uh-huh.

0:15:49.1

AE: Yeah, travel.

0:15:49.2

LA: Right. And then I can leave my—my--my girls here and let them--I'm going to organize this real nice and I'm going--I'm going to clean that all up and put some concrete down--put some concrete down. I want me a--a motor home up under there. That's what I want there.

0:16:04.8

AE: That's a neat place you have down there [down the hill and behind his tamale stand].

0:16:06.5

LA: Thank you. That part where the woods is going down, I'm going--I'm going to put some lattice at the bottom and put a stream at the top and make a barbecue part there. That's what my plan is.

0:16:14.3

AE: All right, all right. You make barbecue, too?

0:16:15.7

LA: Yeah, I do barbecue, uh-huh. I like to barbecue.

0:16:21.3

AE: So when you came up--you came up learning how to make tamales from your mom and then have you always been making them either for yourself or for other people ever since?

0:16:29.4

LA: Whatever--I've--yeah, I've always made them at home for me. And I've always--you know every time I get into a jam I always turn back to tamales! [**Laughs**] Yeah, but I always made tamales and--and I--I just stopped. The money was slow, and I—I was—I was—I was in the fast lane. I was making fast money. Until I got jammed, and I had to come up out of the fast lane. You know, I'm just going to tell you straight up, you know, that's what--that's what happened.

0:16:52.6

AE: I hear you.

0:16:53.5

LA: And you know so that's what--you know, that's what's going on.

0:16:57.1

AE: And so how many days a week or a month are you here in Yazoo [City] and how many are you on the road?

0:17:01.7

LA: The majority of times—if I had my--I'd be on the road on the weekends.

0:17:05.8

AE: Okay.

0:17:07.8

LA: I'd do shows--you know the late Tyrone Davis—old O. B. Buchanan or Willie Clayton, which is going to be out here in the O'Reilly's place on the third of July, you know, and if I can--if I can just get--be prepared for to be out there because my license is suspended, and I've got to find me somebody to ride me out there and all that, but that's where I want to go. I want to go out

there for that. And--and during the week, like back in they day when I was doing concession stands and going to places, I'd do work on Friday--Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday I'd be home rolling, making up tamales. So I'd take four days off—I took--three days on the road and four days off. That's the way I do it.

0:17:56.4

AE: So if I sent people down here to Yazoo and they came down here during the week mostly you'd be right here?

0:18:01.1

LA: I'd be right here. I can't get my license back until August--well it's going to be really September.

0:18:07.5

AE: Okay.

0:18:07.7

LA: About September second, so I will be here, you know. But I'm going to be--if I don't be here, I'm going to have--someone is going to be here every day mostly, just about every day. During the weekday and on the weekends, too.

0:18:20.0

AE: Do you sell a lot of tamales?

0:18:21.4

LA: I sell--I do pretty--I do good. I do good. I do well. I mean--you know I knock on wood [knocks on counter of stand]. I do well. I really do quite well. I really do. I do well.

0:18:31.6

AE: Do you have a lot of local customers or do you have many people coming through that hear about you or--?

0:18:35.9

LA: It's people--you'd be surprised how many people from different states come through here--farther states. I didn't have no idea--from--they were from different places. I mean, there's different places all over the place, you know, and some--you'll come through and you won't see

no car here, but you're going to be surprised how many people done already been here and gone. You know--well you know they built a new highway out here--a four-lane highway, and bypass old [Highway] 49, so this is 1-49 now. Okay; see this--this is a historic street, now. So it's people from all over that come through, and they're taking pictures of things because this is a legendary--historic street. It's really not as [famous as] probably Beale Street [in Memphis, Tennessee] but what I'm saying is all the--a lot of people that just come from out of Wa--Memphis and they'd be on their way to Jackson, and this was the only way--the quickest way because other--other than go down through Leflore County and come out at Greenwood. So they had to come down through here. It was so busy it would be back-to-back traffic here on this street here, all night and all day when I first moved up here. Before the highway came through. So now that the highway's through, a lot of my--a lot of my customers go around Jackson and then they come back through here, so they can get them some tamales and then go right up into the--into the--before you get to the overpass you can go to [highway] Number Three. Look, I mean go back to--to new highway, which is the shortest way from here to Belzoni or Indianola.

0:20:11.7

AE: Oh, okay. Got you.

0:20:12.3

LA: Yeah, uh-hm.

0:20:13.2

AE: So you still got some traffic but not like it used to be?

0:20:15.3

LA: Right, not like it used to be. But when Miss Missouri was open, oh--I mean, traffic--see they bypass--they made the eighteen-wheelers go around. They either got to go the new highway or they're going through Vicksburg. You understand what I'm saying? So I've been getting a lot of my traffic then. I made a lot of money with just a small cart here [taps on the small wooden push-cart standing just outside of his tamale trailer/stand].

0:20:37.4

AE: I was going to ask you about that.

0:20:38.1

LA: Yeah; I--I just sit right on the corner, like in front of that store [across the street] before I bought this land here and eighteen-wheelers would pull over, you know, and--and half of my business--half of my customers were Europeans.

0:20:52.5

AE: Europeans?

0:20:54.0

LA: Europeans--yes, white--white peoples--what we call white, yeah. [*Laughs*] Right; yeah but they was--they come through here and--and I mean from all over. I mean I--like someplace like New York, California, Washington, DC—just every--all over the place, you know. So my customers from--mostly from out of town; but I got a lot of customers in town, too, but my customers--mostly from out of town. But what I'm waiting on--because I'm--I'm going to run an ad in the paper and go through the Department--letting the Department of the Chamber of Commerce know and--and what I want to do is when I get my driver's license--I want to straighten out. I want to straighten this up here. There's some more work to do here. That's what I want to do. I want to have--build a deck from the highway here where you can walk down and build a deck from here where you can walk down in the yard and sit because I'm going to move all them pallets and put me country a—

PASSERBY: Hello.

LA: Hello--down--country down and--and down and have it be real--real pretty and be looking right. You know what I'm saying.

0:21:58.6

AE: Yeah, that would be real nice. So people can sit and--?

0:21:58.9

LA: Right, right. And then I'm going to build a latrine [pronounces this *lay-trin*]. I'm going to take a part and close it in and put a latrine there for--for--they could use the bathroom and things like that, you know. That's what I want to do; uh-huh for the public, yeah, yeah.

0:22:10.6

AE: Well that will be nice; I hope that happens for you.

0:22:12.1

LA: Thank you--thank you, yeah.

0:22:13.5

AE: So did you ever take this cart downtown, or did you just sell tamales out here?

0:22:16.9

LA: I just take it--I--I just sell them out here. I just put them on the back of that antique 1965 Chevrolet truck back there. It didn't have no cap on it then. I used to sit on the back of that truck, and I would take it around up by the different stores--different stores on the highways. I was not just on this side--up on--on 49 up there; the old K-Mart was up there then. And I would go across and ask the guy if it was okay for me to sit out front with the camper on the back--this cart on back of the camper, and I had two pots on two burners--propane burners. That's how we cook it, you know. And I was cooking mine--I was cooking mines in just--in a typical pot, but see I don't cook them in no regular pot, now. So that--that pot right behind you is a steamer, is what that is.

0:23:06.6

AE: Yeah, because you don't have any sauce with your tamales. So you steam them instead of simmering them, right?

0:23:11.3

LA: Well I steam them to keep them out of the water and--and I also do prep--I prep mines by--when I put them into the truck, I eliminate the strings [to tie the bundles with] by putting them into a--I put them into aluminum foil, and I try to rub the--roll them up and close the top part off real good and the bottom off real good. I--I put them into the--into a steamer for the steam to come up into--from the bottom where they'll sweat.

0:23:47.4

AE: While they're wrapped in tin foil?

0:23:48.1

LA: While they're wrapped in aluminum foil. And this way--and that way there you--the water won't get--won't take the seasoning out. The seasoning will stay right in--it stays right inside. You understand what I'm saying? So that's why I do it like that; uh-hm.

0:24:02.9

AE: Okay. So what is it you think about hot tamales in the Delta? Do you have an idea of where that tradition came from?

0:24:12.7

LA: They say--a lot of peoples—it's just different opinions you know--some of them think they come from--from Africa, some say they come from an old word that we use called "cush," you know. A lot of the--a lot of the--the Africans would use just--just meal--take meal and season it--just take meal and season the meal, you know what I'm saying because a lot of them didn't have enough money to buy meat--a lot of meat--meat like they wanted, so they would take the meal and season the meal, and the meal would taste so good it tasted like meat was in it, you know.

The older--the older womens knowed how to do it, you know, but the young folks don't know anything about that, you know. But anyway I--they say it comes from Mexico; a lot of them say it comes from Mexico, a lot of them say it comes from Texas, a lot of them say that it come in from Africa, and to be honest about it, I don't really know. I--I--I'm pondering now; I'm just thinking that it--it—the hot tamale thing been here for all--all the time. It's been here all the time. If it's--if it's a black thing or a Mexican thing, I don't know exactly which one you know--I could—you could say was first. Or who really was making hot tamales first. I don't--I really don't know. But I know this. Mostly all--all the peoples that I knowed mostly sold tamales, you know, was from African Americans. But now Europeans sell them, too. I know--I know it's a white guy in Greenville that sells tamales on Nelson Street.

0:25:55.4

AE: Oh, okay. At Doe's [Eat Place]?

0:25:57.7

LA: Right. You know him?

0:25:58.0

AE: Yeah, the Signa family?

0:25:59.9

LA: Uh-huh. Because he--he used [parchment] paper with his. He cooks his in paper, you know. But I--I don't know--it's--it's--it's a lot of them that--that sells them--that sell them but there's not as many as--as African Americans and Mexicans. You understand what I'm saying?

0:26:17.0

AE: And they're not a lot of people left here still making them, too. I mean I know that Tony sells to a lot of places, but they're so labor intensive. Do you think there will be a day when people stop wanting to make them?

0:26:28.9

LA: I don't--I don't think that day will come.

0:26:30.3

AE: No?

0:26:29.8

LA: No. [*Laughs*]

0:26:31.4

AE: I hope not.

0:26:32.1

LA: I don't think that day will come, you know. No, so--

0:26:36.3

AE: Well you're going to continue selling tamales here as long as--as long as you can?

0:26:39.2

LA: Yeah, I'm going to continue selling tamales here, but I'm going to also be going in--I used to work on Beale Street in Memphis--I used to help them operate a store called Strange Cargo on Handy Park--on 3rd and Handy--Beale Street over by Handy Park. Jerome Berger and Marsha Jones they're friends of mine from—I used to work with them. I used to sell—you got to sell souvenirs, Beale Street, t-shirts and things like that--Elvis Presley and all that kind of thing like that. I lived in Memphis almost all my life, and I'm going to be going back to Memphis shortly. I'll be going back to Memphis as soon as August comes, and I get my license and everything

straightened back out. I had a DUI on me. That's what messed me--messed me up about my license. But anyway--.

0:27:20.6

AE: Yeah, that'll set you back a little bit.

0:27:20.9

LA: Yeah, that's what messed me up about my license. But I'm going to be going back to Memphis to do concession stands because I'll be able to sell one hundred to one hundred fifty dozen a day in Memphis. Or two hundred—two hundred dozen a day.

0:27:33.2

AE: That's worth the trip. [*Laughs*]

0:27:32.8

LA: Uh-huh, that's right.

0:27:34.5

AE: Are there many other places in Memphis that have hot tamales?

0:27:37.5

LA: There's--there's a few people--it's some peoples up there that sell tamales, but I don't think it's nobody else--no one up there that really--that would be--be an offense to me, you know.

0:27:47.8

AE: Have you heard of this thing out of Chicago called a Mother-in-Law sandwich that's a tamale on a bun with some stuff on it?

0:27:55.9

LA: No, no, no.

0:27:58.6

AE: You've never heard of that? Somebody was telling me about that a couple days ago, so that's the first time I've heard about. I thought I'd ask around.

0:28:01.7

LA: Yeah, yeah. No, I never had that. I know they've got some good food in Chicago now because I stayed in Chicago a few years, you know. But I don't know--I don't know anything about that, you know. It's--what did you call it?

0:28:14.9

AE: Mother-in-Law sandwich.

0:28:16.5

LA: Mother-in-Law sandwich?

0:28:18.0

AE: I don't know how it got that name, but--. [*Laughs*]

0:28:19.7

LA: Yeah. And what did you say is on it? [*Laughs*]

0:28:21.8

AE: I don't know if I can remember everything, but I feel like maybe it has chili on it, but I know it's--it's a tamale in a bun, like a hotdog bun.

0:28:30.7

LA: Okay.

0:28:30.9

AE: And then peppers and stuff on it.

0:28:32.9

LA: Uh-hm.

0:28:33.8

AE: Like a Chicago dog maybe but with hot tamales.

0:28:39.0

LA: Yeah.

0:28:39.1

AE: I just heard about it. [*Laughs*]

0:28:41.5

LA: Yeah.

0:28:43.3

AE: Well do you have any final words about hot tamales in the Mississippi Delta?

0:28:46.4

LA: I--I—yeah, I think that--as a matter of fact, I know hot tamales is--is--it's a dish that--that--that sells real good in the fall of the year. And the summer--the summer months they don't sell as good as they do in the--in the winter, you know. But peoples buy them all the year. And if you know how to cook tamales even in the summer time, they won't be too hot for--I mean, not from the heat--where you can--you can eat them all--you know, any time that you--you know--because what I do with mines, when I get through cooking mine, I take them and--and I set--I set newspaper in the bottom of an ice cooler. And I take my pot--old pot with top and all on it and sit it down in the ice cooler and I put newspaper on the top of it and close it, and they'll stay warm for hours like that, because the temperature--you have to keep them up to 140-degrees and they'll

stay up to 140-degrees for--if I cook them at one o'clock in the day time, they'll stay up to 140-degrees--150 or more for three to four hours--sometimes four or five hours. And if it's hot like--if--if the air [conditioner] wasn't on in there [in the trailer], they would be--they'll stay hot longer than that. I have a thermometer, you know. I stick it down in there and one with the pin that you want on a thing, so I use that to stick it in to see if the temperature stays like it--is like it should be; uh-hm.

0:30:23.2

AE: Yeah. Do you stay out here open late at night? Do you have a lot of people come by when the bars close and stuff?

0:30:27.3

LA: Well that--there's a club right over there, and he was open but now he's closed; a young man got killed over there.

0:30:33.6

AE: Oh.

0:30:35.7

LA: And they--man, let me tell you that's a pool hall [points across the street] and this was an auction here, and you couldn't find no traffic nowhere. I used to stay open all--I used to stay open all night right here, yeah--all night. I'd be open until 5 o'clock--6 o'clock in the morning. And then by the time I'd get ready to close up peoples from out of town coming through early on their way places, they done pull over and--and I'll maybe go to sleep, you know. So it's--it's a good location. It's a really good location, it really is.

0:31:02.5

AE: Do you have any idea if most people that buy tamales from you if they like having them with the cracker or hot sauce or ketchup or anything?

0:31:10.1

LA: They--they--I keep crackers around.

0:31:12.0

AE: Yeah?

0:31:12.2

LA: Yeah; they--they--sometimes they ask for crackers, but the majority of the time they just--they just want just the tamales and--and park. Park and [eat] tamales and a lot of them will ask for--ask--ask me for some crackers, you know. A lot of them be wanting chili, you know. So I make--I'm--I'm thinking about doing a chili--I'm thinking about doing some chili and some chili dogs. I don't know; I may just--I may not do that, but I'm thinking about it.

0:31:40.9

AE: But right now the only thing you do is tamales?

0:31:43.6

LA: The only thing I do is tamales.

0:31:44.7

AE: All right. Well you do it well, my friend.

0:31:45.8

LA: Right; thank you--thank you.

0:31:47.9

AE: Thank you for letting me stand in here in the air conditioning. *[Laughs]*

0:31:50.1

LA: Yeah, because I know you'll be--. *[Laughs]*

0:31:51.3

AE: That was really too--too kind of you. I appreciate it.

0:31:54.2

LA: You is more than welcome.

0:32:00.3

[End Lumumba Ajanaku]