Black Liberations Movement Mosaic

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Oral History Interview

with

Mr. Johnny Newson

By Max Paschall

Clarksdale, Mississippi, USA

October 31, 2008

Interview with Mr. Johnny Newson

Interviewed on October 31, 2008

Location: Clarksdale, Mississippi, USA

Interviewer: Max Paschall

Black Liberation Movements Mosaic

Transcript edited by narrator

Max Paschall: We are here with Johnny Newson. How are you doing?

Johnny Newson: Fine, how about you, Max?

Max Paschall: Good, thank you.

Johnny Newson: Good.

Max Paschall: Do we have permission to tape this interview?

Johnny Newson: Yeah.

Max Paschall: So, when and where were you born?

Johnny Newson: I was born in Sardis, Mississippi, which is about 50 miles from here, about an hour's drive. The area of Sardis is considered the hills. We moved here when I was about three years old. Now I am living in an area that we call the Delta, which is Clarksdale, Mississippi.

Max Paschall: What were your first experiences with segregation?

Johnny Newson: The first experience that I can actually recall that affected me during segregation was when my dad and I went on a little visitation trip. We might have been going to Jackson or something and my dad pulled into a little dairy bar, hamburger stand, and he wanted to go to the window and buy us a ice cream cone. That incident was dark with me because he came back to the car and told us that they don't serve blacks. That incident stuck with me forever for the simple reason, I consider my dad as a hard-working individual trying to provide for us family and for him to walk up to a ice cream stand, a dairy bar, and then have to come back and tell his children, "I can't buy you a ice cream cone because they don't serve blacks." That's totally segregation, that's totally racism right there. That's stuck with me all my life and that's something that no one should ever have to go back and tell their kids, "I can buy you a hamburger," or "I can't buy you a ice cream cone" at this particular store or whatever because they are racist and they don't serve blacks there. So that was one incident that really stuck with me and I've been privy to other instances but when you're a child something like that happens, it just cuts so deep that it, just not it will ever remove it. As you get older and grow older, you kind of understand racism and segregation and you kind of have to deal with it in, and when I say deal with it, you kind of put it in the right perspective according to the events, the time, the gender, and the place at a particular time. But as a child, you can't expect a child to be able to put those events in the right perspective. I can mention things that happened in my later life as an adult, but at that time when you grew up and became an adult, you kind of had a tendency then to understand what is going on, and why there is racism, and why this individual treated you like

this or why you can't do certain things, why you're not allowed to go to certain places. Because of racism. It's a big difference and hopefully the children nowadays won't go through what I went through. Hopefully no parent will ever have to tell their child again, "I can't buy you a ice cream cone from this particular business because they don't serve blacks." And I'm sure that's probably putting it mildly when he came back and told us. He probably was putting it mildly as to what they told him when he went to the window there. So yes, I've been privy to some segregation on instances they are and that was one of the ones that actually really stuck with me.

Max Paschall: What other experiences have stuck with you, from your adult life?

Johnny Newson: In my adult life, I would say that most experiences that stuck with me, was when I went to a white institution, a white college: Delta State University. Let me take you a little trip back down memory lane. I went to predominantly black school all my life which was Immaculate Conception School, which is right down the street here, less than half a block; you all passed it coming in. That was predominantly black school, but it was run by nuns. And you know at that particular time, the majority of your nuns were white, there probably were some black nuns, but we weren't privy to have any black nuns in this area. The nuns were white, treated us fabulous as if we were their children. There was never any racism or segregation when it came to dealing with the students on a professional level from the teachers and student. That was my upbringing from kindergarten to 12th grade. So, as far as being involved or having some segregation or prejudice implemented were bestowed upon me at that time, I can't recall any from that particular area. I graduated from high school in 1971 Immaculate Conception, 1971 now. Bearing in mind they had just desegregated the schools in 1968, okay? I never went

to public school, so I was never involved actually sitting across from white students or going to class with white students or being at a school where you had predominantly white predominantly black or fifty even. So therefore, there was no racism at the school I went to, so in 1968 when they desegregated public schools here, which was Clarksdale High, that's when the riffraff and the uproar really took hold, whereas your white schools were divided for your black schools that you still have that today. So therefore, from 68 to 71, I wasn't involved in the racial struggle, nor was I privy to any of the racism and segregation that was going on in the public school. So, when I graduated from high school in 71, I went to a white college. Not knowing what I was doing, going to a white college, knowing that I wanted to get an education from the best university that was affordable to me in which the university that I elected to go with Delta State University, predominantly white University, with an eight hour's drive from home, so I commuted. So it worked hand-in-hand, because it was somewhere where I could go to school, get my education, come back home, and live in the residence during my educational career there. Not knowing that desegregation had just been implemented and 68 and I graduated in 71, I go to Coahoma Community College, which is a black local community college for two years, 71 to 72, 72 to 73. Everything is fine, everything is hunky dory. So I graduated from community college, 73 I go down Delta State University. It was just like night and day because it's, like, I walked into a institution that said, "Okay, yes, we'll serve you simply because the law say we must, but the law is not here watching us as to how we are going to serve you and asked to how we're going to provide this education to you or how we're going to go about teaching you. Say you can come on in, you sit down and take a sit, and you go through the same problems as everyone else, you get your grade," but basically that was my adult involvement, my first adult venture with segregation on that level. Which means at that age, I might have been, I graduated from high

school 16, 17, 18, I might have been what, 19 the most when I went to Delta State. So age 19 I am sitting there as a young man and everything is basically centered or geared towards the whites in the classroom. So, I've got to do the best I can in order to survive in this white infrastructure now. I've got to do the best I can to make sure I get a passing grade because everything here in this environment is totally new to me. The white institution is totally new to me. But bear in mind, I consider myself a very intelligent individual the connection go to the institution, any school, and do fairly well and pass if I am afforded that opportunity. If I am afforded a level playing field: let's put it like that. Okay. But I wasn't afforded a level playing field for the simple reason I wasn't afforded the same privileges as the white students and I understood what was going on. I would, could recall in this room right next door here, I would cram all night for tests. I mean this stuff that they would sell over-the-counter called [inaudible] the first I ever took it, I was trying to stay awake to study all night for a test or a exam. And I can vividly remember those were the type instances I was involved, with type things that I had to do to ensure that I passed. When you have this other white student come in here, there was a member of one of the local sororities or whatever they had on campus at that time, one of her friends probably worked for the Dean or the instructor of the class. So she had to test. So she comes in, you know, ace the test, that she go right on about her business. And there is no doubt in my mind that some of the instructors knew what was going on because they would make a joke out of it, "Oh, they probably got my test on file" at whatever house or fraternity house or sorority house or whatever. But still, there was never any consideration as to what the students they were actually there that were being underprivileged by the mere fact that they weren't involved with some of their sororities and fraternities what they were going through. I don't think the teachers even cared, I really don't, because it was a situation whereas he probably had

pressure upon him for the simple reason he was a white instructor. So he had to fit in with his white group, his white group, his white class, his white social class, his peers, so therefore he didn't feel inclined at all to reach out and see actually what was going on on the other side of the track. Probably didn't care. Going back to what I said, he would afford us the education, the law said he must do. Which means you've got to have so many blacks for, to get federal assistance, or you got to have so many blacks to say yes that we are integrated now. Or you got to have so many blacks to say yes, "we got 25 blacks out of 100 students." Now, what kind of ratio is that? You follow, but it was just something to pacify the socioeconomic demands at that time to say that you had to have some blacks in the school. So as far as trying to remove the prejudices that went along with that, no. It was there and I can point blank vividly remember when I went to Delta State in 1973, I can almost count the blacks that were there and I want to say was about 12. I don't know why I want to say it was 12, but I can almost count the number of blacks that were there at that particular time. So you can imagine how we felt I mean, that was my first adult encounter with segregation, and from 73 up until today's date, it's still prevalent and it still goes on. When I say they, the people that perpetrate segregation and racism, they don't do it so openly now, but they do it. And I hate it, I hate to even see it come about, but it's so vivid that when you go to a public function, your blacks have a tendency to drift together. Your whites have a tendency to drift together and it is just self-evident that we have gotten to the point towards the position, yet whereas instead of having a black-white relationship, eventually hopefully it will become a great relationship where you can't look at this person, or that particular instance and say it's black or white or versus. But yet when you go to a public function, it's just as point-blank as day and night. You have your area where your blacks are going to sit in and your area where your whites are going to sit in. And I can only speak in references to what goes on here in the

South. But regardless of whether it's the south or it's the north, during my travels, I still see some of the things that have happened. You might have the people on the tendency to be a little bit more friendly or a little bit more open or maybe a little bit more susceptible to accepting blacks and so the degree to racism would be lesser and the degree of segregation would be lesser. Even when it comes down to marriage, you probably find more interracial marriages up north and you do here. I doubt if you could even find five interracial marriages here in Clarksdale with a population of 30,000. So that gives you a pretty good ratio they are asked to what goes on. You see. So.

Max Paschall: You are talking about how blacks tend to move toward blacks and whites towards whites in social functions; did you find that a Delta State?

Johnny Newson: Most definitely. It was there at Delta State more recent then I went there because I graduated from Delta State in 75, my wife went back and obtained her master's public during the 80s, 85, you know, somewhere in that category; I can't give you an exact date, but I could call her to get the exact date, but just to use the timeframe, the something that happened to me in 75 happened to her in 85. Counseling program, 15 counselors may be applied for it, just say five of the 15 were blacks, two of the five blacks might have completed the program and graduated. So it was, program wasn't geared to make black counselors, it appeared to her that the program is geared to prevent black counselors. Because the instructor told them before they walked in, and not necessarily pinpoint the blacks, but "Some of you all going to make it and some of you not. Some of you going to be counselors and some of you not." But then during the course of study and the work, if she specifically taught to the whites, what is that saying? That

she is not interested in making or assisting the blacks to become counselors. As if she is already called them out as to the ones that are going to make it. Just so happens my wife made it. She is one of the ones, I think it might've been to add a class that were blacks, if I'm not mistaken, to blacks graduated during that. She had applied to become a counselor. And the school really gave her holy hell. They even told her that she couldn't graduate, they even did all they could to prevent her from graduating, they even use different studies against her, but it just so happens that course study that she started during her time that she was working on her master's degree, whatever the course study was at that particular time that was the course study that they had to use to give her credentials when they completed the program. But there was one instructor they came up with other types of classes saying that "You haven't completed this class," and she said, "Well, that class is not required of me because I started my course study and 81 and complete under the program that I started under." And she had to go to the dean in order for Dean to intercede to tell this lady checks are completed the course study that she started under and for her to graduate. So, that was just one of the instances that was more recent, that I can recall that it is still being perpetuated, you know, when you talk about segregation and racism there. So a lot hasn't changed that of period time.

Max Paschall: What else do you remember about your early life before high school?

Johnny Newson: I can remember vividly we having to participate in marches. And I guess when you talk about the south of what went on here in the south, there was so much turmoil here the almost had to march in order to get some attention. And when I say March, I'm talking about what we used to call Civil Rights marches. And if something went wrong in City Hall, there was

a boycott. And if something went wrong politically dealing with the mayor and the board of commissioners, if there was an unfavorable ruling, there was a march, something of that nature. And that appeared to be one technique that got people's attention. When you talk about a boycott, you talk about affecting them financially. I mean, you cut off all your resources, you don't spend money on white institutions, white businesses, so that affects them so then you have a tendency to get people's ears then and when you march, they have a tendency to get afraid when you see a group of people actually banding together for a common goal so. So, they have a tendency to actually get afraid when they see people banding together for a common goal participating in March. But it got the attention of the founding fathers here of the city commissioner and the mayor, the board of commissioners. That was something that was utilized as a nonviolent tactic, a nonviolent method, and it worked we weren't violent when we marched, it was nonviolent, but it got the attention of the people we were trying to get to address certain issues here, that they would not lend an ear to. Point blank there were several marches that I participated in and the reason why I participated in these marches was because I worked for Dr. Aaron E. Henry at the drugstore, Fourth Street Drugstore. I was considered what we call a soda jerker at that time. I would make ice cream cone floats, etc., so he operating his drugstore business, and also being interwoven into politics through keeping the president of the NAACP kind of gave me a little experience as to some of the things that were going on, and some of the things that other people were going through. So, some of my early experiences would be actually seeing some of the things that he did and seeing some of the things that he was involved in and, basically, I can recall marching and to be honest with you, I don't know why we were

marching, and when I say why, the definition of why we marched this day, what reason, but I was there because in numbers there is strength so everybody was there marching you know, so what the real reason was I don't know, but all of us marched, and wherever there was those in need we banned together. And I can recall Dr. Henry one day going over to City Hall and we would have people that would go and if there was an issue different people would speak on the issue before the board and just to go to show you how the board tried to alienate blacks and segregate blacks within themselves, my dad went over once and he was speaking about a particular issue, and the mayor asked him which was white at that time "who is Charlie Newsome representing when he come over here?" and I just loved the response that Dr. Henry gave, "When you see one of us, you see all of us." You see so don't try to make us fall out amongst each other. Or be crabs within a barrel and pull each other down. Because when you see one of us, you see all of us. So regardless of who that individual is who is coming to speak at this particular time on that issue, when you see one of us, you see all of us, and he's got our full backing and I just love that today and it stuck with me. And that's something that I am proud of, that quote that he told him. When you see one of us, you see all of us. You see, so that's just one of the little instances that stuck with me during that particular march and those instances at that time.

MP: Do you remember anything else about Aaron Henry, or the Civil Rights movement?

JN: Well Aaron was a very very, busy person, I mean he would come home on Friday night and be gone, Sunday morning. Back to Jackson or back to Washington, wherever. And my biggest association with him, was working at the drug store and his wife would

run the drug store. But Doc would come in, we would call him Doc for short, Doctor Aaron E. Henry. He would come in whenever he had free time he would come in and run the business and let his wife off, or whoever he had there to assist in running the business. But he was definitely politically, orientated and it wasn't so much that he was politically orientated that he wanted to hold public office as he was to want to serve the people. And that's what I saw majority of his time, and that's why I saw him as a public servant because everything and every telephone that heard him on he was working diligently for the public for a cause to get something accomplished. Whether it was something that was taking place in Washington, whether it was a congressional hearing, whether he had to go to Jackson to meet with some people or something, whether it's head start or medi cade. Those issues didn't affect one individual. He didn't work just to say I am doing this solely for this individual. Whatever he did affected either the whole state or the whole nation. When you talk about medicade you talk about the whole nation. When you talk about hiring highway patrol, your talking about not only the state of Mississippi but the whole nation. And when mention hiring highway patrol a few years ago in the 70s talk about segregation and racism, the highway patrol had this standard where you had to be 6 feet so and so, maybe 6ft 1 or 6ft 2, or a certain height and a hundred and fifty pounds. Very few of us in my stature would have been able to become highway patrol O.K. Just another form to alienate us, and keep us in a position where we couldn't qualify for that position. But everyone time I look at a highway patrol now I say to myself he really don't know how he got that job, because Aaron Henry fought hard to make sure that the State of Mississippi, the Mississippi Safety Division changed their guidelines and their standards which made it more friendlier and

eligible for blacks to become highway patrol and I'm sure when you drive up and down the highway now you will see quite a few black highway patrol, and that's one thing that I want to give him credit for during his tenure. That he worked for the people in masses and not for one particular group or one particular area, or one particular individual.

MP: What did you study at Delta Sate?

JN: Political Science.

MP: What did you do afterwards?

JN: I graduated from Delta State in 1975. My master's was Political Science with a minor in History. Went back to work in a master's in Social Studies. Had a friend to come by my business, which we run a auto parts, (inaudible), drying cleaning, and real estate here. Good friend, he graduated from IC also. And he said Johnie thier hiring at Parchmen, Mississippi State Penitentiary, Mississippi State Department of Corrections now. He said their hiring and he brought me an application. I filled out the application, it must have been around October or November of 77. December of 77 I was hired at Parchmen. So I went to work at Mississippi State Department of Corrections, and I worked there for about close to twenty years. So in actuality the degree that I obtained for Delta State in 1975. I didn't use it until twenty years later, let me rephrase that, I used it all during my tenure but in actuality I wasn't elected into a political office until 2004. So that's why I say I didn't use the degree until actually I was elected in 2004 to become a county commissioner here. And county commissioner is synonymous with what we call board of supervisors, so you might call them county commissioners in your state but in actuality we call them board of supervisor's here, but it's synonymous. Same term same type of political office that is held, and that's basically what I am doing now. I am

county commissioner.

MP: What did you do in the Department of Corrections?

JN: I started out as a, we all them security guards at that time, but changed the title to Correction Office 1. So I started out as a correction officer, and I gradually progressed through the scales where I went from Correction Officer 1 to Unit Administrator, from Unit Administrator to a case manager, when I left in 1995, I held the position of a Unit Administrator, correction I mean Case Manager. So, it's basically, and I must say that the degree and the education that obtained over the years it wasn't wasted I mean the, and then to getting back to how I was treated just made me more determined to want to succeed. So in actuality in looking back at my history it only helped me and made (inaudible) steps for me for the future. And like I said I started at Parchmen as a Correction office 1, went to a Unit Administrator, and then progressed to a case manager. And now I am a elected official so, I just give thanks to God you know, he prepared me for all of that and some of the things that are going on nowadays probably really are not preparing the children for the future that they are probably going to run into on down the life so.

MP: What do you mean?

JN: Ok I am going to give you a typical example. If a young man today is not educated, if he is not career orientated, and I just mentioned about my education right? And I just showed to you and exampled to you how I was career orientated, if not I wouldn't have progressed right? But if you go down here on the corner and you catch a young man that is not educated doesn't have a job, not career orientated where is he going to be in twenty years from now? You follow me? I had my sights set on where I

wanted to go and what I wanted to be, and how I wanted to get there, even though it took me twenty years to get there, and I tell people, it took me twenty years to actually get to the position that I am holding today. As a county commissioner as supervisor of district 4, because I ran for it about four times. I ran for it lost, run for it again, every four years, lost, run for it again. But you got to be career orientated you got to have a mindset and you got to stay the course. Now go down the street find me, out of five young men, find me two that is going to career orientated and that's going to stick with something and stay the course for twenty years, and hopefully within twenty years he can reap the benefits of it. And that's why I am saying if they, if the youngsters don't become career orientated and really look for the future then they are going to become stagnate. There going to be doing the something they are doing today, twenty years from now. Now what that might be, I don't even want to speculate. You know, but that is one reason why we have institutions, we have colleges, to prepare students for the future. And provide them with a career something, give them an option as to some insight or fore sight as to what you want to do, and what you want to be doing twenty thirty years from now, you know, so. And I'm very much afraid that if we don't do a better job of educating them and getting some of them off the streets and getting them involved in programs that will give them a future, then we are going to end up paying for it.

Kyle Coston (KC): Why do think, what do you think, are the issues with the youth now here in this county, in terms of them, seeming like there not motivated, not career orientated?

JN: Well you know, you can have all types of reasons for the youth doing what they are doing now. Some of them, the biggest excuse they want to say is peer pressure. They

want to blame everything on peer pressure. Well I image I had a little big a peer pressure also but I went to school and I graduate right? Got a job, you know, if peer pressure going to make me do that, then all of them need peer pressure. But at the same time I understand that times have changed and when you talk about segregation and racism a lot of the youth today is unfamiliar with actually what happen then twenty years ago because the average one of the is only about twenty years old. So they haven't actually been subjected to racism or prejudice which might have at that particular time instilled something deeper into me to make me want to survive and strive to be something better, and to reach other heights where as since they haven't been subjected to that, everything just happy go lucky. I mean I go to school fine, I graduate from high school fine, you know, but to really have to to know or to say that I earned my diploma or I earned my degree, I don't even think they had that nowhere in there vocabulary. I can recall when we graduated from High School I had friends that cried, girls that cried, because they said they had made it, you follow me, you graduate from High School you had done something, you made it you know, but I guess today date with the youngsters, either I make it or I don't make it, either I graduate or I don't make it so you know. Whoop di do. But there are so many things that actually involved in there life today that probably I can't even speak to because of the generational gap. Certain things they gone tell me, certain things they gone let me involved, certain things there not. Even with my son, you know, I mean he will go across the street and talk to one of his friends first before he come and tell me. But you know I'm not suppose to know. But yet being his dad I can automatically assume or surmise as to what is going on. But that goes back to peer pressure whereas he would have a tendency to drift toward people his own age and

discuss issues with them as to how it affects him and them you know and their surroundings rather then come to me and say well this is what's happening with us dad or this is what is happening with me. How should I approach this, how should I handle this so. And I can only speak to what's happening to the youth being on the outside and just witnessing it from a point of a visual observation. And what I see is, and I can't so much say it's drugs. Because I don't see a lot of them doing drugs. You know it might be there, they might be accused doing it I don't know, I don't see it. Let me put it like this, but then they don't it around me. Ok? Fights I see them fight, I've even seen gang fella's stand off, what you call them toe to toe and I just tell them naw, we ain't going to have this here. I get right between them and they would go there different ways. I guess, they might need a little guidance, a little leadership and another thing that a lot of people like to say is causing a lot of youth problems. The first thing they say is well, single parents. You know, if it is, it is, if it ain't it aint. But I can't put my finger on that being and issue because you have a lot of single parents that actually raise their children and they do good. So you can't put your finger on it, and say this is the pulse as to what's causing this between the youngsters. So, it's so many things that I would say that's causing interference in the youths life today, that would cause them to go astray.

MP: How would you describe gangs in Clarksdale right now?

JN: Well I just gave you one instance of one gang. What happen I was sponsoring a carnival one night and two gangs just stood toe to toe. Excuse me (coughing). Just stood toe to toe, as if they wanted to fight, and I know the fellas and they knew me. And I just got rights between them and told them naw we not going to have this, take this somewhere else. And they just backed down. And the family said yall see that the

know what I mean. And it wasn't so much I was taking sides between the gangs because I wasn't because I care just as much for this kid as I do this kid but not the place and time, and to be honest with you we don't need known of this gang stuff. Somebody has got to take a stand and say O.K this is enough of this. Where is this going? No good deed is going to come of it. So therefore the gang activity was quelled, you know how it was quelled, through police activities. And when I say police activities, the city took the approach of, Ok the gangs are so bad here, let's bring in resources from other agencies which end up being the U.S Marshalls to come in and implement certain programs clean sweep or whatever and they come in and they end up arresting go gogs of gang members which basically I guess, what you call cleaning up the streets. So that kind of quelled your little gang rivalry at that time. Which it worked, but the question is did it solve the problem? You know you can come in and take this certain groups of gang members out and this certain group of gang members off so you eliminate their gang rivalry but you have youngsters coming up and if you not addressing the gang problem in a fashion where as it eliminates itself, then you gonna have to come back ten twenty years later and do the same thing again. So in actuality I don't think they actually took the problem at hand and come up with a solution to it. And I think the solution would have been, and this is just me speaking from my point of view, we always taking about mentoring, we always talking about single parents not having a dad in the house, so if that is an issue then we need to develop programs that will suffice to serve as a substitute of positiveness for the negativeness that's automatically in the street. If we need a mentoring program, if that's going to help this kid that is ten, eleven, twelve years old so when he gets to seven-teen eight-teen he can make some sound decisions then that's what we need to do.

Rather then waiting till he get to be eight-teen and lock him up because he is in a gang. If we need to develop some type of school resource programs to help, then that's what we need to do. Rather then wait till he get to be nineteen, twenty, twenty-one because he has failed two or three years and he is still in the twelfth grade and he is what nineteen years old now so everybody is making fun of him so he is causing a disturbance in the classroom, so therefore you got a problem there. But you didn't address your problem early enough. You should of addressed it early enough so therefore you wouldn't have this problem now. For one you wouldn't have a detainee. What you call a retainee, when he is retained, he is retained. He is retained several years, so you wouldn't have a retainee in the twelfth grade that's been retained two or three years that they constantly kept passing because he was of age. But you passed him and he still can't read and write so he is still going back where? On the streets. He going to get right back into the same situation, same environment that he was in when he was sixteen seventeen years old, with this gang activity. So there are a lot of issues that need to be addressed and they probably need to be addressed in a different fashion then the way we are addressing then they way we are addressing them today.

MP: What kinds of young people would say are most attracted to gang life and why would you say they are?

JN: Well you know what, I know what your thinking and I know what the general public thinks, they going to say low economic status children which is a lie. Ok, which is a lie. Because I have seen some children which have come from six figure families involved in gang activities Ok. When I say six figure families I mean, mom and dad are wealthy they have their own vehicle providing with there own apartment, children don't

have work provided with allowance. So you can't say that this kid, that was raised by his mom alone and because his mom worked on a hourly wage job, was more prone to become involved in gang activity, it's not. I wouldn't buy that if you bagged up in my front yard and dumped in truck load of money. You still couldn't make me buy that, because I have witnessed it, and it's just not like that. I guess I don't know if you want to say peer pressure is stronger then parental pressure, then there it is Ok. Because it is definitely not just the socioeconomic level, its not that. Not at all so I guess it would just boil down to the kids hanging with the wrong crowd. And want to become apart of the wrong crowd and willing to do the things that other kids do to be excepted in that crowd.

MP: When you were working with the department of corrections, do you have any, were you in contact with prisoners or were you, or was it more of a office job?

JN: No, my first job with the department of corrections was basically contact type of position because if you were working with prisoner's you are working in a environment where you are around prisoners. It's just like the only different between a penitentiary and a college, is that you have prisoners at the penitentiary and students at the college right. Just use this as a analogy I am a instructor at the college and the students are the individuals that would be parallel to me being a correction officer at the penitentiary and your inmates at the penitentiary. I mean same type of ability to interact, one on one. Or in a group wise so it's not like that when your working at a penitentiary that the things that you see on television everyone is locked down, the officer walking down the hallway. Naw it's like that, its just basically like I just mentioned. Like instructor in a classroom. So you have inmates that are in a dormitory type of environment and you have correctional officers there that provide security, customs, and control. So that's

basically the way it operates. And that's the contact that I had with them.

MP: What kinds of prisoners were there?

JN: We had, I guess for classifications. A custody inmates were the least non-violent and, when I say least non-violent you A custody inmate would be considered as a trusty, someone that you could actually put trust in and let him do errands or work specific jobs. Your B custody inmate would be your inmate that is a little less of an individual that you could, a little less trustworthy. Which means you might would have to monitor his activities or guard him a little bit more closely. And then you C custody inmates they would totally what you would call lock down. Now that would be the type of inmate that you would see actually in the cell when you hear you cell doors clang behind him, and he's locked down that's you C custody inmate ok.

KC: So what type of offenses would you have to, what type of people were in C?

JN: Anyone can be in the C category because it would be a category that actually. Actually anybody could be in the C category because it is a category that you more likely will come in when you originally come into a institution and there would be what we call reclassify you. So you would probably come in as a C custody inmate, it just depends on the nature of your crime, you will be elevated to a B or an A. Ok a C custody could be a violent crime, armed robbery, assault, rape, murder etc. like you would automatically come in as a C custody inmate. D custody inmate also, I didn't mention that's what you call your death row inmates. So they automatically come in D custody because they have been sentenced to death by the court or some nature. But, you have all types of inmates working at the penitentiary. So it's just a matter of what classification you are in and your units are also segregated depending on the type of classification. And today

we have inmates that are working in the community but they are called A custody inmates. And then too, I learned that you just don't look at a person, even though he is an inmate and say ok you bad bad bad, it's not like that because an individual can take a drink run out here have an accident, and someone could get killed. But that doesn't make him a bad person he just ended up having what a freak accident. Somebody got killed in the accident so then, should people look at him and say he's a murdered he killed somebody, he's an inmate he was sentenced to the penitentiary, or should they actually look at him say well you know you apply the circumstances to the particular instance to him. So and I learned to except that because a lot of people, when I went to the penitentiary yea I was afraid of inmates. But when you actually look at it, the same inmate that is out here on the street that you knew today that went to the penitentiary tomorrow for an accident or for cutting somebody or for selling drugs or something, does it make that inmate any more violent then when he was on the street and you saw him at the corner grocery store then when you see him in a penitentiary in a different environment. That's my (inaudible) to that.

MP: Where you in contact with all different grades of prisoners or just one?

JN: No, you were in contact with all grades of inmates. Go back to what I said you had different units, of different classifications, it depends on which unit you are working at. Now if you were working at maximum security unit then you was working at a unit that had C custody and D custody inmates. C custody lock down inmates they are very violent D custody inmates are the ones that were on death row.

MP: And your unit?

JP: pardon me?

MP: And your unit?

JN: My unit that I worked in? I worked in all of them.

MP: So how would you describe, what kinds were most prevalent at that time?

JN: Drugs, was the biggest of the crimes, you had people selling drugs. You had maybe armed robbery, rape, murder, crime of passion, something of that nature. That was probably your biggest of your crimes you know so.

MP: Were drugs always in the area or did they come in at a specific time?

JN: What do you mean when you say the area?

MP: I mean were they always in Coahoma County?

JN: I would say yes, but at the same time I wasn't privy to whether they was coming in, when they was coming in. So I can't give you a definite date or time frame. But I am sure drugs have always been here, in the course of conducting my bail bond business we've often gotten people out of jail for drug use, or drug sale, but like I said, if your not in a arena where you are dealing with people such as the court system, such as the jail system, such as bail bond then you really don't know what is happening in that arena. You don't know who's going to jail for it, who's getting locked up or who is selling drugs. So I would say yes drugs have been here quite sometime, and I didn't know it. To be honest with you, the first time I ever knew anything about drugs is when I watched the movie Superfly. I don't know whether you have seen it. But that's that first time I ever knew how and knew anything about how, or knew anything about how actually the drug scene actually operated. I think that movie was what in the sixties, you know sixty five, sixty eight, something like that. So and that was the only time that I actually knew anything about how the drug scene was coming abroad. I guess the movie depicted it

very readily because you had this (inaudible) buying drugs from white counterparts that was selling the drugs and they was pushing them back into the black neighborhoods. That's how Freddy ended up dead, Freddy's dead. That was just one of the situations there.

MP: How did drugs get into Coahoma County?

JN: How?, now you asking me a six million dollar question? I couldn't answer that question if you gave me a stack of encyclopedia's and all of them was hooked up to Washington DC through the internet I couldn't answer that question because really I don't know. I don't know, I would be wrong to sit here and try to conjure up an anwer or a response to that question because I don't know who brings them and I don't know they come in, I'm not involved in the know of how they would come in because I am not in law enforcement so I don't have any tracking system and I am not involved to the point where I am privy to that information. But I do know one thing, blacks don't have helicopters, they don't have boats and they don't have airplanes, so now, I don't know how they are getting in here unless they are coming in via you know automobile which I am sure probably the bulk of them are. But my point is I don't know of any blacks that have boats that come cross from Cuba or wherever the drugs are coming from. I don't know of any landing strips where they are flying in and dropping them so, that's why I say that's a six million dollar question that the chair and chief of police would probably have to try and answer for you because if they can answer the question themselves one hundred percent, then they could stop the drug trafficking. So, I think that's far fetched right now.

MP: Socially, what do you think explains the prevalence of substance abuse of some

segments of Clarksdale's society?

JN: What perpetuates it?

MP: What makes people abuse drugs here?

JN: Socioeconomic level. Lack of jobs. Lack of, let's back up. Lack of jobs, lack of self-esteem right. No money no honey, no money you can't go to the grocery store, you can't go buy a car, you can't go buy a house, you can't dress properly, you can't keep up your personal hygiene. Simply because you don't have a job. So if you want to eliminate a person's desire to use drug then you uplift him and up him in a socioeconomic status or position whereas he can feel good about himself then he won't have to use drugs. I've always been taught that alcohol is a pain killer. So I'm assuming that drugs is parallel to that. You know, they say drugs take them to another phase, whereas beam me up Scotty, takes them to another entity whereas they really remove themselves from what is happening here. So it's like they don't want to except the now, so they take the drugs to escape it. So give them a good job, give them a good training, give them a good education, and you probably could eradicate the desire to use drugs like that.

MP: What do you think about non-violent resistance?

JN: I love it, I love it.

MP: or militant resistance?

JN: what?

MP: Non-violent versus, I guess less non-violent resistance?

JN: Well there is only one or two, it's either or, it's not a grey area there. Either you are non-violent or you are violent. I love the non-violent tactics because, if I'm not

mistake Dr. Martin Luther King went and I don't know if studied up under Gandhi, but if I'm not mistaken was it Gandhi that first utilized the non-violent tactics and I think that's how Dr. Marin Luther King incorporated it into his Civil Rights Movement. So I am totally aware of the non-violent tactics and I'm more pro non-violent measures then I am of violent measures. I can't see anything coming good of using violent tendencies or violent tactics at all. Not at all.

MP: What's the importance of religion to you and umm to your family and to the community?

JN: Religion, plays a very very deep integral part of my family. We were brought up going to church every Sunday, Sunday school church, whatever. And the reason being that's basically all we had to focus on, that's all we had to more or less depend upon was our religion to pull us out at that particular time. And that's one reason, you mention some of the youth now, they don't have that footing and that background, the religious background. And I can explain to you a little bit more in depth why I say that, but religion has been something that has been so deeply rooted in my family that I can't even imagine not being involved in some type of religious activity like going to church or listening to a sermon or something. Because now if you notice that photograph there is Mahalia Jackson. Did you yall know her, you heard her? She is a religious gospel singer you know, and you can look at the expression on her face right there, religion is deeply rooted within her soul also. So and a lot of the things that happen to us during my upbringing if it had not been for religion then I probably would have been in a penitentiary. Because some of the things that we were subjected to such as racism and segregation you more or less had to have an out let of it to eliminate resorting to violent

tactics so your outlet was through religion. Going to church, praying at night, getting on your knees, etc. And hoping for a better day tomorrow. So yes, religion has been deeply within my family. My dad was a member of the Church of God in Christ and my mom was a Baptist. I got a little bit of both of it and I ended up being a Baptist simply because my mom carried us to church wit her so we got baptized in the Baptist denomination. My dad went to Church in God and Christ and I still see members of his congregation his ex congregation cause he is passed now, and they will say, you know your dad was a a member of the Church in God and Christ which means they excepted me there also. I am glad and proud of that, to know. People back then if it had not been for religion I don't think a lot of them would have made it. I imagine you would have had people committing suicide and murder and everything else, so they had something to fall back on. They had God to fall back on, they had someone to trust in which was God and they prayed and they excepted things as they are, and they wished for the better.

MP: What do you think it meant for the Civil Rights movement in Mississippi?

JN: Religion? If it had not been for religion we probably would not have had the Civil Rights movement. We probably would have had another revolution. You know so, religion played an integral part because all of your Civil rights movement and activities basically started or was held in a church and it was predominantly lead by a minister. So quiet naturally if you have a minister leading a congregation he's not going to get up there and pray go get your gun and shoot. He's going to give your another method to handle your frustration which is through religion. He's going to preach his sermon, he is going to explain to you the do's and don'ts of it and the rights and wrongs of it and last thing he is going to tell you is leave it in the hands of the Good lord. And that's why a

lot of the activities that we were involved in during the Civil rights were non-violent. And I don't have to call names but all of the ministers that I know of that was involved in the Civil rights movement were non-violent. Such as people here in Clarksdale Rev. R.I. Drew, we had Rev. Carr Thomas, Rev. Michael Williams, we had Rev. Krump, Dr. Aaron E. Henry, all these people were involved in non-violent activities. And all of the mass meetings that they had were held in churches. So it was like you going to church for this particular political movement but this church is a sanctuary and it's sanctioned by God so you still have to bear in mind why you are here and respect your religion why you are here. So Rev. Abernathy, Rev. Martin Luther King, so you understand how the scenario, and that's just a few names that I can call because history probably has a whole history book of how ministers played an integral part in the Civil Rights movement there.

MP: Why do you say without religion it would have been revolution?

JN: For one, if you don't know right from wrong, then you do wrong. If you don't have another outlet to release your frustration then you get your gun, and that's your outlet. And that's only one outlet because once you pull the trigger the consequences of pulling the trigger is jail and penitentiary, so you really haven't accomplished anything. That was an outlet that no one really wanted to get involved in or anyone wanted to really express themselves via, but you could express yourself through freedom of speech all day long. So that's why the religion played an integral part in the non-violent movement. It goes way back in history, it goes all the way back to Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad, it goes way back to your slave people working in the field there. You know it goes way back where they would sing songs for communication, where they would gather at the river to have services, you know so, religion has been deeply rooted

in black America, and I think it will forever be deeply rooted in black America. It might not be rooted to the level that it was deeply rooted into me because some of the things that I went through that made me closely cling to my religion a lot of people now are not going through it. I can relate to, when I was going to church as a youngster you had a lot of elderly people in the church, and I don't know if yall ever seen a lady shout in church or not, if you hadn't then you know it's something that yall grew up in your area that you missed ok, but this lady would feel so close to her religion and to God that it's like she had to express her emotions publicly. And that's where the shouting will come ok? But now you go to church, you got his beautiful young lady sitting here in her expensive outfit and her Lewy Vaton purse etc matching, where is the emotion and feeling for her to express her religion and her love for God physically by shouting? Haven't seen it have you? I know you haven't you know. But it's just something to let you know in the difference how people then express there love and their religion versus how people today express their love and religion. So next time you go to church pay that attention.

MP: Do you remember what kinds of music, or what kinds of songs were being sung during the Civil rights movement?

JN: The only song that I can really say that I'm privy to and I recall was We Shall Overcome. That's a song that we always sing when we march down the street, We Shall Overcome. And to be honest with you, I have participated in a couple of most recent marches and they didn't even sing the song. You know, they probably didn't even know the words to the song, some of the people that were marching. But I'm sure there were other songs, but that's the only one I personally can recall and I'm sure everyone, if you just mention that they know a few notes to We Shall Overcome. That's one of the most

popular tunes that we sang during the Civil rights era, and I guess if you dissect that and look at what it means, were hoping that we will overcome. And then if you tie the religious aspects into it, all we have to do is hope and pray that God one day will what? Allow us to overcome. And that song, like I said, it just stuck with me, We Shall Overcome.

MP: What marches have there been here recently?

JN: We usually would have something like an annual march, like on Martin Luther Kings birthday or something like that, Martin Luther King day, we might get together at a particular location and we will march to one of the local churches and have a little Martin Luther King program. But getting back to what I said, some of the children don't even know the words to the song, We Shall Overcome, they really don't. And some of the probably don't even know why they are marching, and some of them probably don't even know who Martin Luther King is. They know some of the highlights of his life, but to really know, I don't think so. I really don't.

KC: And why do you think a lot of the kids don't know about this tradition?

JN: They hadn't been taught. They hadn't been taught. You know I could go back here and pull out three or four books that have really stuck with me. One of the them, the young lady depicted Aaron Henry, during the, I don't know if it was the 65 or 68 Democratic Convention. You all familiar with that? When Huber Humphrey was running for President and the Mississippi delegation which was Aaron Henry, Fannie Lou Hamer, and bunch of them. Did they go to Atlanta, Georgia, Washington, somewhere but they wanted to be seated such as during the presidential convention. And I read the book, and the book stuck with me because I didn't really know how Aaron felt inside

until I read the book later years after he had died because some of the things that he did then I can relate to it, as to how he felt. One thing that he would do when he came back, this record came out by Brook Benton, Rainy Night in Georgia. So I'm thinking that this convention might have been held in Georgia, was it?

KC: I think it was Atlanta

JN: Yea Atlanta, but anyway the story goes to say that Aaron Henry was in one hotel and Fannie Lou Hamer and group of them was in another hotel and Huber Humphrey and his delegation was playing both organizations against each other as to how many seats they were going to have at the Convention, and I don't know what happen but according to the book it was just raining and raining in Georgia, and I think Aaron Henry and Fannie Lou Hamer had a falling out about how the process should actually take place. And when Doc came back every time that song would come on the radio, Rainy Night in Georgia, by Brook Benton, he would stand still and listen to it, as if it just hurt him deep down in his heart as to what happen at that time. And after the song went off he would reach over and unplug the radio and go on about his business. And I never knew what that meant to him until I read that book by that young lady. To get back to what I was saying to you, a lot of the youth nowadays really don't know what Aaron did and the rest of them did and what happen during the Civil rights era so they don't have any foundation as to what went on then so and that's why some of them really don't appreciate the things that their taking for granted now, and really there taking everything for granted now. The jobs, taking the jobs for granted, and the Civil right movement not only helped blacks, it helped everyone, Latinos, Whites, etc. And men also, next time you all fly, look at the little elderly white lady that is pushing the cart up and down the

aisle, because twenty five years ago she had to be thirty-six, twenty-four, thirty-nine, you follow me? She had to be a certain age. Look at the gentleman now that is pushing the cart up and down the aisle on the airplane because a few years ago you didn't have any male air line attendants. I don't know whether you all have see any of that or not, but that's something that the Civil rights movement helped everyone. Latinos there over here so they have certain rights now and had it not been for the Civil rights movement then their rights would have been violated so it's not like, it goes back to what I said, when Aaron spoke and went to any organization he wasn't going for the blacks, he wasn't going saying well I'm just doing this for my people, because what ever the issue was he wanted the issue to be world wide, he wanted it to be a national issue which affected everyone, and just so happen that a lot of the things he did, did affect everyone.

MP: What else do you remember about Aaron Henry, do you think he changed at all after the Convention in Atlanta?

JN: I would say that, it kind of divided the party because

MP: DMFDP?

JN: Yea, it divided the party so. He remained to be president of the NAACP for a long time I can't recall the exact year that he was unseated but he remained president for a long time. And they always made a joke that since he was president I was going to vice president and a lot of his political aspirations bled off into me. So, it just so happen that I left and went to college, so that kind of separated us but, Aaron he, during is tenure he helped a lot of people, he provided a lot of assistance and encouraged a lot of people. So, and I'm sure when he came back after that delegation during the Atlanta trip when he and Fannie Lou Hamer had difference of opinion and I don't know exactly the scope of

the difference of opinion, but I can only recall what I read in a book, that it, I'm not going to say it changed him to the point where he became bitter, but I'm sure there was a different outlook on life. And then too, you had Fannie Lou Hamer from (inaudible) Mississippi, trying to do things in her particular area that might not coincide with what Aaron was doing in Coahoma county because I think Fannie Lou was from Sunflower county. So there were a lot of things that were happening in Sunflower county that didn't happen here and vs., because there are a lot of things that happen in Sunflower county, if you read the history of Sunflower county, was a little more detrimental to then what happen here in Coahoma county. It was some startling times, and just to mention one thing that I know happen here in Coahoma county, and we talked about how the churches played a integral part into religion, during the Civil rights struggle and during the non-violent movement, they were having a meeting one night in one of the local churches and someone through a (inaudible) cocktail through the window, and the church was full and my dad picked up the (inaudible) cocktail and threw it back out of the window. That was, they put that in Jet magazine, I don't know if any other magazines carried it, but today you can find that in the Jet magazine, at that particular time that instance did happen. That was just some of the thing and one of the things that happened during the Civil Rights era that people were subjected to you know. And that wasn't anything unusual that was just a form and a tactic of intimidation and threat so.

MP: What do you think about the current election?

JN: To be honest with you, well the first thing I want to say is I am definitely an Obama man. Second of all I am a second Obama man because, not because he is black, but because I want change. And I can relate that to my race, a few years ago when I was

elected in 2004 because I ran on the same platform, it's time for a change. And my opponent at that time had been in this particular office for about thirty years, and I was a newcomer and ran for the position about four times and never was successful. But it's just time for a change. I mean I don't care if you are blue, black, green, grey, or yellow, it's time for a change because with the economy as it is now and I just want to use like everybody else now, we can't stand another eight years of this same economy you know I am not knocking the McCain Palin ticket, but if the McCain Palin ticket is going to be a repeat of the Bush ticket, then will know what we are in for. So and like I said I wouldn't care who was running, it didn't necessarily have to Obama, you know it could have been any intelligent individual, then I would been voting for that individual because there is no way I can logically say, Ok I can except eight more years of what is going on, and I can feel it, and when I say I can feel it, I can feel it in all sorts of fashions. I can feel it financially, I can feel it in my business, I can feel it in the people's cry's and their tension, they want jobs they want stability, they want to be able to provide a decent living their family. So if the Republican ticket is not sensitive to the people's need's then we don't need to even think about supporting a Republican ticket, and so far I haven't seen any evidence that a Republican ticket is sensitive to the people's needs. Now if it is, it's not my needs because I can tell you, we can probably go down the street here and count the people that don't have jobs, that want jobs, or that have lost jobs. We can just go through the community here and talk about the jobs, which have been outsourced, we got a plant less then two blocks from here, Cooper Tie Rubber company, and from what I gather now, they are making a product which they use to make here in New Mexico but shipping it back here to this plant to be repackaged, so now where is that beneficial to

Coahoma county or to the United States when you have outsourced a job. And it gets down to the nickel's and dimes of it. When you get down and start counting nickel's and dimes and you say well we can make more money in New Mexico but making this product there and shipping it back here and repackaging it and then selling it but yet you don't look at the consequences of the people that you have alienated and fired and don't have jobs, and these people can't even buy your product anymore. So it's a situation whereas if the Democratic ticket is going to be more sensitive to the working mans needs then that's who I'm supporting, but I'm a life long Democrat I have always been, matter in fact I would probably support the Democratic ticket regardless because I really feel that the Democratic ticket is more or less in compliance with what the people, the working man everyday. So, it's just my position on that, and I see it everyday and with my businesses and I can speak from a point whereas, where I can speak from statistics, any time your business drop off two thousand dollars per week, because lack of jobs, because people have gotten laid off. Then it's telling you something, it's telling you that the economy is bad. When you walk up to people and you ask them how are they doing and they say I am trying to survive, or I'm barely hanging on I am trying to make it, and this is not anything that is spoken randomly, this is something that is spoken readily and repeatedly over over and over. It's not like it's one out of ten, more or less, it's nine out of ten. That's trying to make it. So now what does that tell you, and how does that explain to you and show you where the economy and the country is going, so that's why I said, you question was what do I think about the election, we should of voted last week. And we should have had a new president here today, now like I said. Just so happen that the time is right and Obama is the Democratic nominee, and things don't happen

haphazardly. And you can go back to my religion, things just don't happen haphazardly. Things just don't pop up out of the clear blue sky. Water just don't fall for no reason. And I'm not looking at Obama as being a black individual, or a white individual, I am looking at Obama as being the best individual for the job right now so, and that's my point on it, I'm all for it, I'm ready to like they say Rock n Roll.

MP: Is there anything else you would like to say?

JN: Everything went fine, any other question, you might want to know about?

MP: Not that I can think of, you guys? Thank you