Black Liberations Movement Mosaic
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Oral History Interview
with
Mr. Charles Reid
By Atandi Anyona
Coahoma Community College, Clarksdale, Mississippi, USA
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Interview with Mr. Charles Reid

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Atandi Anyona: Okay, my name is Atandi Anyona from Dickinson College. And I'm going to be interviewing Mr. Charles Reid. I hope it's okay if we record the interview.

Charles Reid: Yes, it's fine.

Atandi Anyona: And would you begin by giving us a small introduction about who you are, where you were born, and things like that?

Charles Reid: Okay. Well, as you said, I'm Charles Reid. I am from Clarksdale, Coahoma County, Mississippi. I was born and grew up most of my life, spent most of my life—growing up and adulthood, with the exception of the time I spent going off to college and in the military. And I worked two years in Boston, Massachusetts. And I worked 18 months in Texas. But other than that I've been here as a citizen of this area. And, I have been employed here at the Coahoma Community College for most of my adult life. I am now 73 years old and retired.

Atandi Anyona: How did you end up in the teaching profession here?

Charles Reid: After finishing college and getting into the military I just decided I just wanted to come back and give something back to my community. I decided after getting certain degrees, masters and specialist degrees, I came back here to work in my community, and I've been working here at the community college. I had a, I'm kind of dedicated to this area as far as education is concerned. I'm the third generation of my family that's been involved in this college. The college grew out of the high school it was founded in 1925 and it's still here on campus; it operates in grades nine through 12. And the high school, as I said, and started in 1925. My grandfather, whose mother was born in slavery, migrated here from Alabama with the Sherad family, for we grew up in a little community called Sherad, Mississippi which is about 6 miles southwest of here. That's where I grew up on a farm that was settled by the Sherad. My grandfather, he purchased land from the Sherad's and from other... you know, the Illinois Central Railroad that was selling land and it began to accumulate and we ended up having 200 acres of land. So I grew up on a 200 acre land farm here in Coahoma County. But my grandfather, although he was not totally educated, he was very smart. And he helped to influence the plantation owners here to begin a high school for African-American students and in 1925, with the help of the Board of Supervisors and some of the plantation owners, Coahoma Agricultural High School was started. And in 1949, there was a decision made by the Board of Trustees of the high school to add another year on to, beyond the 12 grade, to begin a junior college. And the next year the second year was added. So it became a, that's how Coahoma Junior-College got started in 1949. My father came to work out here in 1955 as an instructor and later became

the registrar. And when I came back to work here, he was the registrar of the college. I started off teaching and later became an administrator in 1968. And I served as an administrator from 1968 until 1996 when I finally retired. So I've been involved with this area, with the college, not only the college, but the community for many years.

Atandi Anyona: How was your childhood life like growing up here in Coahoma?

Charles Reid: Within my family life and with the individuals I associated with, it was nice. But when you got outside of our comfort area, it was kind of... everything was totally segregated in growing up here in the Mississippi Delta. And, although we had what's called now, "integration," it's not really integration: its “desegregation.” We never really integrated here. When the laws were passed it became desegregated. But it's never been integrated here. We still lead our separate lives, just, basically what we grew up in. But it is better; the education system is better and, but they are not integrated—just desegregated.

Atandi Anyona: But in your, like, young, when you're young, you do have to do things like pick cotton...?

Charles Reid: Yes. All the crops that were grown there on our farm, we were response for harvest, harvesting and raising them. In fact, most of our food we grew on our farm when I was growing up, such as the animals and the chickens and all those things that we raised, all those and our farm crops that we had to chop the weeds out of the cotton and other crops that we grew and then the harvest time we had to be responsible for picking the cotton, or shucking the corn,

whatever: pulling or shucking the corn, or whatever we were doing. So we grew up doing that. In fact, when I went off to college the money that we raised on our farm helped us, helped my family and us off to college. I have, I have; there are seven of us siblings. I have six brothers and sisters and all of us are college educated except one. All of us are still living. My father is dead; my mother is still living. She just turned a hundred years old and she's still living.

Atandi Anyona: Was there, when you are doing your education, because during that time the schools were segregated, right?

Charles Reid: Totally segregated.

Atandi Anyona: How was it, was it very difficult to study because of lack of resources or how was it as compared maybe to now?

Charles Reid: We did a lot with a little, I guess you could say, during that time, we always got secondhand things and going to school: we got secondhand books, all materials were secondhand, all of these hand-me-down things and we never really had... I started school in a one-room schoolhouse. Had to share it with one teacher serving all eight grades. It was an eight grade, one-room schoolhouse. And one teacher serving all eight grades, so that's how I started out. Then, later on, we had to come to school within the city of Clarksdale. In my elementary school years, I was able to attend the Clarksdale public schools. But, I started out in a one-room schoolhouse in Sherad, Mississippi. And, we didn't have any materials. We walked to school—about a mile and a half—walking to school. The buses that carried the white students passed by

us while we were walking to school. But we never had a bus to even ride to school in when I was growing up.

Atandi Anyona: In terms of, is there a time when you would miss school and do work in the farm? Or were you at school...

Charles Reid: Okay. Back when I was going up, they had what they called a "split session school," that you went to school during the non-harvest and non-farm working period. Then, when it's time for to harvest the crops and work in the fields, you work in the fields and there was no school. We had a split session during the year just to make sure that you took care of the crops and you work for the farmers. [Laughs]

Atandi Anyona: And did that interfere with your schooling?

Charles Reid: Yes sir, it made it a handicap for us growing up that we really spent less time going to school and we did working.

Atandi Anyona: And, looking at how the education system has grown right now, like you told me, in your community it was okay, but there's a lot of hostility outside. Did you ever experience some of that—let's say discrimination or racism personally? Or indirectly?

Charles Reid: Oh yeah, we were called all kinds of names. I'm not going to say the kind of names we were called when we were growing up. We experienced a lot of hatred and things

when we were growing up. There was, you know, there was white supremacy all around us and we were exposed to it. And we knew our place and we stayed in our place back then when we were growing up. But, it was later during the civil rights movement when things got turbulent that we were able to, I guess, helped to change some of the things that were facing us.

Atandi Anyona: That, were you either directly or indirectly involved with the civil rights?

Charles Reid: Mostly indirectly. I became one of the earlier persons registered to vote and I became a registered voter. We had to go through a test, pay poll tax, and we had to recite things from the Constitution and all that to register to vote. And I became a registered voter but I was protesting that way. But in later years, I wanted to really be involved in things going on from the inside, not as a protester, but as a participant on the inside. So I began to join in the early 70s and up to the present, I joined a lot of different organizations that very few of us were members of. In fact, some of them that I became a member of, there was no one; like the Chamber of Commerce, like the Rotary club, and those kinds of organizations. I became members of just to find out what was going on. Because decisions were made for us but not by us. And we were, I just wanted to know, being on the inside, I could really find out what was going on. And in 2001 I was selected as citizen of the year for Clarksdale and Coahoma County and it was based on my volunteering and working within these organizations in the community. In fact, when I was chosen as citizen of the year, I was a member of about 17 organizations and committees here in Coahoma County. And some of them were statewide, really, I remember, so I really wanted to find out from inside what was going on so I could, you know, keep people informed as to what we needed to be doing, not as a real activist.

Atandi Anyona: And I'm sure, for example, in the Chamber of Commerce, was that a majority white...?

Charles Reid: Yes, it still is a majority white, yeah.

Atandi Anyona: How did it feel, or how does it feel, like, working in such an environment where you are a minority?

Charles Reid: You are uncomfortable sometimes, but you do a lot of listening and then when you get to the point where you really want to disagree, know that you don't like what's going on, you get a to chance to speak out. I served as president of the Chamber of Commerce at one point here. And I was the second African-American to serve as the president of a Chamber of Commerce. And, they thought enough of me to elect me president. And I was able to get things done faster... One thing that I'm proud of that I tried to do it, I don't know what you all read about it nationally or not, Mississippi was attempting to change the Confederate flag in the state of Mississippi. And there was a referendum to vote on it. The Chamber of Commerce under my leadership at that time was the first county in the state of Mississippi voted in favor of changing the flag. I mean we as an organization voted to it, but the state did not pass it because it was a statewide referendum. But Coahoma County basically, because of my leadership on the Chamber of Commerce, the county said that they were in favor of changing the flag.

Atandi Anyona: And how is it now? Because today we went to the courthouse and saw the flag is still out.

Charles Reid: Yet, it went back the way it was. Statewide, they voted against changing it. It went back the way it was.

Atandi Anyona: For those who voted against changing it, what was their reasoning?

Charles Reid: Those who…

Atandi Anyona: Those who, voted for the flag to stay...

Charles Reid:... The flag to stay? they one of the Confederate symbol to still stay there. We looked at it as a, I guess, as white supremacy. And we did not want it to continue that way. And, they voted, they voted, the majority voted to keep it the way it was. And hopefully one day it'll be changed—we'll have the chance to vote to change it again. And, ironically, when I was growing up, because everything was segregated here, high school, we use the library that was designated for us, well it said "Coloured." That's the only library we could go to. And library contained secondhand books didn't have any coming in now, the reference material, and what have you. And then when I came back here to live, I was interested in improving the library. The library, when things were desegregated, the library was also desegregated. We could now go to the public library here to do whatever we need to do as far as research and to read and what have you. And later on, I was appointed to the library board. And, after serving on it for three or

four years, I was elected president of the board of trustees for the library. I was the first African-American to ever serve as president of the local, Board of Trustees of the local library. It's called the Carnegie Public Library. That's the name of it. And, so I was very proud of that, it's one of proudest achievements of my life in service as chairman, when I could not even go to the library when I was growing up here and I later became chairman of the board! [Laughs]

Atandi Anyona: So in a way, like, once desegregation was passed, and has, were there any, because you know there were some good results at the segregation, were there any bad results that came with the integration of schools?

Charles Reid: The schools never integrated. They were desegregated, but they were never integrated. When the desegregation law was passed and later on by court decisions we had to desegregate; we the… white high school became the school; the African-American high school became the junior high school. So the students who were high school students had to go now attend the previously all-white high school which was not in near as good a shape as the African-American school. But, by the decision of the leaders of that time, they made that previously all-white high school the high school and it was in deteriorating condition because it had been there so long. But when the students went over to the previously all-white high school from the African-American school, they were taught by African-American teachers—they weren't taught by white teachers. The white students were in separate classes taught by white teachers during the early years of that. And that's as I said. But now, you know, it's changed, but the formerly all-white high school is now the predominantly black high school. And during the time when this transition was taking place, during the desegregation, the whites decided to form their own

school, which was an Academy, is still in existence now, called Lee Academy. So that's where the white students go now, basically, to Lee Academy. And the public high school is predominantly black.

Atandi Anyona: So, in a way, the, once the black students came in, the white students...

Charles Reid: It was white flight. Everyone, just... they had an organization already in place called Lula Rich Foundation. So they had a foundation already in place to form this private academy once they decided to put up enough money to get it started. It's a large facility they have now; it's called Lee Academy. So, that's one of the biggest drawbacks in our community that separates us now is the education system, because the whites go to the Academy, the blacks go to public school system. All the population pay taxes to fund public education. So, the whites I guess are just disgusted, as they send their kids to a private academy, they still have to pay taxes that support public education.

Atandi Anyona: So there's still that feeling, "we still don't want to integrate."

Charles Reid: We don't get the support in public education that we should because of the Academy being here and the wealthy whites pretty much support the Academy. That's where they spend their own money.

Atandi Anyona: I'm sure in the past, since education was very limited for black or African-Americans, there was that urged to get educated. Is there still the same feeling now, or have people lost that momentum?

Charles Reid: Yeah, they have lost... when you are in a separate school system, you have a lot of pride in your school. You won championships statewide, you had organizations statewide, you became members of, like, the High Y, Tri HighY, and those, like, leadership kind of organizations. But once desegregation took place, and you were put into these other school systems, all that kind of thing disappeared. You didn't have leaders and organizations within the school system. You didn't have leadership organizations; they had separate proms, and everything was, just, still separate. But, the experience and feeling proud about your school was no longer there because you did not have these kind of organizations in existence.

Atandi Anyona: Is... like, we were looking some statistics. And they say in, like, Mississippi they have one of the lowest, I think, math and science performance. Why is that?

Charles Reid: Well, there are several reasons. The students don't have the background; when they get into the higher level of the public school system, coming up for the elementary and junior high, we have those steps from elementary to junior high school, they don't have those steps in there that they will, the sequence of learning that they would need to go from one step to the other. They are just passed along, really. And they don't have the background that they should have when they get to the higher levels, like in the high schools when they would need especially strong math and strong science. They didn't get that along the way, so when they get

up to that level of school, that's really missing. You want to have a strong math background and a strong science background, and strong reading that they should have. They are just passed along, many of them are.

Atandi Anyona: And, with regards to the development programs, such as the Head Start, when did that start here in Coahoma?

Charles Reid: Okay, I was involved—I don't want to use the pronoun "I", but I was involved in the beginning of that back in 1960s... really in the late 1964, 1965. There was a, the federal government had passed this law for a Head Start program through [OEO- Office of Equal Opportunities]... I've forgotten what the acronym stood for, but it was the federal government. It later went into the department of education, actually. But the Head Start program was offered to low income areas for students who needed the, help in the beginning before they go, really go into school—the four and five year old kids need it. And, a gentleman who was from here by the name of Jesse Epps—he lived in Syracuse, New York. And he knew about this program. He came, moved back here and formed an organization in the latter of 1964 called Southern Education and Recreation Association which was known as SERA—that was the acronym. He started meeting with some of the black leaderships here to inform them that this kind of program was available and we need, “y'all need to apply for it.” So he started working with a gentleman, you've probably heard his name: Benny Goodmen. They were doing the application confidentially; we didn't know what was going on until they had finished the application but the federal government required you to have your local political, your local agency, like the Board of Supervisors, what have you, to sign off on it. So it was controlled totally by whites. They

refused to sign off on the application, so that would block us from getting federal funds into Coahoma County to start the Head Start program. So now we got to figure a way to get around that. So there was a loophole in the application process where you could go to another, private organization to get it done. Because it was public, they wouldn't allow the [Coahoma Community] college to sign off on it, here. So they went to Holly Springs, Mississippi, to Rusk College to get the application signed. So they became the sponsoring agent of our first Head Start program under the umbrella of SERA— Southern Education and Recreation Association. I guess the reason I'm so familiar with it because I used to carry Aaron Henry and Jesse Epps to Holly Springs in the negotiation process to get it signed. So a lot of people don't even know that: that I was the one who transported them back and forth to Holly Springs. And so that started the Head Start program in the summer of 1965 here in Coahoma County; that's when it was started. And later, a year or so after that, another organization was formed called Coahoma Opportunities, Inc. and, the federal government required you to have a biracial board to operate these kind of programs. It was hard to get whites to serve on a board like that. And sometimes the only reason they would serve was because they really wanted to know what was going on. They didn't want federal money to be coming into the county, so they get in there to see how could they stop it? How could they find out what was going on? So when they found that they could not stop it, they started getting off the board. And a few of them stayed on—those who were real interested. You probably heard this name, too: Andrew Carr was one of the ones who stayed on and kind of help negotiate things and keep things in the right perspective; involved in both the races. He was kind of the mediator for the whole thing. And so, Coahoma Opportunities came into existence in 1966 or 67. And it's been in existence ever since then and

it's has sponsored of Head Start program ever since then. It's been in existence ever since. It's a very strong program for preschool kids.

Atandi Anyona: And even now, the Head Start program is functioning on?

Charles Reid:... it's functioning all over the county. They have it in different communities; the biggest operation is right here in Clarksdale, but they have it in the other areas. Like, you've been to Friars Point. They have a center there; one in Coahoma; one in Jonestown; centers across the county still operating.

Atandi Anyona: And for that, do they still require a biracial...?

Charles Reid: It's still in the law that you're supposed to have a biracial board to administer it. But, I'm not sure who alls' on board right now. I served on the board a long time ago. I've served on so many boards, sometimes I forget! But, I served on the board... in fact, when I... I told you that I lived in Boston for a while. From 1966 to '68, I worked in Boston, Massachusetts for a community action agency called ABCD: Action for Boston Community Development. It was similar type, it was a cap agency similar to Coahoma Opportunities. And when I decided to come back from Boston to live here, I inquired about the opportunity to work for the cap agency here and they told me they needed a personnel officer within the organization; they did not have a personnel officer. So, when I came back in 1968 to live here, I became the personnel officer for Coahoma Opportunities—the first personnel officer that they had. I did the first personnel handbook for them. And then when I retired from the organization to come and work for

college, I became a member of the board of directors for Coahoma Opportunities. I stayed on it for several years and I was ever there; there are several committees on the board, and one was personnel committee and I was chairman of the personnel committee. So I've been involved in there for many, many years. But I'm not involved in any now.

Atandi Anyona: Coahoma Opportunities: is that very different from the Head Start or is it a part of the Head Start?

Charles Reid: It is the umbrella for the Head Start program. That's one of the agencies under Coahoma Opportunities. They have several other activities going on within Coahoma Opportunities, but the Head Start is the biggest, biggest program under Coahoma Opportunities.

Atandi Anyona: And, has it been effective so far in the county?

Charles Reid: Yes, it's been effective, but you'd have to look at some statistics to see how effective it has been; how the kids, once they go into the mainstream of the population of the other students... I understand that when they go into first grade, they are ahead of the other students and by being there in the general population of the other students, they, that knowledge, they begin to lose some of that once they get into the general population. But when they go into the public schools, I think they're really way ahead of the other students coming out of Had Start. And it's been an effective program. They've got the statistics to show, you know, how effective it's been.

Atandi Anyona: And it's open to all children from all backgrounds...?

Charles Reid: Well, there are certain poverty levels I think you have to meet in order to qualify, to go to Head Start. I'm not sure what those—some guidelines you have to have in order to qualify to go into Head Start.

Atandi Anyona: And, the funding is still, is it still now federal, or is it from the state government?

Charles Reid: You have to have a local matching funds, also, from your local Board of Supervisors, or whatever your local county officers... organization. And ours is the Board of Supervisors. So they have to get some matching funds, locally, in order to match the federal funds that you're getting.

Atandi Anyona: And, coming back to the school. Is it now an all African-American school...?

Charles Reid: Coahoma Community College?

Atandi Anyona: Coahoma Community College.

Charles Reid: Now, it's... okay, when it was first started in 1949, it was started out to teach African-American students how to become teachers. And the curriculum that was available was developed by institutions that had—four year institutions—that had teacher education programs.

So, if you look at the early years of the school's catalog, the curriculum consisted mostly of education courses for people who were going into teacher education programs; to going out to teach after they leave a two year college. They did a lot of that here in Mississippi: you can go to a two-year college, and still be allowed to teach. The African-American teachers could. But, you could go into a four-year college with and in into the teacher education program, the program, the curriculum they have for teachers. A lot of, that's why a lot of these teachers in Coahoma County really got their start here at Coahoma community college and then going on to a four-year school. But later on the curriculum became more diverse: they added the vocational and teachnical programs and it became a comprehensive junior college at that time with the vocational programs, the academic program, the, what we call opportunity education programs in different other training programs. And later on, I believe, I believe it was in the ’80s, when the, there were 15 community college, public community colleges in the state of Mississippi in districts. Got time to tell you a little history about this?

Atandi Anyona: Oh yes! Oh yes!

Charles Reid: Okay. When Coahoma [Community College] was first started in 1949, it was not in a district. You had 14 other community—junior colleges who had their own districts. Coahoma [Community College] is listed in the state law, the coals—what we call the Mississippi Codes— as that school that two-year college is located in a county that borders on the Mississippi [River]. It's not even listed in there by name in the state codes. It's listed as that two-year college debts located in the county that borders on the Mississippi. And that's Coahoma County. It's the only county in the state that at that time that had a community college

that was located on a county that bordered the state—bordered the Mississippi River. So you knew you was talking about Coahoma [Community College]! So, when it first got started, the funding mainly came from local sources and from the counties that decided to provide financial support to the school. And they provided financial support based on students from their county coming to school here. And that was Bolivar and Sunflower Counties in addition to Coahoma County, because a lot of students came to Coahoma during that time because the schools had not been desegregated. The black kids came to this college if they wanted an education beyond two years. So the students came from Bolivar and Sunflower and Coahoma County mostly. So those two counties beside Coahoma County decided to give Coahoma some money to their Board of Supervisors to help educate those students. So still we did not have a district. So later on, Quitman County decided it wanted to become a part of this. They decided to give money. But we still did not have a district. It wasn't until the 1980s that the legislature redistricted the community colleges as far as counties were concerned. And so we have; Coahoma became the sole... well, at that time, Coahoma County also supported another community college: Mississippi Delta Community College down to Morehead. But when they redistricted, Coahoma County became the sole county for Coahoma Community College. But we still share Bolivar County with Mississippi Delta [Community College]. We share Tunica, Tallahatchie, and Quitman County with Northwest Mississippi Community College. So we only have one county solely by ourselves, but we do have now a district—we have a five-county district right now. So we can get tax money to help support the community college. So we have been struggling all along the way. And we've been known as the college that did a lot with a little.

Atandi Anyona: And Coahoma, is it a good mix of blacks and whites or is it mostly, predominantly black?

Charles Reid: In early years, it was totally black. When it started out by... whites beginning to come when the guys would be discharged from the military, when they came out and begin to take evening courses under G.I. benefits—the G.I. bill for education. That's really how it really, mostly got started and then, later on, when more evening courses were added, you had more whites coming to take evening courses, but none hardly would come to take day classes at the college until recently. But it's still became a predominantly black, it still is a predominately black college, but you do have some whites now. You have more whites on staff and more white teachers now than we've had in the past. So it's slowly becoming... it used to be said in the white community, "that's the school out there for blacks. And we don't have anything to do with that." That was the white philosophy, basically. And it lasted that way for a while until they saw the benefit of having a community college here and they could come, too. And some of them came and said, "this is a gold mine out here. We just didn't know all this existed out here."

Atandi Anyona: Is it the only one, is this the only college in Coahoma County or are there other colleges around?

Charles Reid: There are other colleges around. You have Delta State University which is about 35 miles south of here. You have the Mississippi Valley State University which is about 60 miles south of here. You have Mississippi Delta Community College which is in Morehead which is about 60 miles. We have Northwest Mississippi Community College which is in

Senatobia, Mississippi, which is about 60 miles north of here, northeast of here. So you do have other institutions located near here are education. But still a lot of students don't take advantage of the education opportunity, even with the federal government offering grants and other financial assistance for them to go to school such as work-study and loans and what have you. They still don't take advantage of it.

Atandi Anyona Why is that...?

Charles Reid: A lot of them who do take advantage of that, they don't take it seriously. They come in just to get the money. And they get the money and then they leave, walk away, whatever.

Atandi Anyona: And why do you think that has happened, that students no longer have that...?

Charles Reid: It's a mentality thing, and attitude thing. Until you convince the students that they really need this, and you really need something better than a high school education to really get a good job and to be able to have the life that they want to live, they need something better than just a high school education. The statistics show that the economic benefits are... you get a job, you're paid a higher salary if you got a two-year college or a four-year college education. Still, it's hard to convince them, but that's what they need to have. And then, too, in the high school situation, here in the state of Mississippi: they basically, in public education, they basically did away with the vocational types of courses, like, what you call industrial arts: shop, and plumbing, and welding, and all those kind of courses—automobile mechanics. They did away

with those kinds of programs basically in the high school. So when the kids finish high school, they pretty much follow a college preparation track in high school. So when they come to the community college, if they do, that's the first time they've been able to go into a trade program. They don't, have not been able to get that in the public education. So that's what we're turned to push now: for them to go back to the trade programs and high schools now because, to substitute for the trade programs, they went into what is called “tech prep” and that hasn't really worked. That's to go into technology type programs and that hasn't really worked in the public schools. The students who don't really want to go into college, they need some alternative like a trade education: to learn a trade. And it's been difficult.

Atandi Anyona: So, you have a trade school?

Charles Reid: Yet, we have a vocational, have a vocational program, a technical program... I mean, they have a lot of different courses, programs within the vocational area, such as, our newest one is culinary arts. That's a very outstanding program we have here. It's known almost nationwide now, it's been so successful. The students are, in fact they have been to several countries, been abroad, they been... this past spring they went to France. The year before that they went somewhere else. Now they're getting ready, I think, to go to Greece or Spain or somewhere for next year. So the students in the program, they raise money to take these foreign trips where they look at how culinary arts are done in other countries so they can get that experience. But it's an outstanding program here. And then you have automobile repair, automobile mechanics, welding, machine shop, those kind of programs to prepare students to go out into the world of work once they complete as vocational programs. Plus your regular

academic programs, and in the technical area they have your computers and business technology, those kind of programs. They are short-term programs: some of them are one year, some of them are two years, you know, for completion. And then come you know, we have an outstanding Allied health program. The LPN program—the licensed practical nursing program; you have the RN program, you have respiratory therapy, and several other Allied health type programs. That program is located downtown; it's not even on the campus. But we have two downtown sites for Coahoma Community College: one is the Allied health program and the other is the... workforce development program, where they work directly with industry to, if they want short-term training programs, a specified program for their particular industry, they can go out and teach these programs to different industries that they need. So it's workforce development. It's located downtown also.

Atandi Anyona: So they have a range of courses to...

Charles Reid: Oh yeah, something for everybody! Now they do, they do programs on request. If industry wants something special, they can get it, and the state will pay for the instructor. They provide the instructor for those programs. So it's, we always got something for somebody that they really want to learn!

Atandi Anyona: And now thinking about Coahoma County and Clarksdale, since this is a big, there's a lot of blues thing around, because we know there are clubs, and tourists coming to see it. Is that in any way incorporated into the school...?

Charles Reid: Not directly. Indirectly we have individuals who serve on different boards related to the blues. In fact, I serve on the State Blues Commission. I was appointed by Governor Barbour a couple years ago when they first organized the State Blues Commission. And also at the [obscured] there they have the Blues Foundation. I serve on, representing the Blues Commission on the Foundation, so I'm involved statewide with the blues. But we have individuals who work at the college that serve on these different committeeS, blues organization committees. But we're not directly involved in the blues.

Atandi Anyona: And being involved in some of those councils, doyou think, let's say the blues, let's say the restaurants and the museums, do you think they have lifted the economy of Coahoma County in general?

Charles Reid: Well... we are... the blues... the tourism, that's what we... our blues effort is mostly comes under what we call tourism. And tourism is an industry in itself. So we... tourists coming to Clarksdale spend their money, staying here; we want them to stay more than one day when they come. I don't know if you've been to the [Delta] Blues Museum or not; that's a major attraction to our area. People come to visit the [Delta] Blues Museum. We're trying to expand it to become more interactive type of activities in the [Delta] Blues Museum. That's within the near future; and they've got grants and whatever to do that. But ironically, when the [Delta] Blues Museum first got started, they got started within the library. So when I was chair of the Library Board of Trustees, I was chairman also of the [Delta] Blues Museum. And when the city found out that the [Delta] Blues Museum would be a real profitable thing for this area—Clarksdale and Coahoma County—they wanted it to be transferred to the city. At the time that

they were trying to get it transferred, we had some grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and Arts that said specifically that it be under the library. So it could not transferred to the city as long as his grants were active. And then finally we got a person in Washington who was over at the Humanities and Arts who was from Mississippi. And we negotiated with him to allow us to transfer those grants when we got ready to transfer the [Delta] Blues Museum to the city that those grants could also be transferred. That's the only way we could do it; other than that, they had stay with the library. And then the city formed its own [Delta] Blues Museum board. So it was no longer under the library. But for a long it was under the library; that's how it really got started--under the library.

Atandi Anyona: And then it expanded...

Charles Reid: Yeah. It just took off. They got their own facility and just took off. They got their own board. They got a good director or curator. I don't know if you met her—Shelley Ritter.

Atandi Anyona: Yet, I think we did.

Charles Reid: She's a real, a go-getter.

Atandi Anyona: So it has no longer any connection with the library?

Charles Reid: No.

Atandi Anyona: Separate entity.

Charles Reid: Everything was moved to the [Delta Blues] museum during all the artifacts and everything. We had a lot of artifacts in the library. Like, I went to St. Louis when I was chairman of the library board to receive a national award for our [Delta] Blues Museum which was with the library. And I still have that, it was still in the library; we didn't transfer that's the [Delta] Blues Museum; it's still housed in the library. But I went to St. Louis at the National Governors Congress because our governor nominated our [Delta] Blues Museum to receive that award. So I went to the National Governors Conference in St. Louis that year to receive the award.

Atandi Anyona: That's quite impressive.

Charles Reid: Yeah. And President Clinton was president at that time. He was the speaker at the National Governors Convention. I was able to go up and shake his hand. I've got a picture also at home where I, an organization I was involved in, we went to the White House. We were invited to come to the White House. And I have a picture of shaking hands with President Clinton in the East Room, I ways. I have a big picture at home along with the invitation inviting us to come, and a letter thanking me for coming. I've got all that in a big frame at home.

Atandi Anyona: Wow. You've gone to the highest places.

Charles Reid: Oh yeah. The things I've been have kept, you know, taking me to a lot of different places. Organizations I have been involved with through the college and through different things within the county and city, I've been able to travel quite a bit. The organization I just introduced you [referring to Atandi] to, the people down the hall. We, for the past four years, we have been traveling all over the United States with different organizations similar to the organization that he is called Tri-County Workforce Alliance. And I have similar types of organization across the country. We have gone to visit them. They have one in Chicago, one in northern Minnesota, one in southeastern Oklahoma... what's the other one? Oh, Iowa: Aims, Iowa. We've been to visit all those different places and been to New York because the organization that was funded us was based out of New York so we had to go to New York quite a bit, working with them.

Atandi Anyona: Well, what does that organization concentrate on? What does it do?

Charles Reid: It, through education and economic development and getting job creation, helped to, help to get unemployed and underemployed people to raise their status in life, get good jobs. So if they want to go and do their own business, helping them get their business started and what have you. In fact, I was over in a community in Quitman County last night meeting with a group that wanted to start meeting some people who want to, interested in starting their own businesses. So we go about doing that kind of thing with this organization.

Atandi Anyona: And, having been in the education profession for quite a while, how do you see education now and how do you see education in the future?

Charles Reid: There's been quite a bit of improvement, but there's a lot of improvement to be made. In the state of Mississippi, schools, public schools are classified by a level and they have a formula they use to, test scores of students they used to define what level you are in. And the levels are from one through five. And here in Clarksdale we've never had a school, Clarksdale has never had a school above a three. So that means that they are a low level. And their goal is to raise the level. But the only way you can do that, unless they change the way it's determined, is that, it's going to have to improve. And the only way you can improve it, you got to have better teachers, you got to have better administration, you got to have better, just a whole, just a better school system in order to raise your level. And, until that happens, and getting back to the a white students not coming back to public schools.. If, the way I look at it, the current administration: that is the superintendent, the principal, and the majority of the teachers in our part of the school system are black. The white kids are not going to come back to a system that is operated, administered by African-Americans. If they had a white superintendent, a white principle, and more white teachers, many of the students would come back, I believe. But as long as it's the way it is now, they're not coming back. You're not going to get the local support that you need to continue to operate the public school system if they, if you're not going to have the white power structure involved in it. We're trying hard: we have a new superintendent who's trying to work with the power structure. He's doing things. He’s, they want to start a... I'm trying to think of the name of it. Charter schools here. But they always, on the state level, they voted it down. So they can't get a charter school unless you can get the state Legislature to approve a charter school. And they'll always vote you down. So, that's what the white leaders want. So the new superintendent [obscured], he started what they call "magnet schools." Which is schools for gifted, if you want to select a school for your child to go to that offer special kind

of thing, in arts and music or what have you, then you select a particular school you want your kid to go to. And, so that begins next year, next school year. But he's new and this is one of the things that he's bringing in. He's starting a Junior ROTC program for kids who want to go into that. So that's some of the advances that are going to take place, we believe, here in Clarksdale with the public school system that we haven't seen before. And, he started what is called a "Superintendent's Roundtable," where he got community people to come in and advise him on things that need to be done within the school system. So you're getting a lot of public input into, and this is black and white, this is an interracial Superintendent's Roundtable where blacks and whites serve on it. So they're advising him on how to improve the school system. So I think you're going to see some improvements that we have not seen before.

Atandi Anyona: And is there anything else you'd want to add to, maybe some I forgot to ask you that you'd want to share with us?

Charles Reid: Really the basic things I want to talk about were the beginning of the community college and how it was before desegregation and how it is now in the public school systems and the Head Start programs. That's basically the kinds of things I've been involved in other than a real volunteer within the community. Trying to do what I can. I don't know whether I've made a difference or not.

Atandi Anyona: I think you made a big difference.

Charles Reid: Well, I feel I'm respected in the community.

Atandi Anyona: Okay then...

Charles Reid: Is there anything else that you want to ask me that you have not asked me?

Atandi Anyona: Yeah, okay, there's something about…coming, the government that will come after, for example, beats Obama or McCain. Does it have any incentives for the education, or what is that…do you think whoever comes in, do you think they will help life the education system, especially in a place like, let's say, Mississippi?

Charles Reid: It would take a lot of… Mississippi's going to have to do some things itself, rather than the national, the federal government coming in. They're going to have to educate themselves and to some doing things. And it's not a whole lot different that the national government can do that they have not already done, I don't think. It's just that the state is going to have to come up to the plate and do what it needs to do to improve the whole system. And, I don't think whoever is elected would make that much difference in Mississippi as far as the education system is concerned. But it depends on the state of Mississippi itself.

Atandi Anyona: So it's a state business, nothing federal?

Charles Reid: I would think so. We're still going to receive federal support that you've been receiving for education through what you mention, we talked about the Head Start program and different programs within the public school system that you can get funds for. They will still

becoming in whether they come from the federal government or special funds that come through the state and gets on down to the public school system. Those will still be coming in, but the states just going to have to do something itself. Have to do better preparation for teachers in your teacher education schools to make... because, nowadays, there's difficulty to get teachers to go into teacher education. They don't want to go into teacher education. Just need to get better teachers. And we feel in our school system we may have to go out on our own, we may have to higher younger teachers and get them more prepared to become master teachers or whatever they need to do to become better teachers. But, the ones who come out of college and come and are, you know, not from here, they may stay a couple years and and leave. But if you grow your own, this is home, they own property here, whatever, and you continue to get them to improve, maybe become master teachers, they will continue to stay here and that would help improve the school system. So I say, you got to grow your own, basically. [Laughs] You got to get real good teachers, because in the Delta, nobody really wants to come live in the Delta. If you look at statistics, the population in the Delta is constantly decreasing.

Atandi Anyona: I'm hoping in the future than it might reverse and people will...

Charles Reid:... reverse and come back.

Atandi Anyona: But, otherwise, thank you very much for...

Charles Reid: Well, I hope I've been some help to you.

Atandi Anyona: Oh yes, definitely. That interview helped because there some people also dealing with the education aspect of the project, so your perspective, I think, will help them very, very much.

Charles Reid: Well, I hope on some help to you.

Atandi Anyona: Well yes, oh yes.

Charles Reid: Okay.