Black Liberations Movement Mosaic

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Oral History Interview

with

Mr. Mayo Wilson

By Tiffany Mane and Flosha Tejada

Clarksdale, Mississippi, USA

November 3, 2008

Interview with Mr. Mayo Wilson

Interviewed on November 3, 2008

Location: Clarksdale, Mississippi, USA

Interviewers: Tiffany Mane and Flosha Tejada

Transcriber: Unknown

Language: English

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Transcript edited by narrator

Tiffany Mane: I will be interviewing Mr. Mayo Wilson today. So if you could state your name for the camera.

Mayo Wilson: Mayo Wilson.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and just to let you know, today is November 3, 2008 and we have a consent form for you to sign at the end of the interview once we're done. Just so you know we're going to put these in the archives at Dickinson College as well as use some of the information for the website. And just to start off, where are you from?

Mayo Wilson: I'm from Mississippi. I grew up in a small town called Cary, Mississippi, which is in Sharkey County. And of course we had a home in Port Gibson, Mississippi which is Claiborne County, south of Vicksburg in the mid state area.

Tiffany Mane: Okay

Mayo Wilson: I’ve been here in Coahoma, County of course, in Clarksdale area since 1958.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so what made you want to come to Clarksdale.

Mayo Wilson: Well I was asked to come here to work at the mathematics department at Coahoma Community College. It was called Coahoma Junior College at the time. And I was contacted to come and fulfill a role there as a teacher. And I came here thought I would stay one year and I’ve been here ever since. Yes.

Tiffany Mane: So did you train to be a teacher?

Mayo Wilson: Yes I had finished my bachelor’s degree at Tougaloo in mathematics and chemistry and biology.

Tiffany Mane: Wow.

Mayo Wilson: And I had done an extra year in Jackson, which was Jackson College at the time but is now Jackson State University, to prepare for teaching. My father had suggested that while I was waiting on being drafted to the military service that I should prepare to teach just in case I decided not to go to medical school and that’s what happened.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm okay. So you said you didn’t grow up in Clarksdale. Can you repeat where you grew up for me?

Mayo Wilson: I grew up in a small town called Cary C-A-R-Y.

Tiffany Mane: C-A-R-Y.

Mayo Wilson: And I had a combination of small towns that I grew up in during the same period. One of those towns was called Port Gibson. P-O-R-T G-I-B-S-O-N. My family, my father and my mother were teachers and of course during those days the school systems basically ran for eight months during the year and there were four months we spent at where was there hometown in Port Gibson. So we would transfer back there and live there over the period when schools were not on.

Tiffany Mane: Okay so what was the education system like when you were growing up?

Mayo Wilson: Two separate schools in the community. White schools on one side of town, black schools on the other side of town and difference of quality of course, in facilities, in offering and materials things of that nature. But we did have a free school system. And I rate actually my teachers as very high quality teachers because they were caring and inspirational and they were well prepared.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so you said that there was a difference in funding and things like that. Um…

Mayo Wilson: Yes, it was obvious that the white schools got more support, financial support. They got the new books we got the used books. And that kind of thing was going on. But that was generally the way of pattern of education in Mississippi was at the time. We were under a completely separate school system and it was even before the time of separate but equal.

Tiffany Mane: And did that motivate you to sort of become involved in education? What influenced you to…?

Mayo Wilson: Well my parents would have seen nothing less. They were teachers and they had a high degree of concern for all their children to go to higher levels and so it was expected that I would go through high school, through college and the university. So to some extent, I guess you'd say I had no choice. But it was obviously that that was the only way to go. We were in a small rural community where farming was basically the industry of the time. There was, what they call a sawmill process in my community which was just across the way from where we lived and where the school was. There were very few opportunities for educated people other than in the teaching profession. I was the youngest of six children in my family and all of them were in college and in the universities. And so it was nothing left for me to do but follow their pattern and of course it was obvious that I did not want to be a farmer, and get involved in that kind of life.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so farming was common within that time period?

Mayo Wilson: Yes, it was the pattern of the Mississippi Delta. Farming is a major industry even today in Mississippi Delta. Cotton farming was basically it and most of that was done by manual labor and hand you know processes. And so it was not a very welcome thing but it was what people did to live. And of course my parents did not come from that background and so consequently, they didn't encourage or have their kids and their students to aspire to anything less than a higher level of education. And so most of the kids in my hometown, although very small did go to colleges of some sort.

Tiffany Mane: Wow. So you sound like you have a very accomplished family and you know that's great.

Mayo Wilson: By comparison. I would say that we could consider that they were accomplished by the mere fact both my parents and all of my siblings were educated at the young high school level and many of the people in my community were not. And of course that's the way life was.

Tiffany Mane: So did your family ever tell you any stories about segregation or any stories of their experiences through Jim Crow and all those things.

Mayo Wilson: Well let me back that up just a little bit and tell you that I was born in 1931.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: So my parents didn't have to tell me very much about Jim Crow. I grew up in the time of the Great Depression.

Tiffany Mane: Wow okay.

Mayo Wilson: And in a small community of Sharkey County. The Mississippi Delta it was very prolific. You had the obvious way of life was discrimination and segregation. And if, it ran the spectrum all the way through finishing college and getting into what was now known as the Civil Rights era. But I had grown up in the time when all the preparation for the Civil Rights era were being laid out. And so yeah, we used to sit around and talk about things. My father was a, what I might call a kind of a commanding person. He maintained a level of dignity and respect and consequently he received a level of dignity of respect from both sides of the community. It was just kind of expected that you would treat him right. And if not he'd let you know that. He was very gentle but also very, very assertive. And so consequently my personal family got along well with all segments of the community. When I was a kid growing up in junior high school, I would, at one of the local stores, which was a general store that had merchandise of several levels, including groceries. But I also became a newspaper delivery person. It was delivery of Commercial Appeal, which was a paper out Memphis, and one out of Vicksburg, called the Vicksburg Evening Post. So I had two carries during the day, so I had a chance to meet and interact with some of everybody in the community, black and white. So we to some degree got along well. But we also understood that there was a separateness of living and existence in the community. So I did, I have a lot of respect for my home town. Now having said all that, I

realize the fullness of how segregation and discrimination and rejection takes place. Yes, I experienced some of that too. But, we had a strong family and so my family, being as close knit as they were and as I guess, established as they were, certain things that other people experienced to some degree, we did not.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmmm

Mayo Wilson: My parents never, as best I know-I'm reasonably sure of this-never worked in white homes having to be servants as some of my friend's families did. And they never lived on a plantation where they had to cater and answer to any kind of negative relationships that took place in the Mississippi Delta farming community. So I was very fortunate along those lines. Nonetheless, having grown up with friends and peers that were going through these things, and we shared visits in homes and in smaller communities, you know, you can't help but know what people are living through. So I guess I'm fortunate to a certain degree.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmmm. So you said that you moved to Clarksdale. What were you doing? You were teaching math? Is that what you..?

Mayo Wilson: When I came to Clarksdale I had been, I had taught a year in a small town called Hollandale, Mississippi, which is down in Washington County. I came to Hollandale after I had spent a stint in Korea, in the military.

Tiffany Mane: Oh you were in the military? Okay.

Mayo Wilson: Yes. And this was all after I had finished college. And having, my father, as I told you earlier had told me to spend some time getting an educational certification for teaching, just in the event that I needed it. When I came out of Korea, I didn't want to go back to school right then. I was thinking I was probably headed to medical school. But Korea took a lot study thing out of my system, so having had that certification for education and one of my father's friends needed a math teacher. And my dad says well I got a son who's certified for teaching mathematics. So I taught mathematics at Hollandale, Mississippi. Then I left and got married and we went to school at Ohio State. And came back home for a visit and the president of Coahoma Community College found that I was back during the [inaudible] and said that they had an emergency need for someone to come out and fill a slot in their mathematics and chemistry department. And so that's how I got. I came here to work out there.

Tiffany Mane: Wow. And so after that, what did you…what was your occupation after teaching there.

Mayo Wilson: Well after teaching, as I said, I came here to stay one year, and I stayed out there several years. The president asked me to… they had just organized the office of economic opportunity and the head start program and Community Action concepts under Kennedy and Johnson administration, and was now coming in. And so they had a minister, who was a white minister who had been selected to head the head start program. And he resigned after a few months. And so the board asked if I would come in and head the program. And so I got involved in community action. And so I stayed in Community Action until 78'. As I, think I told you,

from 1966 to 78, I had been in head start administration and what have you. The, which at that time was called the Bank of Clarksdale, which is right around the corner from here, it is now Regions, one of Regions Bank's branches. But it was a major bank in this area. They asked if I would come and join their staff as the Vice President as the Bank of Clarksdale. And so I left Community Action and they recruited me to come. And I stayed in banking and went to the banking schools and got my banking certificates and what have you. But I stayed in banking until I retired in 1992.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmmm

Mayo Wilson: And then I came back as a contract person to 1995. And so when I came back to community action in 2004, I was retired and doing the Kellogg Community Development grant for youth development.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so can you tell me a little bit about the head start program and what your role in bringing that to Clarksdale was.

Mayo Wilson: I didn't bring it to Clarksdale.

Tiffany Mane: Okay.

Mayo Wilson: There was a young man who initially brought the concept to Clarksdale, a young man by the name of Jessie Epps. You might have heard his name before. He had been in

Syracuse, New York as a union organizer and he was there during the time when the 2000, I mean the 1964, legislation went forth under president Johnson, to establish the Office of Economic Opportunities, and head start was a part of that. Well he came in and started doing the organizing and getting groups together to talk about bringing in a head start program. And so he brought an organization together called SERA, which was an acronym for Southern Education and Recreation Association. They started a summer head start program. And after that the community decided to organize-a different fraction of the community, most of the white community- and be able to apply for the federal grants that were coming to [inaudible] for community development purposes. Back at that time, some of our white leadership were afraid of federal dollars influencing the way of life in the south. And so one of the ways of being able to keep that, what we call a southern culture, intact was to be the recipients of federal dollars and therefore in position that you could say no or yes to whatever the initiatives were. So they organized in a push to getting a charter for Coahoma Opportunities, which is this agency. Well there was a provision that happened to say that you have to have a diverse group. And so the initial board of Coahoma Opportunities was a board of half white and half black members. I think there was, there were twenty or fifteen, there must have been twenty. Ten on one side, and ten on the other. So they worked together and the original charterers of Coahoma Opportunities, didn't like the arrangement. One of the requirements in the mandate was one of our, at that point identified Civil Rights leader Aaron Henry, was going to have to be a part of that board. Well some of those original charterers did not want any part of working in a respectable relationship with Aaron Henry. So consequently they resigned from the board and then others were brought in to replace them. But that was just before I became a part of head start. That happened in 1965, when the board was originally charted. I came into head start in the summer of 1996. So it had

been established, it had the grant and some transitions were taking place. So I was asked to leave the community college and come here to be a part of head start.

Tiffany Mane: Okay. And so do you think that head start helped the community or did it hinder the community? What do you think its affect was?

Mayo Wilson: During the…I think first of all, the answer is I think it has helped the community and it still does. In the early years, head start was one of the programs of Community Action. Community Action was broader concept which includes as a part of its programs head start. We had an adult education component that was designed to take especially rural people that were becoming a part of a transition and get them prepared a little bit better than they had been by educating them to at least a high school level. So they could, you know, a different kind of workforce from the farming workforce that they had been involved in. We had programs for youth, Neighborhood Youth Corp. We had Job Corp. programs that were designed to help people find jobs and get involved in employment, whether they were being displaced from farming. We had a legal aid component that was designed to help people with basic legal concerns and problems. And we had a credit union that people could begin to put some monies in. And also at the times when many people were having difficulty accessing loans in banks, the credit union would serve as the purpose to try to help people to finance various kinds of needs, be they buying homes or financing business or personal needs. Having said that, along with all these other programs had a particular mandate which was basically, yes, community organizing. We had the subsidiary but also primary mandate for head start of being sure that kids could get an early start on the education process. Theoretically, the notion being that during the first three to

five years of a child's life is when he is really formed intellectually. And therefore he can, or she can have a better chance to succeed if they get any interruption in the cycle of poverty that had taken place in the lifestyles that they had. And so part of the primary responsibilities, the main objective of head start at that time was education. However, it was understood that kids were not necessarily being fed completely proper nutritional diets. So a nutritional factor was a part of that. Health was a part of that need and kids were having various kinds of health problems including dental and mental. And so head start had the mandate of working with the children, but also with their families. Because you had to intervene into the whole process of the family development and responsibility for the child.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so all of these programs were sort of a way to end the economic inequality that existed?

Mayo Wilson: Yes, they were collaborative efforts to target the total of what causes people to be in poverty. Now one of the things that I'm sure happened with respect to Mississippi but also the country, whiles the level of blatant segregation, discrimination and oppression that was going on was obviously one of the elements that would keep people down. So, yes, we did have a mandate of attacking the causes of poverty which included discrimination and segregation. And so that was a part of our community organizing effort. To get people to a level of awareness of not only what was happening to them, but how to counter the negative effects of what was happening to them. So all our programs worked together along those lines.

Tiffany Mane: Can you tell me a little bit about your current position and what your role here at Coahoma Opportunities is?

Mayo Wilson: Well I'm the Executive Director, which is equivalent to the CEO of a corporation. My basic role is [inaudible]. One, a responsibility the poor community and assuring that they get the benefits and rights that they so deserve and desire. [Inaudible] being a liaison between the program, the constituents of the program and the funding sources that we receive monies from, state or [inaudible]. To be a liaison and also a representative from the public standpoint to the local community and helping them to be aware and also supportive of the needs of what people are trying to [inaudible]. So my job is you might call a chief administrator.

Tiffany Mane: Okay and so what are some of the initiatives that are still going on in the community?

Mayo Wilson: Well we still have head start. Head start is our biggest program. At some point during this whole series of years since the Johnson administration, the programs have changed direction to some extent. We had initially what was called the Office of Economic Opportunities and it was the original Community Action national office set up under the Johnson administration with Sergeant Striver as the director. During that time we have had all of these diverse programs that I had mentioned to you a minute ago. When President Nixon came in office and what he did initially was to eliminate some of the original Johnson administration programs and redirect some of the funding of those programs. In later years they organized what is called the Community Development Block Grant system that the federal government would

fund monies to the states, then the states would then therefore parcel that money out to various communities based on some of the states planning. And I think the initial thinking there was that the states would have a better voice in determining what economic issues and development processes would be taking place in their communities. And it was the notion that we would reduce the federal petitions to states to do things, by giving the money to states. Head start is still a direct funded program. But the other programs come under what is called Community Development Block Grant. And those grants are basically developed around the notions of economic development in housing where the poor people are having housing problems. You might have seen or heard that in recent years, we've had a lot of initiatives that relate to energy, and support for energy needs. Mainly the elderly people are still living in non energy efficient housing and un…what you call it when they don't have energy?…what's the stuff you put in the walls and stuff? But we do weatherize to help improve properties so that people's home will be easier to heat or cool. We also provide some cooling systems including fans and air conditioning systems for homes during hot weather. Especially with those homes [inaudible]. They have some other programs that are not a part of the agency now, that are direct in housing; you got the section 8 housing and stuff of that nature. And then legal aid is a separate and private entity now where as it used to be a part of Coahoma Opportunities. And our basic adult education program is now another private entity so some of those programs still exist and as an example, before, in the earlier years, we had adult education, and job development programs. Now some of those programs come under TANF and TANF helps to pay for people's education and training and also preparing them for jobs. Now we do some of that too through our CSBG, Community Services Block Grant Program. We take a process of what is called case management and in the case management process, we deal with people who approach us for assistance. And we have to

work out a strategic plan with them to try to see if we can move them from point a, where they are, to through some process of training, assistance, etc. support, to a sufficiently acquired job, that they can do a living wage in.

Tiffany Mane: Wow.

Mayo Wilson: So a lot of that is going on. Recent programs, the earned income tax credit program where we find so many people have not been taking advantage of it. We have a special division that helps people with their income tax, it's free. And trying to help them get the subsistence that they need through the income tax credit program. So it's those kind of things that we do. We don't have the luxury of all the support that we used to have. You gotta work harder now to find resources.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm okay, and what role has the government played in that? I know that…do you still get government funding.

Mayo Wilson: Yes. As I said, head start is still direct funded. All of it is government funding to some extent, it just comes through different channels. Head start funding… okay. The government has always had, or has had since the inception of the national office in DC and then in different regions around the country, I think it was eight or ten. They are what they call regional offices that sort out the arms of the national office. Region four is the south east region, which our office is in Atlanta, Georgia. So our funding comes down through Atlanta, then through into the states, directly into programs. So they fund us directly from the federal

government in that process. Now in the Community Development Block Grant Program, that money from the federal government comes directly to the state, and the state government has an office where then they fund programs within the state under the provision of Community Services Block Grant and low income housing, energy assistance program.

Tiffany Mane: Okay well that's interesting.

Flosha Tejada: I have a question. How has the head start program evolved over the years? Because I mean you said it's still active today. So I was wondering, has it changed at all from what it was, when it was first created? Like I know the summer programs, I read about how it wasn't really as effective as they wanted it to be. So that's why they wanted it to become sort of like a year round program. Can you tell me a little bit about that change.

Mayo Wilson: Yes. It started off… the way head start started off as a summer initiative [inaudible]. But then it was determined that two or three months would not be sufficient. And so almost simultaneously after its first year, programs were funded for a full year. Right now we have a program sort of like the school systems. We work about the same schedule as the school systems, we start in August and we end in May or June. In the early years -your question I think was-in the early years we had a lot of flexibility to be creative and to find ways of doing things. We had relationships with one particular one, George Peabody College out of Nashville, Tennessee. They had graduate and Ph.D. programs. And so we had some of their professors, Dr. Henzy and Dr. Rubo, we had some of them to come in and create models of learning for…it helped them in terms of, help kids getting their Ph.D.s, they're doing their dissertations, they're

doing their research, they're doing projects and determining, you know, results. So they get results from being here, and we get results from the creative ideas that they have in place since we have a Montessori program, back in the early days, and some of the theoretical programs that they created with us. Today's programs are more prescribed in terms of learning processes and learning centers. And so basically all across the country you follow the same general pattern. Head start is now held to a different level of accountability than it was then. And so it has changed along those lines, but I think the expectation, it was a little different. We had the freedom to choose before, we also still have some of that freedom but it's more prescribed now. And a lot what we're having to do is being sure that, to ask for some of the concern that was raised in your question, is to document everything. We can't say that it happened we gotta show that it happened and have the documentation to represent, you know, when it happened, how it happened and what have you. We have head start three year review coming up in the first week of November, oh no the first week of December. And much of what they want when they come is to see our plans. It has to be documented, our procedures have to be documented, [and] our results have to be documented. Everything from when we assess the community to determine what the needs were. We have to represent those needs and show why we are doing what we do. We have to show how we recruit, how we assess and how we, what they call ERSEA. I don't know if you're familiar with ERSEA, but it is the recruitment and selection process. We go out there and we determine the eligibility of children and what basis and what have you, and who's to be selected and who's not. We have to have documentation now to show all that. And it has to be the documentation of not only what we did but we plan to do. And then when they come in and review, like they're coming in next month, this time, is they're gonna say okay let me see what you say you were gonna do, and let me see if you did it. Show me the evidence that you did

this. And so you see we have to have something that goes back some time and then it has to show results [inaudible]. So that was a little different from what we did then. That was so yes, a lot of criticism as to how effective head start was. And I think some of the criticism came from the fact that people didn't know from where head start came. They didn't realize that those kids without head start had nothing. And they got to school and they were put in categories of slow learners when they may not very well have been slow learners, they just hadn't had the process of learning instilled within their process of thinking. And so it became a little bit different. So we're going down that road now where it's a…the game is accountability. I had one of our board members ask me a question, two board meetings ago. And the question was, is head start preparing the kids for public school? I don't know if he said public school, but for school. This was a board member. So, my answer to him was, I think so. But it depends on what you're saying in terms of preparation. What are you asking in terms of are we preparing them. And under what measuring rod is that being determined. So we have to do an assessment, what they call a self assessment. We have to look at ourselves, over and over again. And then we have to go forward and see okay what's going on with these kids. If we're doing what we're supposed to be doing, or what is required or desired, what happens with those kids after they leave us? And if they're succeeding, then fine do we get the credit for what successes that are taking place? Or, if they're not succeeding, then do we get the blame for what is taking place?

Tiffany Mane:: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: At what point is the separation factor a matter of concern. So we do have those kind of things that happen. So when people look at us now and they say well we think that's

wasting the-one of the great statements that we see in all the politics these days is- we think it's a waste of the tax payer's dollars! And preconceived determinations that our expense dollars are being wasted many times are an issue that you can't win if you debate. So the only thing we can do is do the best we can and try to prove that we are worth being. And so we think we do that. But it's an, you don't remember that, there used to be an old airline called Eastern Airlines. And Eastern Airlines used to have a slogan that says "We earn our wings every day." And so we have to realize that sometimes we're under the microscope and we have to earn our keep every day. Because there are those out there who are going to criticize who are gonna say no, they don't need to be here. You will see, and I don't want to use the national presidential politics, but I've got to use it. You will see the campaign right now where one of the candidates, even as late as today, spends most of his time, criticizing the other candidate, rather than putting forth a plan for the country. Okay so that kind of thing happens with respect to what we do here. We have those people who will sit out there and who will say I don't want to spend my money on that program. One of the things that you haven't asked me, but it happened, is that we were identified by one of our board members in the initial chartering of this agency as being a black program.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: And therefore it was not worth the effort, and so he resigned from the board.

Tiffany Mane: Wow

Mayo Wilson: Even today, forty three years later, we are stilled looked at as being a program for black people. Now, that's not just in Coahoma County, that's in much of the nation. So even in our presidential politics, a lot of what is not being said is how much is race a factor in this election that we're going to have tomorrow.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: So, here we are.

Flosha Tejada: You mentioned the recruitment process of head start and how you have to assess all these things. What is your recruitment process for these kids? Like which…I'm wondering how you determine which kids are eligible to be part of the head start program.

Mayo Wilson: Okay, we have mandate that we cannot have more than ten percent of the enrollees that are above the poverty guideline. And we don't have a problem getting the below poverty guideline filled because we have sufficient kids basically between the age of three and five years old, in the various communities that we serve. We have to draw the line at some point because we would have more people who are above the poverty guideline than we are permitted to serve. So, the way we do the process is we do a recruitment process but it's, there's an acronym that the federal government has established called ERSEA, Eligibility…E-R-S-E-A… Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance. So we have to determine who is eligible, and we do what we call community assessment. We do a full community assessment in trying to see where families are, where people are, where the economy is, what they're going

through, how many kids are there, how many in this house, how many in that house, and get some idea of about what their level of income or not is. And then we can take that information such as, it's sort of like a census thing, we can take that information and we can determine who's eligible. I think that's what your question was. We can determine who's eligible. And then within that information about who's eligible, based on the communities that we serve, then we can go through the process of saying okay of this group, these are eligible, then our selection can be this particular group of kids here. Now the parents have to come in and enroll those kids. That's a mobility thing, you know, you gotta get folks out of the house and out here. And so then we go through an enrollment process and that's the selection process, that the enrollment follows. And from there, it's how we get them to the center. And we organize a system of buses and transportation and things of that nature to get them to the centers where we operate. Right now we're operating in four communities. We have two communities in Clarksdale and two in the rural outside of Clarksdale.

Tiffany Mane: Okay. I heard you say the game is accountability. And so one of the hugest things of the current administration is accountability and sort of how that's measured within, not only head start, but further in education for children. So I was wondering what your views on that were.

Mayo Wilson: I think it's well… accountability has I think two ways of being, and that is one of them is good and the other one is it depends. Um…you've heard of the No Child Left Behind.

Tiffany Mane: Yes, NCLB

Mayo Wilson: Okay. The theoretical [inaudible] but implementation wise, you can tell me okay I'm going to grade you on the basis of how well you perform something, but if you don't give me the ability to perform that, then although the basis is very good for the results that you expect, but it's not good for the process. So I've got a thing about some of the requirements, and I think that most of them theoretically are very good. And coming up this year is the new reauthorization bill. The new head start reauthorization legislation provided a tremendous number of new requirements. And we're, you're always in this debate as to well will money help solve problems. One of the things that we have be sure of is that when you put a requirement on, we're financially able to do, to provide for that. And a requirement of head start that has nothing to do with the classroom is that programs will meet twenty percent non federal and eighty percent federal. So if you give me five million dollars, and say that I've got raise a million locally, in order for me to meet this requirement that becomes a very, very difficult requirement even though you can see the process as okay. If you're in a relatively affluent community, that million dollars may not be difficult to raise. But if you're in a poor community, that million dollars is a giant to accomplish. And yet, the government says well okay if you can't raise that money, you can't get this other money. Or we're going to reduce your budget back to that level. And now you've got all these kids out here you're trying to serve, and you don't have the resources to do it with. And so raising the non federal share as a part of our mandate is difficult in this community especially because we don't have a lot of industrial and business resources. We don't have our government. Our local government is claiming poverty themselves and their dollars are being stretched beyond the ability to do. And we have not been able to attract sufficient of outside corporate or foundational resources. So sometimes regulations can be very

good, but also the implementation of them can be a little bit tough. Now, I think the in classroom and process for measuring what we do, like with we enroll kids in August, by a certain time, all of them gotta have had their health exams and being referred to specialists and stuff like that. I think all those things are very good. But we, you know the requirement is that we have to be sure that we have documentation for all of that. And so people who are being asked to do this in the classrooms, they just have to be sure that they spend sufficient time to get it done. And it's not undue burden, it's just that many times when the amount that you're asking for under compressed time frame, it becomes a little bit difficult. But I have nothing against the requirements themselves.

Tiffany Mane: Can you wait one second while we switch the tapes.

Mayo Wilson: Okay.

Tiffany Mane: So you said you have nothing against the requirements themselves.

Mayo Wilson: Generally no. Yeah there's merit on a lot things. The new legislation as opposed to the old legislation attempted to change some of the mandate. Then add a lot of additional requirements. There is merit in saying that you have to have for instance a [inaudible]. There is merit in saying that you have to have a board of directors but also a policy council. There's merit in saying that you have to have subcommittees. The problem becomes, the government does not clarify all too often how the decision making process is to go fluidly forward. We had in the new legislation, it was the new authorization bill, a requirement for how you deal with conflict

resolution. Because they saw that at some point, there could possibly be what is called a standoff between two bodies, and because they tried to make this requirement one that would be uniform across the country, they discovered that with all the great diversity that exists out there, that that probably won't happen. So we were sorta told well hold off on that one, we'll get back to you on it. We'll send you a model plan, and hopefully that this will help you to work out your plan. So, I have nothing against the requirement for having all these different bodies, but somewhere along the way if there's a conflict that can't be resolved, and it ultimately has to go to arbitration then how do you be sure that all the prefaces on that when people don't agree.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm well okay. Is there anything else that you would like to add, anything that we didn't ask you?

Mayo Wilson: Um…I don't think so… um… Are you basically studying for history? Are you studying for…

Tiffany Mane: Um…

Flosha Tejada: We have a focus on education

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: Okay

Flosha Tejada: So then both places, in South Africa and in Mississippi, so since head start is such a big component of the Civil Rights Movement, and of education, that's why we sort of want to focus on that.

Tiffany Mane: Yeah, but I mean you can feel…[inaudible]

Mayo Wilson: No I don't really have anything to inject, but I just was noticing that the trend of this discussion has sort of locked in on head start.

Tiffany Mane: Yeah

Mayo Wilson: And when you told me that you were concerned about comparing the Civil Rights Era…

Tiffany Mane: It's interesting because South Africa also had something similar to head start and community development programs so that's sort of why we want to focus on that and put that on the website so…

Mayo Wilson: Yeah yeah okay okay…

Tiffany Mane: South Africa had something called Community…um..development

Flosha Tejada: Black Community Development Programs

Mayo Wilson: Okay

Flosha Tejada: But aside from that before we finish the interview…

Tiffany Mane: Yeah

Flosha Tejada: I was wondering, because you were wondering if head start was sort of like a big component, we have different teams within the group, so some people are more focused on the philosophy of what the Civil Rights Movement was, other people are more focused on the monuments and memorization of things. So I guess a couple of questions that will help out the rest of the team and sort of the overall project something like…

Tiffany Mane: How do you feel about the state flag? We know that there's a confederate flag on the corner of it, which is very controversial for some people, so we were wondering, what you thought of that and how it affects you or anything like that.

Mayo Wilson: Um…doesn't really affect me. But it is repulsive.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: People attempt to hold onto what was called, what they'll claim to be heritage, but it's symbolic of philosophy.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: And it's not necessarily heritage. So the big fight over the flag was really one of philosophy and if I would just use that scenario as relates to even the national politics that's going to climax itself tomorrow, you hear labels being placed on people and things. One of those big labels is I'm a conservative and you're a liberal. Generally that's just a label for control, it has nothing to do really about what people do or believe. Another one is we want to be sure that this person represents our great southern values, or our great Christian values, they'll say. And many a times again, if you really examine the Christianity side of that, you'll only see one or two things that are brought forward, the rest are discriminatory. Ways to divide people, one from the other. And so if I put a label on you, then I can make all of my friends know that you're not good. Even if they haven't met you, but if I say okay man she's a conservative, or she's a liberal. Then all of my friends, when they first see you they'll say well okay I won't want anything to do with her. So it's nothing to do with what you do, and so I just see those things kinda happening. People do things for a lot of reasons. And I want to mention something that happened when I visited South Africa, since you're looking at that.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmmm

Mayo Wilson: We-and you're probably familiar with this-we saw down in the Capetown area, how they separated the people.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: And-are you familiar with the pass system?

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmmm

Mayo Wilson: Where they-people- had to have a pass to be where they were going to be when, when they were going to be there.

Tiffany Mane: Uh huh

Mayo Wilson: And after five o'clock they couldn't be on this side of the line, as opposed to on the other side of the line. Even where they worked, they had to be sure they'd be out of there by a certain hour. Those kind of things sort of happened, but we didn't have passes. It's just that people were monitoring the people's movements and being sure that so called people stayed in their place. Their designated place put it that way. We used to have, Clarksdale and Coahoma County, especially Clarksdale, this city here, had what they called a curfew system in the early years.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm hmmm

Mayo Wilson: And it was the same as the pass system. By a certain hour, all of the black people had to be off the street. You know it was just that kind of thing. And so I see people's couching

discrimination and oppression and suppression on the titles and labels that I don't think are necessarily what people are really believing. Aaron Henry used to say "He ain't sayin what he's talkin bout." Okay so when you see a lot of these things that happened, with respect to us here, people do a lot of things. The flag, ain't what folks talkin bout. It was a symbol, and all of us know what the origin of that flag was. But it was a symbol that was used to oppress people and anytime the people decided to say okay this still insults me, the message that comes back is so who cares?

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: And so that's the way it goes with respect to when you've got a system of where the majority is the minority. It's who has the power. So…

Tiffany Mane: Another one of our teams is focusing on music during the Civil Rights Movement and we know that church music and gospel were really big during the time. So what role did that play? That you know, what role did music play during that time?

Mayo Wilson: [laughs] Music has always played a role, I'm sure. Music is to some extent-even though we have categories of music-music is sort of a universal language people can identify with. Gospel and Blues sort of stimulated and represented the same theme. My dad having been a Baptist minister in addition to being the principal of a school, he was of the old school Baptists during the early days. He wouldn't let us sing the Blues.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm hmmm

Mayo Wilson: The Blues kind of became an art form of acceptance in much later years. But back in the old days, they used to put labels on it and say it was dirty music so they didn't want their children learning the Blues. Gospel was the accepted form, and so you could sing all the gospel you wanted to. You know because you were expressing and releasing the emotional stress you were under.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: The Blues were a similar thing, but they came from two different backgrounds. So many people who gravitated from the Gospel to the Blues got their start in the church. Aretha Franklin is an example. Her daddy was a minister, and so she got her start singing in his church. So, but that's just the process. And I'm sure he wouldn't have dared sing a Blues, but she went with where she could express her talents a little bit more. And so she went to the full stage of the Blues. Ya'll are going to have an interesting time, trying to put all these little pieces together. The deep south is a place where, we'll come through some of the same stuff that they did in South Africa.

Tiffany Mane: Hmm hmm

Mayo Wilson: I don't know if you're familiar with all the violence that took place in South Africa.

Tiffany Mane: hmmm hmmm

Mayo Wilson: But it happened right here in Mississippi too. People were, maybe not as bad, but people were beat up and killed and different stuff and the country is still trying to decide what to do with some of them. We haven't yet been cleared as to how we're going to deal with those things that took place in 65' and 62'.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Flosha Tejada: Do you think that the government is actually moving toward finding something to do about these people who caused so much violence? Or do you feel that it's just been pushed to the side?

Mayo Wilson: Some of our local governments have attempted to and as a matter of fact, we brought one person to justice and he was convicted back in, during last year. Only to be released from the judge because he said that under the process of… what was it? A…I forgot the term now but [it] determined the amount of time for prosecuting on this basis, had already expired. So you couldn't bring federal charges after so many years.

Tiffany Mane: Statute of Limitations?

Mayo Wilson: Statute of Limitations, yeah. You couldn't bring federal charges after so many years. So our attorney generals and different folks now are trying to say Okay how can we go back now because this guy has been convicted, we know, and he's almost admitted with some of his cronies that were with him that you know testified against him. So we've got to go back and find some law that allows us to go back and prosecute. You know those kinds of things happen.

Tiffany Mane: It's interesting, because in South Africa, they actually had something called the Truth and Reconciliation Committee [Commission]. Have you heard of that?

Mayo Wilson: Yeah

Tiffany Mane: What do you think of that? Do you think that would work here?

Mayo Wilson: Well… there's no reason why it shouldn't. I think it has a chance to. We…now I'm really surprised at how South Africa turned out really.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: Because I think it was much more oppressive than what we had in this country. But for them to turn around as best they did, without any further violence, that just amazed me. And then to take Mandela and let him become President and then de Klerk kind of said okay let's just do…let's change and go. He even got in bad with his own people for agreeing with Mandela. Well those kind of things I think, we were surprised. Now, I'm sure you're familiar that in South

Africa, even today, some group had organized a separate community and decided to create them some separate currency. And they were going to also like secede from South Africa and use their own processes-the white people were. This country is not beyond that kind of extreme to want to secede from the nation if they feel that it's not going the way that they want it to go.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm

Mayo Wilson: So you know I'm just…but I like a lot of what they did. I think they have a tremendous long way to go. See what I'm so most appalled at is those shanty towns. I just think they can't build housing fast enough and they don't have the resources to do it with, any support.

Tiffany Mane: Hmmm okay well…

Mayo Wilson: I liked their wine. I wanted to try to get a permit to be an agent when I was over there, to get their wine into our stores here.

Tiffany Mane: So if there's not anything else you want to add.

Mayo Wilson: No, I appreciate you coming by and I hope you've gotten some benefit from this visit.

Tiffany Mane: We have.

Mayo Wilson: I would’ve liked if you could have talked to some other people, but they’re out now.

Tiffany Mane: Okay.

Flosha Tejada: Thank you.

Tiffany Mane: Thank you for your time.

Mayo Wilson: Ya’ll are welcome.