Name of Project: R.O.O.T.S of Sunflower County

Date of interview: June 23, 2016

Location of Interview: Indianola, MS

Name of Interviewer(s): (A) Fredrick Ellis

Name of Interviewee(s): Adrian Brown (B)

Name of File: 058.MOV

[0:12] **A:** Where are you from? Are you a resident of Sunflower County?

[0:14] **B:** I’m a lifelong resident of Sunflower County in Indianola, Mississippi.

[0:20] **A:** What brought you to Sunflower County?

[0:22] **B:** Well actually after graduating from college, I actually moved back to Sunflower County when my father, a former principal of Indianola Gentry High School, became ill battling diabetes. So that’s what brought me back to Sunflower County.

[0:40] **A:**  Why are we called Sunflower County?

[0:43] **B:** Sunflower County was founded in the 1800s. Sunflower County use to be part of Bolivar County but several groups of people in Sunflower County, who were part of Bolivar County at the time, petitioned the leaders of Bolivar County that they wanted to start their own county so the portion that you see now, that is called Sunflower County, was carved out of Bolivar County once upon a time.

[1:15] **A:** What do you like about Sunflower County?

[1:17] **B:** I think I like the people. I think the people, the quality of life, the environment; it’s a nice place to raise your kids. I would much rather raise my kids in a slow paced environment than in an urban, metropolitan city. I just like the people here.

[1:36] **A:** What problems do you feel are in your community, here in Sunflower County?

[1:40] **B:** Economics. What I mean about economics is Sunflower County, probably less than 2 or 3 percent of the population own all the wealth and so when you have an economic disparity where you have majority of the population that do not control their own economic independence then you have inner generational (?) poverty—cycles of poverty—and that contributes to a decay in the educational system, a decay in community development, a decay in economic development. And it all starts with economics and until we provide economic opportunities for majority of the population then we will continue to lag behind the more and more communities.

[2:35] **A:** What changes have you seen in Sunflower County?

[2:39] **B:** Actually Sunflower County, I was just thinking about this, this morning as I was getting ready to go to work, I was born in 1976 so I’m presently 39 years old and I can remember in the 1980s that Sunflower County and Indianola was booming economically. People had jobs; people were employed at Modern Line. Modern Line shut down in the early 90s as well as other industries and at that time, I think that we were doing better off than we are now. So the question was, have we made any improvements, I think that overall, we’ve regressed. You can look at the population of Sunflower County and it has steadily declined over the past 30 years. Back in the 1930s Sunflower County had 30,000 people in population. In the 70s we had about 15,000, in the early 1990s we had about 12,000, presently we have about 10,900 in population so most people are leaving here because there are no opportunities.

[3:57] **A:** As a young person, are there things I should know about Sunflower County?

[4:01] **B:** Yes Sir. As a young person I think one of the things that you should know about Sunflower County is that Sunflower County is at the heart—the vibration—of how the Mississippi constitution was framed. Dominant authors of the Mississippi Constitution of 1890 are from Sunflower County. That’s why we have parchment, the Mississippi State Penitentiary that is located in Sunflower County. It didn’t just happen to be located in Sunflower County, it’s because that was an economic way for the people at that time to maintain economic control over a base of citizens and so the Whites Citizen Council (?) was founded here in Sunflower County. The lady that Emment Till whistled at and loss his life, she and her family are from Indianola, Sunflower County. Fannie Lou Hamer is from Sunflower County so the civil rights in Sunflower County is prevalent and so I encourage all young people to learn more about Sunflower County and the historical context and that will explain why situations are the way they are today.