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

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**Location of Interview: Indianola, Ms**

**Name of Interviewer(s):Theon James**

**Name of Interviewee(s): Charles Modley**

**Name of file used for transcription** (audio and/or video file): Audio File (Charles Modley)

[0:14] TJ: Are you a native of Indianola?

[0:19] CM: Yes I am.

[0:21] TJ: What is the focus of your advocacy or are you an advocate of the Mississippi Delta?

[0:23] CM: Yeah uhm we basically advocate here in Sunflower County. I’m the President of the Sunflower County NAACP and we advocate for a lot of different things. Basically education is one of our number one priorities and making sure we all the things in education that we need for our kids to successful. And another things that we do is making sure that our constitutional rights for our citizens are not violated— [ making sure] constitutional rights are being carried out throughout the city and throughout the county of Sunflower. Because a lot of times citizens don’t really know when their rights are being violated. That’s part of the work of the NAACP, to ensure quality of life. And to make sure that race is not considered for hiring practices or even like--. Say for instance like uhm the voting booth. A lot of times back in the day we didn’t have the right. We had to take a test and then we had to pay poll taxes to vote back in the day. Our basic goal here is to make sure that rights here in Sunflower County are not being violated for blacks or whites, it’s for all races period.

[1:50 ] TJ: You advocate for the public school, right?

[1:52] CM: I advocate for any school that needs it. Basically all the people that look like us, majority of them go to public school. A lot of things going on in public school now should not be going on. We have a failing school district right now. Basically we try to make sure that the kids are in position to improve. Through advocating through the principal and superintendent and all the different other organizations that we can be a part of.

[2:25] TJ: What problems do you see surface around the school? Or the reason we are a failing school? Do you think it’s--

[2:34] CM: A lot of problems are the reasons we’re failing. First of all, you have to have a vested interest in our community. The majority of the teachers don’t live here in Sunflower County like they used to back in the day. And a whole lot of times they have TFAs, Teach for America. Most of all that I consider is that the parents are not involved like the should be involved. If the parents get involved and stay true to what their kids need to be doing in school, I think it can change in about a year. Our parents are really difficult. A lot them don’t go to the school. You know I visit school all the time. Kids just stare at me when I come there because I heard one of them say that ‘I wish my Dad would come up here’ or ‘I wish my Dad was like you’. When a parent visits school, it means a lot to a child. I think the parents need to just really buckle down and see what the needs are and make sure they are doing everything they possible can to make sure their child feels like they’re nurtured. And then we’ll see a change almost overnight.

[3:52] TJ: Do you think events in the past, like you know you said the same thing with voting and stuff. Do you think problems like that surface up today in the school house or something like that? Do you think prior situations like that have a result on today’s conflict?

[4:10] CM: Not for voting uhm, uhm. Majority of kids are not focused. They need to focused and parents is the main ingredient that the kids are missing when it come to being a part of a kids daily life. The parents come in—because the majority you know especially in our community; the majority of black kids are coming from single parent homes. And that means a lot because when their father is not in their home, it’s chaos mostly in their homes all the time. There is no stability in that home, especially when it comes to discipline and the spiritual side of life. Their father is missing—especially boys. Boys should have their Daddy in their life at least come two or three times a week to come a visit them. It means a whole lot when their Daddy is there and participating and driving home to the child that ‘hey I’m very enthused that you’re involved in this and involved in that’. The majority of black kids all over this beautiful nation we have are lacking. When a majority of kids go home, they go home to one parent. And that’s part of it definitely. To me that’s the main ingredient.

[5:30] TJ: Being that men or becoming a man is real important in society now days, how do you perceive men coming up? What is your outlook or what is your perspective of a young man coming up in the Delta?

[5:44] CM: Well, uhm especially in the black community, we don’t have any guidance. We don’t any guidance and the majority of uh people in the community neve take time out to lend a helping hand, especially when a child is in need. Basically, what I would do is teach yall how to be mens at an early age. I would cultivate you. First of all you have to have respect for yourself. You have to love yourself first. If you don’t love yourself, you cannot love nobody else. You cannot do nothing for your sister -- you cannot do nothing for your parents. You have to love yourself and love what you probably gone become in life. A lot of kids have low self-esteem. ‘I’m just going to school because my parent sent me here and I really don’t want to go.’ But every kid should have goals in life. Set your goals. Every kid is not college material and there’s always something out there where a kid can learn and be productive in life. And take care of himself. Because even if you don’t go to college, there is still something out here that you can learn. Where you can be a successful citizen when you get grown. College is good because once you get that college degree and once you get that knowledge in your head and become a professor or whatever you always got that knowledge in your head—can’t nobody take that away from you never. It’s always there for you always.

[7:15] TJ: So concluding this, is there any advice that you would give young African American males around the Delta?

[7:20] CM: Yes, first thing you need to pray to God. That’s number one, prayer. Prayer changes things. Prayer keeps you guided. If every young men in here pray to God everyday then God will put a hedge around you and he’ll protect you every day. Love yourself first. Love your parents. Be obedient to the cause. When you go to school tomorrow be obedient. Obey your teacher. Once you’re obedient it establishes discipline within yourself. Once you establish that discipline—it’s just like going to the army. If you’re not discipline you can’t make it in the service. The service teaches discipline. You have to be discipline, you have to love yourself, and you got to pray. Stay in school and stay focused. Stay in your focus in knowing what you are in school for. If you don’t stay focused and you get off course a majority—I know you all have heard about the prison—the high school to prison pipeline in the black community. It’s happening all over our nation. The majority of black kids right now. I had a friend that worked at Parchman, he played ball down at Valley. And he said every Thursday they would bring young black mens down up there to Parchmen and they would get off the bus crying like a baby. 14, 15, 16 all young. If you do an adult crime at 14 or 15, they gone charge you as an adult, especially here in Mississippi. So, he told that it hurt him so bad that he quit. It hurt to see our black young men come to prison and that didn’t know what life is all about. They do stupid stuff. They kill one another in our community. They shoot one another down in our community. 17years old and have a gun. What you need a gun for? Who are you mad at 17 years old. Is it that serious that yall would get a gun and kill someone. And you have messed your life up, you have destroyed your life. Parents crying and your cousin crying and all that kind of stuff. We need to focus on the prize. Whatever you want to do in life you can do it. Every life you’re choosing here, you chose that life for you. You choose whatever you want to do. If I was teaching young black men the 1st thing I would tell them, I would ask them a question. ‘Do you love yourself?’ Because if you don’t love yourself you can’t do nothing for yourself. Do you love yourself? Do you love yourself? If you love yourself you can go to the next level and love your parents. Be obedient to your parents. You know I’m very positive when it comes to the biblical principal ‘disobedient child gone live half their days. Did y’all hear that? You hear about kids getting killed in car wrecks, their disobedient. You remember them two girls got killed over in Moorhead. You wonder why? Why does it happen? The bible tells you a disobedient child lives half their days. I know none of yall live like that. Because yall some good young mens and yall abide by the principals. I’m gone say this here and I’m going to be finished. Everything God does, God had an order. He gave the order, laid the law, gave us principles. He don’t put you in school—he don’t put you in 2nd grade if you don’t know your abc’s. When we follow that order and learn your abc’s first. Learn the basic things in life. Be obedient. Don’t be rowdy. You want to live a long life and be a productive citizen. Number one thing is if you love yourself and you love God.