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

Date of Interview: June 22, 2016

Location of interview: Indianola, MS

Name of interviewer: (A) Nicholas Warren

Name of Interviewee: Charles Modley (B)

Name of file used for transcription: 017.MOV

[1:05] **A**: Describe some of the changes that happened throughout Sunflower County.

[1:06] **B**: Well Sunflower County has had a lot of changes and uh you couldn’t walk this street here in 1966, you couldn’t shop at these stores in 1966, you couldn’t do none of the things you are doing here 50 years ago so it’s been a lot of changes. You were only allowed to go [points finger] down here to Church St. only. That’s the only far black people could go was Church St. They did all their shopping on Church St. Now, when integration came and when the 1964 Civil Rights Act came you was able to go where you want. You were not able to vote during that time. We became voters in 1968 after 19—I mean 65 the 1965 Voting Rights Act. So it’s some of the things that are significant to our history where Dr. King came to march 220 miles—a little pass Memphis all the way down to Jackson. James Meredith got shot three times on that march when he first started marching. He got shot three times and he wasn’t able to finish the march but Dr. King and Stokey Carmichael was able to finish all the way down to Jackson. By the time they got to Jackson they had about 22,000 people down there doing their time to march against fear. You know even today I think black people have fear to vote now because if an election come up now you only have about maybe 29 to 30 percent of the people actually participate in voting. But right now are we scared today? Or we just don’t care? Why is (inaudible) so prevalent in our community? Yeah (inaudible) is when you don’t go to the poll and vote. (points towards interviewer) How old are you?

[3:00] **A**: I’m sixteen.

[3:01] **B**: Sixteen. You’ll be able to vote in two more years but right now blacks don’t vote. We have so many blacks in our community have died for our right to vote. Even Fannie Lou Hamer died she was from Ruleville, Mississippi and she’s significant in our black history. We are significant; she is significant in our black history. And uh she was the cause of Dr. King came down here that time when she called him and he said ‘well I’ll come down and help you out Fannie Lou Hamer.’ You know during that time and she was able to get him here and he participated in the march— (throws hands to his side) and everything else was history. One time we were not able to go to (points) to the grocery store over there.You see that old Piggly Wiggly right there—

[3:51] **A**: I know that use to be (inaudible) right there.

[3:52] **B**: Yeah, old Piggly Wiggly (points)

[3:54] **A**: I’ve been in there one time.

[3:55] **B**: We couldn’t go to the library. My first vice principal of the NAACP right now—he got locked up for going to the library. So all the rights that we have today, they just didn’t come just like that (snaps fingers). Everything…

[4:11] **A**: It’s a change.

[4:12] **B**: We had to fight for it.

[4:13] **A**: Yes Sir

[4:16] **B**: uh (shakes head) so much has changed; it’ll take a lifetime really to tell you the changes.

[4:24] **A**: If you was the president what you’ll change?

[4:25] **B**: uh…the first thing I would change today would probably be (pauses) uh poverty that has stricken our community more than ever. If we can get rid of poverty in the black community or all over the United States—a lot of crime that we have in our community, we wouldn’t have. See like all the shooting and thangs that take place in Chicago, it’s all about economics. The (inaudible) be on your corner selling drugs, you claiming territory where the streets and thangs belong to the city and the government. Well you claiming territory just so you can have a way to sell drugs and make a living. And you know…I know that the tragedy that happened down in Orlando couple weeks ago.

[5:15] **A**: yeah

[5:16] **B**: That was bad. But on the same weekend, in the same weekend last year (pauses) in Chicago Halloween weekend, 318 blacks got shot. 318 blacks got shot on last year Halloween weekend but we didn’t have a news conference, we didn’t have a breaking story about it, talking about that. Over a 100 something blacks got killed that weekend. Where the news conference that we had for that? We didn’t have the breaking of a special program for that but it don’t talk about it because it’s the black people that are getting killed and it’s really not a big issue when when we killing ourselves every day. And then you actually question: Why was the 1964 Civil Rights Act so important? It was important to us because we should have had equal protection under the law but when we use that same protection to go out there and kill our own blacks—black on black crime—that’s killing our community as we speak. So the only thing that I’m saying to ya’ll is that so much has changed here in Sunflower and Indianola. Even our schools—we have the same schools over there that we had in 1966, which has been 50 years ago. We had that same school over there—Central High School—we need another high school because of the fact that nobody—the community is not talking. But it’s not the new superintendent’s fault; it’s the community’s fault. It rains in the high school, it’s dark, it’s cold in the wintertime; but we are the reason the community sits still and allows those kinds of things to happen and we wonder why the community is not progressing. It’s not progressing because we are not putting any effort into it. Now even today, when we go down here today, right, it should be filled with young black people, young black men like you all, right?

[7:38] **A**: Yes Sir.

[7:39] **B**: But we want to see how many young black people are down there today when we have this march against fear celebration (holds up pamphlet that has ‘March Against Fear’ in big, red letters and looks at it). We want to see how many black, young men show up. But it’s been a pleasure talking to you all. I’m the president of Sunflower County NAACP and if I can be of any assistance to you all, change anything around. I fight every day in the community for rights. That’s what I do, I fight for rights. And my days of fighting has just begun.