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

Date of interview: June 21, 2016

Location of Interview: Indianola, MS

Name of Interviewer(s): (A)

Name of Interviewee: Clifford Wilson (B)

Name of file used for transcription: 018.MOV

[0:02] **B**: My name is Clifford Wilson, a lifelong resident of Indianola. Born and raised right here and uh, I’m a pastor in the area, a former educator; I worked in the school system for 33 years before I retired in ’06.

[0:24]**A**: Can you tell me some things that you like about Sunflower County?

[0:29] **B**: Yep. Being that it’s a small town, where I’ve been all my life and it’s a preference for me, a smaller place rather than a metropolitan area. Uh some people find that to cramp their style but it’s something that I prefer and you get to know most of the people who live in the town and most of them know you. I kind of like it that way. Even though we’re in a small town—a hour and a half from Jackson, a hour, about two hours, from Memphis, three hours from Little Rock, Arkansas. And uh those are some places to go and do some things you can’t really do right here (inaudible) and have a little bit more to offer so you can take family and enjoy yourselves in places like that, that are close at hand.

[1:45] **A**: What problems do you feel are in your community here in Sunflower County?

[1:50] **B**: What problems do we have here? Uh…lack of jobs, uh we were at one time, back in the mid to late 60s, things were looking up Modern Line moved here, we had (inaudible) still operating, (inaudible) grocery was a much larger employer than Super-Value is today. They had their own truck line and it was Plummet Comet Community, so it appeared. Modern eventually left and with the leaving of Modern we lost a lot of jobs and we haven’t been able to replace those jobs even though we got out here (points) Dollar General and some other places like that—smaller businesses that have moved here—uh we still don’t have a volume of jobs that we had back during that time. That’s one of the serious problems that we have here. Education is on a low way up and our high school graduation rate is dropping, the drop-out rate is going up, teachers are having a more difficult time trying to educate the young people that are in the classrooms now, parents are not as—going to hold a tighter rein (?) on their children as they did and that’s what’s make the job even more difficult. So with the education, lack of education—the drop in graduation rate and the education problem, the unemployment problem, I see those as two serious concerns. It’s hard for a small community to overcome that kind of thing because of the lack of a good infrastructure with the tax base to make the needed improvements in education and some other things that are necessary for a growing community. It makes it hard to overcome problems of that nature.

[4:28] **A**: Can you tell me why we are called Sunflower County?

[4:34] **B**: Uh I use to be able to tell you that. I couldn’t tell you right off the bat right now.

[4:40] **A**: That’s alright

(Laughter)

[4:41] **A**: Describe some of the changes that you saw in Indianola back then and how it is now. Describe a change.

[4:49] **B**: Well, let’s see. Changes that I see (thinking to himself) well when I was your age, right here on this street, there was a movie theatre. A street over, on Main St., there was another movie theatre. There was a smaller theatre on Church St. and there was a drive-in out on 49. And uh there were some places for young people to go, some things for young people to do that we don’t have readily available for them right now. I know that kids can find things like that to do over in Greenville and Greenwood and we don’t even have to leave home to enjoy a good movie today but it’s a little added plus to be able to get out of the house and go somewhere and enjoy a movie with other young people and other people of your own age. We had that then, we don’t have that now. Businesses, like I say, are dropping off right across the street there (moves head in the left direction) You had one of the largest grocery retailers in the area and uh you had at least three others like that in the city. With Wal-Mart being in place right now, that causes smaller businesses like that (motions hand in the left direction) to close down and they pretty much have a monopoly on retail sales, both grocery wise and clothing and some other products that we have to have. That’s some of the greatest changes I see. The white, black ratio has changed somewhat. Blacks are still a majority but whites that are here, in the area, are more outside of the main city. They are outside the city looking in on the inside and you see a change in geographical location of blacks pretty much spread out all across the city of Indianola now rather than just on the south side of the track so that’s a major change.

[7:50] **A**: Can you describe how it was back then?

[7:59] **B**: Well uh, a lot of picking and cotton chopping during my early days as a young man. I spent a lot of time in the cotton field picking cotton, chopping cotton, driving tractors and things of that nature. You don’t see as much of that and that’s a major change. You still have farms around here, they are just as big now as they were then but you don’t need much manpower because the tractors now can do much more than what the tractors could do back in my day so that’s another major change.