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

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**Location of Interview: Indianola, Mississippi**

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

**Name of Interviewee(s): Shequita Johnson**

**Name of file used for transcription** (audio and/or video file): Audio file (Shequita Johnson

[0:18] TJ: What school does your child attend?

[0:21] SJ: Inverness Elementary School

[0:22] TJ: Alright, I’m going to start off by asking a few general questions. Uhm, Can you describe the vision that you see for your child 5-10 years from now?

[0:33]SJ: Uhm, I see my 7th grader being a leader for the youth as a 12th grader. I see my current 5th grader still struggling but in a resilient way, being able to basically shelter his needs so that he can be able to function and be productive in school. And I see my younger son who is now pre-k as being very good academically in school and uhm behaving pretty well.

[1:33] TJ: Do you feel like the history of Indianola, the school system and all, has an effect on the way your children learn?

[1:40] SJ: Yes because I don’t feel like the schools are as safe as they could be. I don’t feel like the teachers are in a position to teach our students to be successful and college ready. But mostly importantly I don’t feel that other students value their education as other counties, or they don’t know the value of their education. And I don’t know if other students even know who they are and what values that they carry. I feel like many of our student are lost and because of that many students that have the potential to be great they are hindered. It doesn’t just start at the school it starts at home and it’s a community, generational thing that has been passed on, which a lot of teachers , parents, students, everybody is slowing losing hope every year. And it feels as if its only getting worse and worse.

[2:55] TJ: Do you feel that the way the school goes about disciplining kids or handling situations is done correctly?

[3:04] SJ: No, I don’t feel that the punishments or the discipline actions that are taken toward students are helping them period. I feel as if it’s only showing our kids that you don’t deserve to be here and if you can’t do things a certain way that we want you to you’re going to be kicked out. It has something to do with the lack of hope that I was speaking on in a previous question. You can’t punish a kid for doing something wrong by always kicking them out. What have they learned? They haven’t learned anything. But if you set rules in place and be intentional about providing interventions for students, they are learning as they go. They gain something from the way you discipline them. A prime example would be a child telling a teacher ‘I’ll hit you in your face.’ Not necessarily doing the act but just say that child says ‘I’ll hit you in your face.’ And in turn that child is sent home for 5 day. and while that child is sent home he doesn’t have a baby sitter so he’s at home by himself. There’s no one to cook for him so he’s having to basically keep himself and try to survive and get a nutritious meal by himself. And after those 5 days are up and he’s back at school you ask yourself as an administrator what did that child learn. What did he gain other than: I’m going to go home; I’m going to watch tv; and I’m going to go back to school. And he has the ability to do that same thing over again with no intentional in place for him. Until eventually the punishment wear off and he takes action and that talk might turn into hitting a teacher in her face. And it’s just that pipeline from school to prison that I see very often in the school. And when he hits that teacher in the face it’s alternative school. And if he ends up doing something and he’s 16, it’s jail. And once he’s out of jail it keeps repeating itself. And once you get into the system I feel like that’s how our kids end up in the position that they are in now, especially our black boys. And being a parent of two black boys coming up in this school system, I’m very afraid.

[6:00] TJ: Do you think corporal punishment is a good way or an appropriate way to start off handling kids?

[6:05]SJ: I’m neutral when it comes to corporal punishment. I’m not going to say it’s wrong. I’m not going to say it’s right. Do I think it’s the right way of punishing kids? No. I feel like the school district needs more counselors and social workers in the school. Because a lot of times if a child has someone to communicate with they’ll be able to you know rectify any type of behavior that a child is presented at the school.

[6:32] TJ: So if you would change anything about the school system and the way things are regulated within all the schools all around, what would it be?

[6:41] SJ: I would get rid of SRO officers. And I would get counselors and I would get social workers on campus that would be able to provide one on one conversations with students and implementing different interventions. More importantly the counselors wouldn’t be there to file paper work or to hand out a scholarship every now and then. They would play a very vital role in a child’s life individually. I really feel like we should do away with any officers on campus because we’re basically telling our kids that this is what you can expect. It’s one things seeing the police officers out in the community but it’s another when your child comes in their going through a uhm metal detector and they see resource officers on campus. We’ve never had an incident to make people feel as if we needed metal detectors or officers on campus. I mean there was a shooting that happened elsewhere and it had nothing to do with our kids. But because of something happened somewhere else our kids are forced to have officers on campus. And if you look at it—just me looking at it—you can tell that more fights have occurred since they’ve had that. It’s a mental thing. They think that that’s what’s supposed to happen. Children think that that is what’s supposed to happen. If they have officers on campus they feel as if others feel the campus is dangerous.

[8:30] TJ: Moving on to the topic of law enforcement. How would uhm advise your children to act against or the way to act against police dealing with – being that police brutality to the black minority is recent. How would you have your kids going about that approach?

[8:47] SJ: Uhm, I hope I’m going in the right direction with this question. But I’ve always since all these incidents have occurred. I have younger children, but I do have a conversation with them as to how to act if they are approached by any police officer regardless of the color. I ask that they not travel single. I ask my kids to travel in large groups. Uhm, be careful as who you choose your friends. We aware of your surroundings. Even recently when I was stopped going to Texas, the police officer got out of his car. I cut all my lights on. I got out my ID before he could even get to my window. I let the windows down and I put my hands on my steering wheel just to let them know that I’m not a threat. I feared for my life as well as my kids life because of all the stuff that has been going on.

[9:49] TJ: Being that you have two young black boys, How do you feel that African American Men are perceived in society as of today?

[10:00]SJ: Hear in Indianola and all around the world as if they are a threat. That they are uhm uneducated. They’re ghetto. Uhm they’re less likely to succeed academically and more likely not to go to college.

[10:20] TJ: Is there any advice that you would give to your two sons coming up?

[10:23] SJ: That everything that I just said is a lie and with great determination and encouragement from -- you know outside people as well as myself—anything is possible. And to never give up.

[10:46] TJ: Concluding is there anything that you would like to add or information you would like to give? Words of encouragement? Anything of that nature.

[10:48] SJ: I like what you all are doing. I see you all being an inspiration to more black boys in our county and I hope that what you’re doing will eventually put hope back into these kids.