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

**Date of Interview: December 10, 2016**

**Location of Interview: Ruleville, Mississippi**

**Name of Interviewer(s): Cornivion Bracey**

**Name of Interviewee(s): Thomas Edwards**

**Name of file used for transcription** (audio and/or video file): Video File (Thomas Edwards)

[0:05] CB: What is your occupation?

[0:06] TE: I’m a retired Educator. Former Teacher, Principal, and Superintendent. I was superintendent for Sunflower County Schools for 10 years.

[0:18] CB: What motivated you to become a teacher/ principal.

[0:21] TE: Just making a difference in the lives of young people in Sunflower County

[0:26] CB: How is Mississippi History impacting the lives of young people today?

[0:29] TE: As an educator and coming up through basically the 60s through the present, uhm Mississippi has impacting the lives of young people. Because coming from a rural area and for me being an example showing that even though you’re from a rural area with lack of resources that you still can be successful.

[0:56] CB: What gives you hope?

[0:58] TE: Young people having more of an opportunity than I had when I came along. We have a lot more opportunities today for young people than my period of time coming up in this community.

[1:15] CB: What is your primary goal as a teacher?

[1:17] TE: Primary goal is just to continue – even in my current role as a retired educator – to make a difference in the lives of young people through giving them guidance and leading by example.

[1:32] CB: What specifically are you doing at your school to support this goal?

[1:39] TE: Just being available for uhm young people to be a consultant to them if they uhm if they have a passion to be an educator to instill in them the importance of having integrity and furthering their education the best they can to be the best they can be. If you’re going to be an educator try to be the best that you can be.

[2:05] CB: What school discipline policies do you employ?

[2:10]TE: Uhm, basically giving children the opportunity to redeem themselves if they make mistakes because students do make mistakes. But also being even handed in the way that you discipline students. Not to make exceptions for students because of their economic background or what type of family they come from. Just treating students right and giving them an opportunity to correct their behavior if they should have behavior problems. But to understand that the big picture is that you can’t learn if you’re out of school. I’m a proponent of strong discipline but students have to understand that they are in school for a reason and that’s not to disrupt the normal activity of the school day but to be able to learn. And the only way you can learn is to be in school and not be out of school for behavioral reasons.

[3:12] CB: What is your role in keeping your community safe?

[3:15] TE: I would suppose having an open dialogue with the police department and those people who are responsible for law enforcement and those people to be able to – just be able to speak to law enforcement. And also get them to understand that they don’t need to be in a position to be a threat to young people. Let them know that they are here to protect them and keep the community safe. But policing does not mean for them to abuse their power. And I think that the Ruleville police department right now where I live is making an effort now to be more visible in the community and also develop relationships with the young people.

[4:04] CB: A lot of African American young men in the Delta will spend some of their school years in prison, how do you think that this impacts their lives and their community.

[4:14] TE: Well it’ll impact their lives in a negative way. There is no way that being incarceration is positive. What we have to do as older citizens of this community is continue to encourage our young people to get an education. Because without an education the streets will just suck up our young people and they will end up being incarcerated. So, most of our young people if they are incarcerated and they come back into the community without any skill sets. Then, the only thing you’re going to end up doing is going back into prison. So, the best way to have an impact on your community is to get an education. Rather it be formal college of technical training but getting an education is so important.

[5:12] CB: What do you want the world to know about African American young men in the Delta?

[5:14]TE: That there is a lot of hope for our young men to make a difference in this world but they need to be given an opportunity. That’s what it’s about now—it’s having an opportunity. But it’s also about our young men taking advantage of the opportunity. Because there are opportunities out there for our young men but have to take advantage of them. And that’s by taking advantage of the instruction they are given at school and moving beyond high school into college and to technical school. But having hope is not enough our young folks have to take advantage of the opportunities that they are presented.

[5:59] CB: What advice do you have for African American young men?

[6:02] TE: Get a good education-- bottom line. Be a person of character. Be a person on integrity. And be able to be an example to the people that’s young than you. That’s what I’ve always tried to do and exemplify in this community where I live. I lived in Ruleville all my life. And I want young men such as yourselves to be able to look at me and say ‘I want to be like him.’ And so everything that I do I try to make sure that it’s something that I won’t be embarrassed about. That you can look at me and say that there’s hope. If he can succeed with less resources coming up in the time he did, then what’s the excuse for someone in 2016 not being successful or not going on to school. If I was able to go to school in the 50s and 60s all the way up to the 90s and continue to get more degrees what’s your excuse for not going. There is no excuse, none at all, for your people not getting an education

[7:18] CB: Is there anything that you would like us to know, that you would like to share?

[7:22] TE: I would and especially not just African Americans but our young men. You need to be able to dream big. And not just dream big, you have to be able to get out there and actively try to be successful and want to do something. All of our young people, we look at sports and that may be fine for some folks but the majority of us will not excel in sports and have that as a lifestyle. But once you get an education, nobody can take that away from you. That is something that I constantly preach to any young men that I have an opportunity to talk to is that you dream big but you just don’t just dream. If you reach for the stars. That means just that there is no limit on what you can do. You limit yourself. If you don’t want to do anything then you won’t do anything. But if you dream big and say you want to become something then you can do it. But nothing in this life worth having is given to you. You have to earn it. Those people that you look around and you see who are somewhat successful nobody just gave it to them they had to work hard. They had to study. They had to go to school.