

# SNCC Digital Gateway: Our Voices

## Lowndes County: Alabama Black Belt

### 1.1 Arthur Nelson: Strong Connection to SNCC Workers

**Arthur Nelson:** Well first of all my name is Arthur Nelson. I'm a proud resident of Lowndes. I've been here for 63 years. And I'm not the eighty group but I had the opportunity to work with a lot of the eighty year old people and I started here in Lowndes. First of all my parents were sharecroppers and we lived on this farm about three miles from this location and we just worked our way through and I do feel a strong connection to the SNCC workers who came to Lowndes County to make a difference because I realized in my short 63-years if it hadn't not been for that I wouldn't be where I am and the things that I have been afforded in my lifetime.

### 1.2 Charles Mays: Joined the March

**Charles Mays:** Charles Mays and I am a native of Lowndes County, been here all my life, 62 years of my life, and my parents lived here. We farmed, had a farm here in the county so, and I remember when they came through, I was small, you know the marches coming through, I was small, and we lived about a half a mile from highway 80 and I can see from where I was on the hill, but my sisters and my brother, they went out and joined the march. And they went on to Montgomery marching with them.

### 1.3 Arthur Nelson: Just as Much Knowledge in Those Books

**Arthur Nelson:** Oh no we went full-time, there was a school in each community, there was a little school, I think the first school that I went to was White Hall which is right next door to where White Hall Church is located and it went from first to sixth grade, we did stay out, well we didn't go to school then before labor day so by the time labor day rolled around all the cotton will be out in the field anyway so we didn't have to stay out just to say work but we had chores and things we had to do once we got out of school. But those schools were good schools, they were community schools and of course there were no hot water, there were no bathrooms and we had to make fire and go get water every day before we could start school in those community schools that we had. But it taught you a lot of responsibilities and I remember one year our teacher was Ms. George Anna Barton she was our three six grade teacher and we had to go to Hayneville which was the county seat to pick up some books and when we went to pick up those books there were some old books on one side of the room and there were new books on the other side. And Ms. Barton told us to get those books that was on that side and I said to her Ms. Barton, I said, why we can't get those new books over there instead of getting these old books. And she told me, she said, well those new books are for some other students and these are for you all. But she said there is just as much knowledge in those old books as it is in those new books and that stuck with me for a long time, yep.

## 1.4 Regina Moorer: Embody the Spirit of Lowndes

**Regina Moorer:** Every day I go about trying to embody that spirit of Lowndes, if anyone ask where I'm from, I always say Bloody Lowndes and that always leads to discussion about where is Bloody Lowndes and why is it called Bloody Lowndes.

**Jennifer Lawson:** And why is it called Bloody Lowndes?

**Moorer:** So we know that the history of this county and the history a the legacy of struggle for equal treatment, civil rights, and civil liberties in this county was not an easy story or an easy struggle. I grew up here and my grandmother tell stories and my mother tell stories about the things that we think are simple, like being able to go and register to vote, being able to actually participate in democracy and how those things were not so simple for generations prior to mine. So I grew up learning about the legacy of white supremacy in Lowndes County, and about the struggle to make sure that Black people had an equal seat at the table and just equal recognition of their humanity in this county. And how just simply asking for the rights and the freedoms that other people enjoyed so freely, seem to have been a problem for the white establishment in this county and so it was so much of a problem that Black people were often met with violence. They were killed so that name Bloody Lowndes means that it was actually very difficult for Black people to acquire and enjoy many of the freedoms that their white neighbors enjoyed.

## 1.5 Jo McCall: Lynched Because He Was Too Prosperous

**Jo McCall:** I lived here until I was 7, my father was lynched when I was 5, and we lived here two additional years and then we moved to Montgomery fleeing for our lives because my grandfather whipped two white men and we were afraid he would be lynched as my father had been. [...] My father is Elmore Bolling. He was 39 when he was shot 6 times with a pistol and once in the back with a shotgun. And left in a ditch and approximately 300 yards from our home and approximately 100 yards from our store. He had become very wealthy and as he moved up the economic ladder, he carried other community residents with him. He started a milk business because he had a trucking business in addition to the store he had tractor trailer trucks and he had a farm. So he had begun a milk business and he was transporting their milk to the dairy in Montgomery and these residents were getting checks from Montgomery's dairy, therefore they were not totally dependent on picking cotton anymore. So he had become too big for his britches so to speak. According to my research and the NAACP's research, he was lynched because he was too prosperous as a Negro farmer.

## 1.6 Willie Ruth Myrick: Needed to Be More Done

**Willie Ruth Myrick:** White folks controlled everything. You had to go in the back door to every place you went. You had to all but bow down to them. And to see that our older people had to do these things, it just made me sick to my stomach. And I never, never wanted to grow up doing that. So I felt like something – you know we need to do something – and something was being done at that time, but it just needed to be more done to get our people out from under that stigma.

## 1.7 Wendell Paris: Always Fighting Against Second-Class Citizenship

**Wendell Paris:** My name is Wendell Paris. I grew up what's called the Alabama Black Belt. We first lived in Livingston, which is in Sumter County, which is the western-most county of the Black Belt. At age 13, we moved to Tuskegee, which is Eastern Black Belt, so I claim the whole Alabama Black Belt. Lowndes, Greene, Wilcox, Sumter, all of those counties that I'm fairly familiar with. Largely from the work that my father was engaged in with the United States Department of Agriculture—Farmers Home Administration—he was the Negro agent for the state of Alabama, so we traveled all over, and we had to stay with folk in the communities, except for in Birmingham where we could stay at A.G. Gaston motel, but largely with families that my daddy knew. My father never accepted—well, I guess he accepted some—but he was always fighting against second-class citizenship. For example, he signed his name G.H. Paris because he didn't want white people to call him George. I remember in 1956, we bought a new car, and we were living in Livingston at the time. And so Daddy had test driven a car in Livingston, and the next weekend, he came from Tuskegee, and he had the car. And so this man goes, "George, I thought you were gonna buy that car from me." And Daddy would tell him, say, "Well, the place where I bought this car, my name is Mr. Paris." So we kind of grew up with that with our father and our mother down through the years. When he would come from Tuskegee—well Daddy, they did the Peter Principle on him. He had done so much with Black farmers and land retention in western Alabama that they decided that the way to get him out of western Alabama was to move him to the state office, which was in Montgomery, and this was probably late fifties.