

# **The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama**

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

## **“Bloody Lowndes” and the Black Panther Party Speaker: John Hulett, Frye Gaillard**

I am Sherry Marie Shuck, Assistant Professor of History at UAH. Welcome to the ninth installment of the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, 14-week symposium centered around a series of public lectures, panels and first-hand account of significant events taking place in the state of Alabama. This series is held alternately at UAH and Alabama A&M University. After three years of planning, this unique intellectual project is a joint venture between Alabama A&M University and the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The members of the Steering Committee in alphabetical order are: Mitch Berbrier of UAH, John Dimmock of UAH, Jack Ellis of UAH, James Johnson of AAMU, Carolyn Parker of AAMU and Lee Williams, II, of UAH. Throughout its work, the planning committee has also been greatly assisted by the efforts of Joyce Maples of UAH's University Relations.

We ask that you complete an evaluation form for this program and leave it here on the stage or with an attendant at the exit.

This series on the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama would not have been possible without the financial support of numerous sponsors whom the planning committee wishes to acknowledge at this time. First and foremost is the Alabama Humanities Foundation, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities; The Huntsville Times, DESE Research Incorporated, Mevatec Corporation, Alabama Representative Laura Hall and Senator Hank Sanders.

# **The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama**

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Joining our efforts from Alabama A&M University is the Office of the President, The Office of the Provost, the State Black Archives Research Center and Museum, the Title III Telecommunications who are responsible for taping these sessions and we give a special thanks to all of you and Distance Learning, the Office of Student Development, the A&M Honors Center, Sociology/Social Work, Political Science and History.

At the University of Alabama in Huntsville, we greatly acknowledge funding assistance from the Office of the President, Office of the Provost, the Humanities Center, the Division of Continuing Education, the Department of Sociology, its Social Issues Symposium, the Honors Program, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Student Affairs, The Copy Center and the UAH History Forum Bankhead Foundation, which is serving as the local host for tonight's activities; and with the kind help of Staff Assistant Beverly Robinson, who has prepared a reception back stage immediately following tonight's lecture to which you are all invited.

We would like to remind you that next Tuesday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, we have a special guest lecturer, Dr. Hilliard Lackey, Professor of History at Jackson State University who will speak on the Selma Voting Rights Campaign, which will be held in Room 111 of the School of Business at Alabama A&M University at 7 p.m.

Next Thursday, our series will take place at the Ernest Knight Reception Center at Alabama A&M University. Our focus will be the struggle for voting rights in Selma, culminating in the event of March 7, 1965, known as Bloody Sunday in which state troopers in an armed posse led by local sheriff, Jim Clark, used clubs and tear gas to beat back peaceful marches attempting to cross Edmund Pettus Bridge on their way to

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Montgomery. Our speaker will be Congressman John Lewis of Georgia's 5<sup>th</sup> District, one of the towering figures of the Civil Rights Movement. A native of Torre, Alabama, an author of *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, published in 1998, Congressman Lewis was active in the national sit-ins, the freedom rides, the Selma movement and was at the head of the marcher's attack on Pettus. He will be joined by New York writer Mary Stanton, author of the book *From Selma to Sorrow: the Life and Death of Viola Liuzzo*, published in 1998.

Tonight, we look at events that took place not far from Selma in a Blackbelt County, whose tradition of violence against African-Americans and Civil Rights workers earned it the unenviable nickname of Bloody Lowndes.

Two classic examples of Lowndes County terrorism are the Klan murders on March 25, 1965, of Mrs. Viola Liuzzo, a white Civil Rights volunteer from Michigan along US Highway 80, followed by the shotgun slaying of Jonathan Daniels, a 26-year-old Divinity student from New Hampshire at Varner's Cash Store in Hayneville. Such atrocities had prevented any black resident from being registered to vote for over half a century, even though they outnumbered local whites by more than 3 to 1. Blacks who wished to register not only faced expulsion from the farms where they lived and worked but also a constant threat of physical violence.

In a county where only 800 white men resided, Mr. John Hulett observed in 1966, that "there are 550 of them who walk around with guns on them. They are deputies. It might sound like a fairy tale to most people, but this is true." Mr. Hulett was at the center of the struggle to bring change to Lowndes County and what he accomplished there had

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

repercussions far beyond the Blackbelt and state of Alabama. To introduce him with our second distinguished guest on stage tonight, prize-winning journalist, Frye Gaillard, a call upon Ms. Erin Reed, a history graduate student at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and president of Phi Alpha Theta, the history on a raring society...Ms. Reed.

**Introduction:** In defending the cause of freedom over the past 5 decades, Mr. John Hulett has served in many ways, from union activist and civil rights leader to county sheriff and probate judge. In his book, *Outside Agitator, John Daniel and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama*, historian Charles W. Eagles, portrays Mr. Hulett as the leader of the Civil Rights struggle in Lowndes County and as a “tireless, determined worker with unusual intensity and powerful personality.” Born in a tiny community of Gordonsville, Mr. Hulett passed his formative years in rural bonds. It was here, according to Professor Eagles, that his grandfather born in slavery had managed during his life to acquire more than a hundred acres in addition to a gristmill, a sawmill and a cotton gin. Finishing high school in 1946, Mr. Hulett soon left the family’s farm to live in Birmingham. There, he was hired as a foundry worker for the Birmingham Stove and Range Company. This marked the beginning of his life as an activist, first as president of the Foundry Worker’s Union and then as a reformer seeking to improve the lives of those in Pratt City where he lives.

By 1949, he had joined the NAACP and after it was banned he joined the Successor Organization created by Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, known as the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. In Birmingham, Mr. Hulett was also successful in his attempt to register to vote.

# **The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama**

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Returning to Lowndes County in 1959, Mr. Hulett soon emerged as the leader of local efforts to combat the poll tax and to gain the right to register for local African-Americans. This brought him into direct conflict with a white minority that dominated that county and that for 50 years had ensured that no black person could vote or serve on jury.

By March of 1965, only he and one other black resident had succeeded in being registered, despite an appearance at the courthouse in Hayneville that month by Martin Luther King, Jr., who sought unsuccessfully to register 37 local residents. In response, Mr. Hulett help organize the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights and served as its first president.

Passage of the Voting Rights Act in August 1965 along with presence of federal registrars helped ensure that African-Americans would become a voting majority in Lowndes County. In order to solidify the gains achieved by this \_\_\_\_\_ and to prevent the local democrat party from again disenfranchising blacks by raising fees for office seekers, Mr. Hulett was instrumental in founding an alternative party, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. This party was organized on April 2, 1966, with Mr. Hulett and it took as its symbol the black panther. In Lowndes County, he explained, we have been deprived of our rights to speak, to move and to do whatever we want to do at all times and now we are going to start moving. On November 8 of this year, we plan to take over the courthouse in Hayneville and whatever it takes to do it, we're going to do it.

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

In 1969, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization became part of the National Democratic Party of Alabama whose electoral victories the following year included that of John Hulett as sheriff, the first African-American to be elected to that office there.

Tonight, Mr. Hulett will share with us memories of his life and struggle in Lowndes County from his youth and early involvement in the Voter Registration Campaign to the founding of the Black Panther Party, to the Selma movement and the murders of Viola Liuzzo and John Daniels and finally to the changes that has witnessed over the past 40 years.

Along with Mr. Hulett, we are also privileged to have as our guest on stage tonight journalist and author Frye Gaillard. Mr. Gaillard will be interviewing Mr. Hulett. Mr. Gaillard lives and works in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is a free-lance writer with special interests in the culture, religion and social history of the American south. He has written or edited 18 books touching on various aspects of this southern experience from black and Native American history to country music and Habitat for Humanity.

Mr. Gaillard is a native of Mobile and in 1994 described his own family's history in a book entitled, *Lessons from the Big House, One Family's Passage through the History of the South*. Between 1964 and 1968, Mr. Gaillard studied at Vanderbilt University, graduating with a major in history. After a brief \_\_\_\_\_ at the Associated Press in 1972, he joined the Charlotte Observer, serving first as a staff writer, then as editorial writer and columnist and finally as southern editor. He remained with this newspaper until 1990 when he decided to pursue free-lance writing. During those years, Mr. Gaillard won numerous awards for excellence in reporting including awards

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

from the North Carolina Press Association and the Associated Press. Among Mr. Gaillard's books are several that bear directly on the Civil Rights Movement, The Greensboro for Civil Rights Pioneers, The Way We See It, documentary , photography by the Children of Charlotte which he published with his daughter Rachel and the Dream Long Deferred which detailed the landmark school desegregation struggle in Charlotte. This book won the Gustavus Myers Award for writing on the subject of human rights.

At present, Mr. Gaillard is working on a book detailing the Civil Rights Movement here in Alabama. It will be titled, Cradle of Freedom, The History of the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama.. It is scheduled to be published by the University of Alabama Press in 2002.

We are pleased to have both interviewer and interviewee with us this evening. Please join me in a warm welcome.

**Frye Gaillard:** We are happy to be here tonight to participate in this program. I was fortunate to be here for one of the other programs, with Diane Dash on September 13<sup>th</sup>, two days after some fairly significant events in the world. My wife and I were driving down and we thought there would be us and Diane Nash at the auditorium, but it was an amazing turnout. It is a testament to the kind of interest that you have in this community, in this subject and also to the really well planned nature of the program that you have been fortunate to be a part of, I think. I have been asked and have worked for the last two years researching what the University of Alabama Press is calling a popular history of the Civil Rights Movement. By that, they mean they want a journalist and a storyteller rather than a historian to write about it and to keep it short. One of things that I

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

have had the privilege of doing is talking to a lot of people who were foot shoulders in the movement, people that I have never in many cases ever heard of. I grew up in those days in Alabama and sort of came of age with an awareness of what was going on in the state. There are so many people who have such rich stories and one of those people are obviously the guest of honor here tonight, John Hulett. I knew that I wanted to meet John Hulett ever since the time in the early 1970's. I was working for the newspaper in Charlotte and I was doing a story on the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on the south in general and one of the places I visited was Lowndes County. I remember driving down one of the back roads in Lowndes County and Lowndes County has a lot of back roads. I was passing this farmhouse and there was kind of a rutted two-lane path that led up to the farmhouse and there was a black man sitting on the porch of this farmhouse. So, I drove up to just see what he might have to say about the Civil Rights Movement and the impact that it had on his life. He was a little skeptical at first of this white stranger who had driven up to his place, but we sat on the porch in these flimsy old aluminum chairs and we talked for a while and began to connect, I think. We started to talk about the movement and the impact that it had and I said, can you tell me what it has meant to you that the Civil Rights Movement occurred in the south and in the state of Alabama. He said, oh, that's an easy question to answer; the biggest difference it has made in my life is that John Hulett is sheriff of Lowndes County and I didn't know exactly what he meant and I said, well talk about this a little bit more. What do you mean by that? He said, let me tell you a story and he told me the story of the night that he was on his way home; this was a man named Ervin Henson. He told me the story of a night that he was on his way

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

home and his car broke down on the side of the road. So, he had to leave it and walk and this was not something that you wanted to happen in the pre-Civil Rights days in Lowndes County, Alabama. He was walking by himself on the road and a car with two deputy sheriffs passed by him. They pulled to a stop, demanded what to know what he was doing and he just told them that he was on his way home. They got out of the car and one of them clubbed him over the head with a nightstick. They handcuffed his hands behind his back and pitched him bleeding and semiconscious into the trunk of the police car. They drove around with him in the trunk of car until it was almost dawn and what Mr. Henson said is that it does not happen any more because John Hulett is sheriff of Lowndes County, Alabama. And the more I began to talk to people about this, the more clear it became that there were these sort of stages that the Civil Rights Movement went through. You had this kind of feeling of daybreak in Montgomery with the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the sort of first time that black people in a kind of mass way took a stand for freedom and justice and actually accomplished something and accomplished very tangible results. Of course, you had the freedom rides where young black people and activists served noticed that there was no place too terrifying for the movement to go and that violence would not overcome nonviolence no matter what. You had Birmingham with the police dogs, the fire hoses and those images that seared the conscious of people all over the country. You had Selma and the Montgomery March that led to the most revolutionary single change that the movement accomplished which was the right to vote for black people everywhere. You also had these other struggles that were taking place in Huntsville, Gadsden, Mobile, Tuskegee, Tuscaloosa and all of these other places and you

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

had the struggle in the Blackbelt that John Hulett knows so well, which I think the final movement was the victory over fear. If you were black... and I am going to ask Judge Hulett about this in a minute. But, if you were black in Lowndes County, Alabama, you lived with fear every single of your life because you knew that white people, if they chose, could do anything to you that they wanted to almost with impunity, but at least the legal system would offer you no protection whatsoever and in fact, in most cases, was part of the problem and this is what they changed. This is the final stage of the movement and so that is what we will get to tonight. The format that we are going to use is one that neither John Hulett nor I would have thought of.; I think I am safe in saying. I was doing an interview with him in Hayneville at the courthouse and there was a professor from Auburn who happened to be with me who was so fascinated by the answers that I was getting to these questions that she said, you know, you guys need to do this publicly. We need to take you to some of the schools in Alabama. So, we tried it out before a couple of high school audiences and survived and we figured that was about as tough a crowd as we could have and then we did it at Auburn one time too. So, we are going to try it again tonight. Hopefully, it will work and if you have questions, feel free either to jump in or when I finish getting us started then I will kind of open it up to the audience and you guys can ask whatever you would like to know as well. So, I just want to say before I start what a privilege it is for me to be here with one of the genuine heroes of this movement that you guys have been talking about.

**Q:** Judge Hulett, you grew up in the Blackbelt in the 1930's and 1940's. Talk a little bit about what it was like for black people in those days in that part of Alabama. What are

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

some of your memories growing up then and do you agree with Ervin Henson and others that it was a dangerous place to be if you were black?

**A:** Certainly, I do. I was born in 1927 in Gordonsville, Alabama; that's close to \_\_\_\_\_ and doing that time the entire county was farming country. Most people who lived in that county were sharecroppers. You had to work on other folks plantation, if you know what a sharecropper is, and when you work on peoples plantations you had to do what they say do or you had to go or get killed or a thing of that time, but I lived in Lowndes County and grew up there. I went to school at an all black school and finished grammar school and high school. I came out of high school in 1946, but it was a lot filth that went on during that time. I can remember many times, at night times, we had a sheriff in that county, a real nice brother and he would drive by, and if you were walking the road at night, especially a few black boys walking the road, he would catch you and beat you. I know one friend of mine whose brother went to school with us that he beat one night and finally he died from that beating, but nothing was done about it; I can remember that. Plenty people he would beat. He would walk up to a place that if you had a music box playing, he would just walk up and take his Billy stick and tear it up and start shooting at it. He was that type of person. Oto Mural was our sheriff and he stayed in it as long as he wanted to. When he got ready to run for probate judge, the people denied him the opportunity to be the probate judge, but they wanted a man like that for sheriff.

**Q:** Now, in the those days, back in the 1930's, the Tenant Farmers Unit, came into Lowndes County and tried to organize sharecroppers who were living in conditions not very far removed from slavery. I remember talking to one elderly man, Mr. Charles

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Smith, who remembered that as a young man in Lowndes County we were working for almost nothing and he talked about how they struck to try to get paid a dollar a day and they walked out of the fields and the person who organized the strike at the Bell plantation that he was part of was shot down by the sheriff of the overseer in cold blood. Did you hear of those kind of stories when you were growing up? Did you hear about that kind of thing?

**A:** Yes, I did. I talked to Mr. Lemon Bogen whose one of the persons who was involved. The late Lemon Bogen, he's dead now, but he also talked about how bad it was and how people would beat up people and shoot individuals. This was the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement when he started telling more about most of this type stuff. He always said when you go out on these plantations be careful cause they will kill you.

**Q:** So, when the Civil Rights Movement really started in Lowndes County, Alabama, it was part of the collective memory of the people there and what could happen to people who stood up for themselves? I mean, you knew that you were laying your life on the line to do that?

**A:** This is true. I did know that.

**Q:** What do you think gave you the courage to do it? Was it some of the experiences that you had at other places? I know you left Lowndes County for awhile, worked in Birmingham, both in the Labor Movement and in the Civil Rights Movement there. Did you learn things there that were important to you later on?

**A:** Yes, I did. In Birmingham I worked in Shutterworth and the most important thing happened was the bombing of church, Author Shows house and Athrene Lucie was trying

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

to enter into the University of Alabama. So, a few of us got together and would sit guard at Author Shows house that night.

**Q:** Now, he was an attorney?

**A:** He was an attorney who represented Athrene Lucie and I can remember one night sitting there about 3 o' clock in the morning and a shout would come out, there's a car driving up with no lights on it. It was a police car and see most of this stuff that went on was done by law enforcement officers or people who they allowed to do what needed to be done. So, when we came out with those guns in our hands. The lights came on the car and then they said they were just checking to see how everything was. That was the beginning of it, but when I went back to Lowndes County it was a whole different ball game because Lowndes County was predominantly black as far as population but such a dangerous place to be in during that time and we got back into Lowndes County. We had a few people that tried to register to vote but was denied. There was not a single registered voter in Lowndes County and in 1965, the first week in March, the voter registration would be opened 2 days, the first and third week of the month. We got about 65 people to go and get registered to vote. Most of them were afraid to get out of there car when it they got to the courthouse, but somebody had to have the courage, so I took the leadership to walk in the courthouse and find out where to register at. The first thing I was told by one of the registrars was that we have not permitted you all here, go down to the old jail; that's where we going to register the people 2 weeks from now. I immediately went to that old jail, went all through it and looked at the gallows to see where they had been hanging people for years. You had to have that kind of nerve. Two

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

weeks later, we went back to that jail and I happen to take the leadership and carry the blind man along with me, the late Reverend Jesse Lawson. They passed two of us that day out of about 25 or 30 people that went through it. They passed me and they passed Reverend Lawson and you had to do answer questions on those older tests at that time. One of the questions that they asked me I can remember, what hospital the president had been in during that time. Now, there are no televisions, very few radios in the radio in the neighborhood, but I did remember it was Walter Reed Hospital and I said that and they passed me. I do not think I passed the test, seriously. They passed me to get rid of me, but every time the voter's registration was open I was back there again until we were able to get enough people registered to vote.

**Q:** You had registered to vote in Birmingham when you lived there. Is that correct?

**A:** This is true. I registered to vote in Birmingham.

**Q:** So, some of the experiences that you had in Birmingham were kind of things that you imported back to Lowndes County?

**A:** That's right.

**Q:** I know one of the interviews that I did recently you mentioned Reverend Shuttlesworth. He tells the story of Christmas night, 1956, right after the end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and he had announced that the next day, December 26, he was going to ride in front of the bus in Birmingham. He was lying in his bed and the parsonage of his house and 14 sticks of dynamite went off on the corner of the house right under the bed where he was lying. The floor collapsed and the ceiling collapsed but fell just short of where he was. He felt himself falling through the floor to the ground,

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

landed on the bed and he said later that he felt like he was landing in the arms of God and if he had ever been afraid until then, he was never afraid again. I am guessing that kind of example of courage inspired you to look inside yourself for the kind of courage that you have because you had to have it in Lowndes County.

**A:** Yes. You had to have it in Lowndes County. I lived about almost a mile and a half off the main. If you have ever lived in the country, you did not have cattle gaps because the drive crossed the cattle gap. You would have to open three gates before you get my house and that was the most fearful thing that somebody might be lying out in the weeds waiting on you. When you open this gate, they could ambush you, but it never happened to me. I kept God in the front and I kept doing what I needed to do to make life better for the people in our country.

**Q:** One of things that happened in a lot of places during the Civil Rights Movements was that in every case there were local people who were there to take a stand. They would stand up for what was right, what was just and what was decent and fair, but there was also in many cases people who came in from the outside to encourage people. I want to talk about two of the people who came into Lowndes County. One of them was Stokeley Carmichael and the other was Jonathan Daniels. Now, there were others too who were every important and we have talked about them as well, but let's take those in order. Give us your recollection of Stokely Carmichael, one of the toughest organizers in SNCC; I think its fair to say. What was your impression of him as a person, a human being, an organizer and a leader and how well did you get to know him?

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

**A:** Just like a brother because he had worked around me quite a bit. I think Stokely was a great person. He had worked in Mississippi with the movement there and when he came into Lowndes County he knew he had an uphill journey. We worked close together and that is why we organized the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. Every place they would go into they was looked at by state troopers every were they went. I remember one incident that took place. One day, there was a group of people that decided to picket in Fort Deposit, Alabama. They arrested about 20 people in that area. Stokely was a passenger in a car and during that same day was arrested and charged with reckless driving as a passenger. So, you can see how bad they wanted Stokely Carmichael. He was great person. He was a great organizer. He stayed with the people in the community and we worked together to try to make Lowndes County better. We had organized the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights. If you can remember the movement in Birmingham; it was the Alabama Christian Movement. So, the day we went over to get registered and was denied that right, Dr. King came over, but we didn't see him, we went down that night and organized the Lowndes County Christian Movement of Human Rights. I was chosen temporary chairman of that group until we was able to have a mass meeting and the people decided to go ahead and keep me there, but this was the beginning of it.

**Q:** Now, there were people who later came to regard Stokely Carmichael as a violent person. Did you think of him that way?

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

**A:** No sir. He was not a violent person. I never saw him do anything violent to anybody. He would speak up, but he would not threaten anybody or talk about killing or all that type stuff.

**Q:** And that was most emphatically your experience with him in Lowndes County.

**A:** This is true.

**Q:** Okay. Let's talk about Jonathan Daniels a little bit, a white, Episcopal seminarian who came to Lowndes County and did not get out alive. What was your view of Jonathan Daniels?

**A:** He was a great person. He was interested in what was going on. He did not try to do anything wrong. The day that they had this picket in Fort Deposit, Alabama (that's the largest town in the county) he joined that group without my knowledge. I was in Fort Deposit, but I did not know he was going to be a part of that group and it was dangerous for any white to join the black in Fort Deposit. When got there that morning in town, they had every police officer they could get and everything, just waiting. In a moment, if they made about 10 steps, they were arrested and out in a two-cell jail with 20 something people. They had to get a dump truck. You know what a dump truck is. The one with the side bars on it. They put them on that dump truck and put a black police officer and brought them in. This was when Stokely was arrested. They wanted him so bad. I am going to be honest with you. There were two pickup trucks and everywhere they would go, one of the trucks would get in the front. If they would make a right into them, the one behind would get in the front and just hit breaks all of a sudden until it made them bump them. When they bumped them, the police arrested them and put both of them in jail and

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

charged them with reckless driving. I have a record of that showing that 2 people got charged for reckless driving in the same automobile, but this was the type of situation we lived in that day and time. There were white people that walked around with shotguns. I can never forget that day. I went to the town hall to try to make arrangements with the chief to try and get them out of jail. I could not get anybody to go with me, but I finally took the same car they were driving and drove it to the town hall and waited there while and carried another fellow. There was 14 people and I am not going to lie to you sitting on the sidewalk with shotguns, rifles and pistols.

**Q:** White people?

**A:** White people and they all came inside when the chief of police came in. He wanted to know what I wanted and I told him that I wanted to try to make bond to get Stokely out of jail because I believe they would kill him there. He said no that I could not get him out of jail he is up in Lowndes County and I can never forget the last man. A double barrel shotgun passed by and I rolled my pistol on the floor and he almost ran over the next man. I can remember that just like daylight today and I found out then it has to be a group of you doing it to do it like it ought to be done. You know what I'm saying. They were afraid themselves, but they were out there doing these types of things. Stokely stayed in jail; that was on a Saturday. On Wednesday, I went by the jailhouse and carried food to feed the people that they took to jail. Some of them we made bond, except for Stokely and one or two more. On a Friday evening, I went to Montgomery and when I came back the town was full of police officers and other white people. Black folks were afraid to speak to me almost when I got out of the car on the corner at the intersection. I asked

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

what was going on. Why were all of these people were in town? They said, they killed those two white preachers. That's what they said. They had killed Jonathan Daniels. They first shot and killed him and the second shot hit Father Marshall from the back and it took 12 hours to operate on him at St. Jude Hospital, but he finally lived from it. I have had seven meetings with him since that time. This was the kind of conditions we had to live in during that time.

**Q:** How were you able to persuade the average person in Lowndes County that it was possible to change a situation that went as deeply as this one went, where white supremacy was defended as completely by violence and any means necessary? How did you convince people that it was possible to make a change?

**A:** We were meeting together in groups. We were having mass meetings and we would speak to them from those mass meetings. He gave a lot of courage to people that they could overcome what was going on. We would talk about what was going on. We would go on plantations on a daily basis. I quit my job and the movement paid me. The Lowndes County Christian Movement gave me a salary to work.

**Q:** How much was that?

**A:** My salary was 25 dollars every first Sunday; that is a month. I did not work long hours. I just worked about 9 or 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. When I went on plantations, bosses were there. You had to have a lot of courage to stand up. I would carry about one or two ladies around with me, most times just riding with me. I would speak up and be straight to people. I was able to get a lot of things done when I started doing that. People would go out and get registered. They just believed that I was doing

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

the right thing. Not only me, but there were other people in the movement as well, like the Jackson family, Mattie Lee Murrell; these were older people. They were strong. They stood up and decided to go ahead and go out and register to vote. They wanted to change life for their children and themselves.

**Q:** One of the people that I interviewed in Lowndes County was a SNCC organizer who came in there by the name of Bob Mantz and he still lives there. I was asking him where he found the courage to do the things that he had to do. He said it was so terrifying. There were times when he could barely make himself do the things that he needed to do. I said, where did you find the courage and he said it came from the people of Lowndes County. He told me the story of going to this house where an elderly black woman, almost 100 years old, was bedridden. She was lying in a bedroom off from the living room where he was talking to other people in the family. He heard this frail voice saying tell that boy to come in here; I want to talk to him. So, he went in to talk to this old lady. She looked up at him and she pointed this bony finger at him from her bed and she said, I have been praying that you boys would come into Lowndes County ever since I saw you march around Mr. Lincoln's grave. Of course, what she meant was that she had seen the march on Washington in television and had been praying that people would come into Lowndes County and trigger a movement in Lowndes County. Bob Mantz said and what I have heard you say as well is that the courage of average people became contagious after awhile. People just held each other help. That is the example from you and other some other people.

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

A: This is true. At the same time, there were people who worked on the plantation. If you were hoeing, you made 25 cents a day and if you were on \_\_\_\_\_ you got 50 cents a day. We started telling people to go to Montgomery and get jobs and start making life better for them. So, that gave them a lot of courage to come out and do what needed to be done. That made a difference. I want to say one other thing. When Stokely got arrested in Prattville I was suppose to have gone over with him, but I had another speaking engagement with a group of folks in my county. He got arrested the next morning. A young lady called me, a school teacher named Ms. Darby Henson. She said, come ride over to Prattville with me. When I got over there, Stokely was in jail. I drove up to the chief of police and asked him could I walk down the hill to one of the Civil Rights workers; they are in a housing house. He said, go ahead but do not stay long. I walked just a short distance and when I looked out of the window he had a carbine rifle punching her in the car, and that was the most hurting thing I have ever seen in my life. So, I came back out. They had the National Guards. State troopers were over there. When I came back out, the punch did not hit me, but they punched after me until I got to the car. I got in the back seat of the car on the passenger's right side. The same person opened the car door and punched me in the face. If I had not snatched by head, I would have broken my jawbone. I made up my mind. I am going to say this because I am serious about it; I was going to get him if I had to burn his house down, his wife and children. Let me be serious with you. I went home that night and prayed about it. It looked like the Lord just came to me like daylight and said do not do that; that is not the way to do it. I did not do it. I prayed about it and things changed for us. Sometimes, you cannot take on violence

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

because you believe you ought to do something. You cannot make a fast decision, just pray about it, but I was punched in the face. A few months later I had a gun in the \_\_\_\_\_. I went to Montgomery to get the gun out the shop. I had to go up to a lawyer's office. I got on the elevator. Now, I do not even know the man because I never seen him before who punched me in the face. So, when I got on that elevator, he was on that elevator and he came off running like a \_\_\_\_\_. The people over there were saying what is going on. I said, do not worry about it' everything is okay. I am not going to bother him. When you treat people wrong, it will come back to you. The next time I got a chance to see him was at the University of Alabama. Everybody was introducing themselves. I was just elected sheriff. When it got around to him, he was sitting across the big conference table and he gave his name in front of me, but he never was able to come back and say I am sorry and that is a bad thing. When you do wrong, you ought to do it. While I am telling it, I want to tell this incident. In 1983, in the line of duty, I got shot in the back by a black man who was on drugs.

**Q:** You were sheriff?

**A:** I was sheriff. One of my deputies reached to shoot him closer than this gentleman over here. I told him not to shoot him. If he was shooting to kill that man and made a mistake and killed somebody else, he would have done more harm than it helped good. After he went to the penitentiary and stayed awhile, I never signed papers to keep him in, I met him one morning after he had gotten out and we out our arms around each one other and forgot about everything. A few months later, I married him to a girl from Pratt, Alabama. I think this is the type of life you have to kill. I think about Jesus Christ, who

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

died on the cross for our sins. If we are going to hold things against one another the rest of our lives, white or black, we are wrong. There was an elder man who was part of our movement by the name of Mr. Calan Hayes. We would call him CC Hayes. He always said, John whatever you all do, do not try to do evil for evil to people, not even to us. He passed away a few months ago, but I thank God for that type of thing. We have tried to live right.

**Q:** Let's talk about this whole idea of the changes in Lowndes County and the whole idea of forgiveness and fairness once those changes happened, two questions about that. First of all, in 1966, you ran for sheriff for the first time under the banner of what some people called the Black Panther Party. Now, that was not literally the name of the party, but the emblem of the party was the black panther. Talk about the symbolism of that party, why you ran under that banner and then we will move on to the next question which has to do with when you were elected in 1970.

**A:** Let me say this, I did not run. I was head of the Lowndes County Christian Movement and in 1966 when we got ready to run candidates the Democratic Party, if you can remember, had over the banner white supremacy for the \_\_\_\_\_. There was a 50 dollar fee to qualify for sheriff. When we got ready to run, a black man Sidney Logan, Jr., they went to 500 dollars. So, we immediately decided to organize the Lowndes County Freedom Organization and we had to have a symbol, like the rooster was for the Democratic Party or the elephant was for the Republican Party. We organized the Lowndes County Freedom Organization and we had to come up with a symbol. We kind of kicked names around and we came up with the black panther. The reason why we did

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

this is because the black panther is not a violent animal but when you push it to a corner, it will come out and do whatever it has to do. If you lived in Lowndes County, you better had something to let folks know you were serious about it. So, we chose that black panther for the party. We lost the election in 1966 and something happened to us. If you can remember, in California, there was a group who was in Lowndes County doing the election in 1966.

**Q:** Huey Newton and some others?

**A:** Huey Newton. They went back to California and got their guns and things.

They would get in their cars and follow a policeman around and one of them finally killed a police officer according the records. Because of that, we just decided that the emblem of the black panther was not the best thing for Lowndes County people. We did not want anyone to get hurt in Lowndes County because of what they were doing in California. Dr. Jordan Cassius, from Huntsville, Alabama, came down to Lowndes County and Green County and we got together and organized the NDPA and used the eagle for our symbol and nobody said a word about that. Logan lost in 1966 and in 1970, I ran for sheriff under the National Democratic Party. I won by 210 votes because a lot of our people were afraid to vote for me because there was a thing out that they were going to kill John Hulett if he wins within 3 days after I was elected. I had to go to a lot of these old people that I had trusted in and that loved me because they did not want to see me die. So, I said go ahead and vote for me. I will live if I have to stay in the woods 3 days. After that, I won 5 more elections without having any problems whatsoever with white or black.

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

**Q:** That is right. It was not you that lost in 1966. It was Sidney Logan and then you ran in 1970. In terms of the kind of spirit that you brought to the Office of Sheriff after you were elected in 1970, the spirit of justice rather than revenge, talk a little bit about your relationship. I think it is a great illustration of this point with Tom Coleman. Tom Coleman was the man who killed Jonathan Daniels, blew him away with a shotgun in cold blood at point blank range in the summer of 1965. Can you tell the story about just before you were running for sheriff that Tom Coleman drove up to you on the square in Hayneville? Tell people about your story.

**A:** He drove over to the square in Hayneville and said John, would you mind riding with me to Lonsborough. Here is the guy who just killed one person and shot the other. I had to show him that I had enough courage to get in that car without a gun or anything. I stepped in that car because I did not think that anybody could do anything to me for driving the car and being up there with him. We rode to Lonsborough and we talked about the incident and what took place. The first thing that he said was that people pushed him in a corner to do this. You know, there was people who encourage him to do this; that is what he was saying. The next thing, which I would not have done to any black, he was trying to do this to white people to keep them out of Lowndes County and from helping us and to slow the process down. This is what this was all about. I told him then that I was going to run for sheriff and I would appreciate it if he vote for me. He said, well I cannot vote for you, but I know you are going to win it. After I won the sheriff race in Lowndes County, he was one of people that kept a monitor in his house. He would call me on a daily and nightly basis. He would let me know that the troopers

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

were trying to get up with me and that I got some debris on the highway. He would get on the road with me at 2 o'clock in the morning. He would clean up the highways. He had done that for me. I think that sometimes you have to live the kind of life that the Lord wants you to live and treat folks like human beings. I never was afraid of him. I worked with his son as a state trooper and an investigator, but this is the type of thing that I have done. I think the best thing in the world to do is let people know that you are not afraid of them, but you are going to do the right thing; black or white, it did not make a difference.

**Q:** Would you say this man became a friend of yours?

**A:** Yes. He became one of the best friends I had as far as letting me know what was going on and talking to me on a regular basis. He had done that.

**Q:** Why do you think he did that?

**A:** I think it could have been out of fear. He could have thought I was going to try and pay him back. A lot of things could have happened. I can never forget. I want to say this while I am talking. I went into Fort Deposit and I walked into a drug store. There were 11 or 12 women in that store and one man who was filling prescriptions. While I was in there, there was a guy who walked around on the outside all the time with a 38 on him with a \_\_\_\_\_. Just as I started out of the door, the main way to \_\_\_\_\_ school, until I got almost to the door like this here, he walked in and said who is your damn so and so and cussing on. Those women were running out of that door. Two or three were trying to get out at the same time. I looked around at the man who was filling the prescription and I would not lie, he was shaking and trembling so the pee was falling on

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

the floor. Somebody has to have some courage. So, I turned around and walked back in there with him wherever he went.

**Q:** The man with the gun?

**A:** Yes. You might shoot me, but you are not going to shoot me in the back. I am going to take this gun from you or you are going to have to shoot me right. I walked back in the store with him for about 5 minutes. He never said another word; I just took his nerve. I finally picked up a bar of candy, paid for it and walked out. He, the drugstore man and I were the only 3 people in there. I never had another word from him. Later, he pulled a gun and said he would never let a nigger arrest him. He pulled a gun on a black man in Fort Deposit and that next morning I go to work after the warrant was signed, he came into the office with Mr. Tom Coleman. That is smart. You understand what I am saying. He believed that Tom Coleman could straighten out some things. I made him sign his bond. I fingerprinted him and told him to make sure you show up in court when time to come and I did not have anymore problems. I never heard another word from him, but he did go to court. These were the types of situations you had to live in. It did not make any difference whether you were right or wrong, white or black; you had to do what was right. I stood my ground the whole time I was in the sheriff's office. I did not care what color he was. If you committed a crime, you went to jail. I would call you and if you did not come, I would go get you.

**Q:** Did you ever have any dealings with George Wallace when you were sheriff?

**A:** Truthfully, I had dealings with George Wallace. George Wallace turned out to be one of my best friends. The first time I became sheriff he had a parade in Greenville and I

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

was the only black sheriff in that parade. I can remember walking by him and he gave me some of his material. Every time I would go to their captain for anything, he would say, sheriff what you want. I had a small staff when I started as sheriff. There was only 3 people. I went up one day and said I need a larger staff and he said okay and tell your representative to come by. I told me my representative, but he did not go by. Two weeks ago, I got a check from him to pay for another deputy. That was the kind of person he was and whenever I would come around he would get up and take a picture with me. He would call my house on the weekend and when I got shot, he would call my wife every weekend, Friday night, and tell her whatever he could do to help he would do it. This was the kind of person George Wallace turned out to be with John Hulett. I was not no Uncle Tom, but I was just doing the right thing.

**Q:** Before we open it up to everybody else's questions, as you look back on the experiences that you had in Lowndes County and the impact that the movement had in Lowndes County and other places in Alabama, what is your bottom line summary of those days. What do you feel was accomplished? To what extent was the movement successful and to what extent did it fall short of what you had hoped for?

**A:** Let me refer back to two things. If you all remember, in the state of Alabama, the only people who served on jurors in the state of Alabama were men. There were very few black men in places like Lowndes County. It was Lowndes County who went to Montgomery and filed a suit, White versus Crooks to allow women to serve as jurors in the state of Alabama.; that originated in Lowndes County, Alabama. The first place they camped out in Lowndes County when they came in was Rose Steel's property. Her

## The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

granddaughter was the individual who \_\_\_\_\_, Ardenia White. So, that is why women are serving today in the state of Alabama. We also had the justice of peace system in the state of Alabama. Most of you might remember the justice of peace. Every county had a justice of peace. In Lowndes County, one day, I was arrested and charged with reckless driving. I went straight to the justice of peace office and said, what would it cost me for this ticket. He said, it was going to cost you 100 dollars and 11 dollars court cost. Excuse me for the expression, but I said I will die and go to hell before I pay it. He said, you can get ready. Next week, I went to Montgomery, attorney Salman Say's office, and talked to him about it cause every justice of peace fine you give them, they get 5 dollars out it. I went to federal court and that is why they do not have any justice of peace in the state of Alabama today. The judge ruled in our favor. That was helpful to the state of Alabama and the woman serving on jury was helpful. There was a number of other things that took place in that county. People were able to hold public office who had never held public office. We got plenty of them now, men and women, not only in Lowndes County but in surrounding counties because of our courage and things that we have done. I have gone into other counties and our joining county, Wilcox County has a black sheriff. When he got ready to run, I encouraged him to run. I went down and spoke for him and he won that election and he has been there ever since. It is a lot you can do to help other people if you would do it. Today, we are still working hard trying to make life better for the people in our county. Let me say this. I am retired now and I could not run for probate judge because of my age, but each morning of my life I get up now and go out and do something for somebody. I pick up aluminum cans off the street and give to the

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

scholarship fund to help children to go to college. I have a group that takes care of it. I plant gardens so there are plenty vegetables to give folks who cannot afford to work. The older people who cannot cut there yards, I cut there yards free. If you need a ramp built or a wheelchair or something, I go out and do it free for people. This is the type of life I live today. God has blessed and I reach out and try to help others. I want to advise all of you, let's try to do the same thing.

**Q:** I think maybe this is a good time to open it up to questions that people out there may have, things that they want to ask Judge Hulett.

**A:** Okay go ahead.

**Q:** If you want to ask them, I will repeat the questions just in case everyone cannot hear you. Do you consider the adverse situations that you faced in Lowndes County, the opposition that you faced when you tried to stand up for what was right, to be state terrorism against the people of Lowndes County?

**A:** This is true as I have said it to a lot of young people lately because I go out and talk to them. I am use to terrorism. We have had it in our county. We have had it in Birmingham and we have had it in other places. When the people crossed the Edmund Pettis Bridge, there was terrorism. When I was punched in the face in Prattville, there was terrorism. We did not have any killing. That was the only difference; it was on a small scale. There was a time in Pratt City, Alabama; I was living in Birmingham. One night, there was like 15 young people who wanted to see the Klan walk up Highbuyon Avenue. I took them out there to show them and they had their robes and everything on. They asked me who are these people. I said, these are the same people that you are trading with in stores on an

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

every day basis, most of them are, but they are Klan men. Do not be afraid because you are with me. As we stood there, they drove by singing the Dixie song or a thing of that type with the lights on in the car. These are the type things I have gone through for years. I am not afraid and I try to be straight with my people and say everybody was not wrong, but there were a few people who would do anything. In terrorism, you are going to reap what you sow, so we need to work together and try to save our people instead of trying to destroy them.

**Q:** How many people, African-American people in Lowndes County, did it take before there was sort of a help factor where you felt you were going to succeed. You started out with a little group. How big did the group get?

**A:** Each Sunday night, we would have our mass meeting in groups. We did not have a church large enough to hold us after a few months when we would go in the county. The question was some churches were afraid for us to go in because they thought someone would burn their churches. There was not church burning in Lowndes County, if you remember. There were 2 or 3 churches going in Lowndes County. We had a poverty program burned and one day a white church burned. I was at the University of Wisconsin at that time. This white church burned and no more burning take place in Lowndes County. That is the sad thing, but that took place.

**Q:** In all of your trials of getting registered voters, where was the Federal Government at this time. At one time, I read an article that you recruited a bunch of \_\_\_\_\_ registered voters. (inaudible)

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

**A:** They came down, but let me be honest with you all. On the first election in 1966, they would be standing out there. I think they were scary and most black folks were. I am serious. I can remember in the \_\_\_\_\_ area in 1966 when they had the election, somebody cut the lights off in the building. Let me tell you, everybody just froze. Stokely and them were there and they went out and turned the lights on their cars, but those federal agents were just as afraid as anything else. They would not say anything. Several white people that I know brought the people that worked on their plantation in with them and went in and voted their ballots for them. That is why we worked to get that law changed where you could not help your boss man. Now, you can help anybody you want, but your phone cannot help you. If you work for a company, your boss man cannot help you raise the vote in the state of Alabama. We had to get that changed and it was Lowndes County who played the biggest part in that. People were evicted off their plantation because they registered to vote and we put tents out there on highway 80 and tried to be fair to people. We did everything we could until there were able to acquire land to move into. We filed a suit to stop the evictions. That is the only suit that we lost.

**Q:** Did you know Viola Liuzzo and what are your recollections of her, of so?

**A:** I did not know here but shortly after she got killed, I go to meet her family on several occasions. Her son came down and stayed in the county for awhile, but I did not know her personally.

**Q:** If you ever have a chance to go to the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma, there is a wall in the museum that I believe is called, I was there wall or the we were there wall or something like that. The people who played some role in the movement signed a

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

little sleep of paper and tacked it to the wall. One of the most touching things on that wall is the daughter of Viola Liuzzo who about a year ago visited the museum and said my mother was here and that is just on the wall there. It is really interesting to see.

**Q:** Do you think that was a turning point in getting national attention to the movement?

**A:** It was a turning point to get lots of attention because people came in. Even at that, Jonathan Daniels was killed after that but remember he got acquitted in court and that is the hurting thing. You understand what I am saying. The Klan killed her and did not anything come from that. The person that was prosecuted in that case stood up in the court and said if she would have stayed in Detroit, Michigan she would have been alive today. There were very few blacks there because they were afraid to go in that court room at night time. Now, if you are prosecuting somebody and get up and say that, what do suspect a jury to do? This is the type of representation we had.

**Q:** Stokely Carmichael had started an organization called The All African Peoples Revolutionary Party. It took a strong standing in the (inaudible).

**A:** He did do that, but he did not do that in our county. He never did that in Lowndes County. He never had any confrontation with the police.

**Q:** Stokely Carmichael founded an organization. Say the name of the organization again.

**A:** The All African Peoples Revolutionary Party.

**Q:** With The All African Revolutionary Party, did that have an effect on your relationship with Stokely?

**A:** No, it did not because he did not do any of that stuff in Lowndes County. He respected the police officers and Arthur Stickwicker did as well.

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

**Q:** There years that you were involved with the Bloody Lowndes in your county, can you tell us a little bit about your personal life. Did you have a family and how did this impact your family during the year. Then, I understand that there was some type of sanitary land field plan underway within the last couple of years that may effect or impact the tourism and trade in Lowndes County with respect to the Edmund Pettis Bridge and the Selma March in November. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**A:** Okay, let me be honest with you. I have some children who lived with me during that time. My son is a probate judge now who lived in Lowndes County. They were too young to vote, but it did not affect them because we did not have any real decent jobs no way, we were just out there working. We were trying to make life better for them to go to school. When they first integrated the school in Hayneville, they sent 6 kids to school that year. One of my sons went to school and he had some problems with some of the white kids stepping on his heels. One night, I got in my car and drove to the father's house. I said to him, your son is stepping on my son's heels and I do not want it to happen again because I may have to stop that bus on the road and get him off there and it never happened again. I was the sheriff. I being straight with you all about it. This is a little incident that happened. Let me be honest about this land field that we have. This land field is off the Civil Rights trail. People are dumping trash on the highways. Lowndes County was not a pretty place until I started cleaning it up when I retired from the sheriff's office. The white people in Lonsborough did not want it and they had a few blacks with them to help to keep it out. I do not think that land field would do anything wrong to Lowndes County as long as it does its problem like it ought to be done. People

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

will be buried under the ground, like 40 feet deep, and within the next 200 years I do not think there will be problem whatsoever.

**Q:** Is that a divisive issue in Lowndes County? Do people disagree about that?

**A:** There are a few people that disagreed about it, just a few. It was mostly people who lived right in Burksville. I remember one night I said to them, you are not concerned about the Civil Rights trail. If you were concerned about the Civil Rights trail, why did you not help us get registered to vote or a thing of that type. You understand what I am saying. These are the same folks who guessed everything now concerned about the Civil Rights trail. It is a money thing that they are looking at now.

**Q:** Have you written or will you right about how the majority of the city of Alabama was able to tolerate injustice in such a way that it brings up today what they are willing to do now which is stand up against injustice.

**A:** I think that to understand the magnitude of what happened in the Civil Rights Movement you have to understand that the majority of white citizens in the state of Alabama were complicit, if not cutting-edge practitioners of the injustices that were inflicted on black people. It was absolutely pervasive. I am very aware of this because I grew up in Alabama in a family that was very much a part of the status quo in Alabama . So, it is really easy to see that the system of segregation that was in place in Alabama could not have survived without the active support of the overwhelming majority of white people in the state of Alabama. I think there is a sense in which white people were liberated by the Civil Rights Movement as well because people of my generation were certainly coming along and you had to decide what we thought about it. It was such a

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

powerful reality and it was inescapable. So, you had to ask yourself what is really going on here. I remember when I was about 16 years old I was in Birmingham on a high school trip and I happen to be walking along one afternoon with no idea of anything that was going on. I was not paying attention to what was going on in the world and I walked up upon the arrest of Martin Luther King, the first time he was arrested in Birmingham. I remembered it actually incorrectly. I remembered at first that he was wearing overalls. He was not. He was wearing a denim work shirt and blue jeans. It was almost that way, but I do remember, like I have a picture of it in my head, the look on his face as the policeman bodily carried him pass where I was standing and it was a look of not fear. His eyes seemed to me to be very sad but kind of stoic all at the same time. There was a dignity about him on that occasion that stood in such incredible contrast with the kind of bullying attitude that the policeman had on that occasion. As a 16-year-old white kid, it was a jarring imaging to behold and it was something that I never forgot. It made you ask in a very personal way, what is going on here. It was easy to know who you wanted to identify with in that particular situation. So, one of the things that I am very interested in and this is a long answer to your question, but one of the things I am very interested in is the impact that the Civil Rights Movement had on white people, people of my generation and other people as well because I think that the white citizenry in the state of Alabama had a long way to go. I think we were compelled to move by events that happened by the example of courage that we saw, so I think that is an important part of the story that I certainly want to try to touch on. Now, did we go as far as we need to go? I mean obviously not. We are still struggling with that issue. I was talking to some reporters

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

today at the paper. We were talking about why it is that we have not made as much progress as we have maybe hoped we would. I think to me it is the cutting edge of civilization. It is sort of the frontier of civilization. The people who are not exactly alike are still trying to learn how to live in peace and proximity with each other, if they are even trying at all. Amazingly enough, we are probably doing a better job of it here than they are in most places because you look at the Middle East, Northern Ireland or all these other places and people struggle with that. We will continue to struggle with it here, but we have more tools now because of the example of people in the Civil Rights Movement.

**Q:** I was a new comer to Alabama. We came here in 1965 and this whole situation has really stressed me a lot and (inaudible) but nowhere else is it quite so legal. So, I thought perfectly well that this is of people like you, although I had a very culture when I came here. I also said to my brother who called me and said (inaudible) how are you managing this and how will it turn out. I said that I truly believe that we will solve our problems as soon as everybody else, so do not worry. I mean it is a bad situation, but I know that the people that I know so well will find a way to let this happen. I was feeling very \_\_\_\_\_ at some times during it, off and on. I also participated in the long line that were lining up to vote after the federal government interceded and it was kind of a interesting mess. If you remember, you had to have a registered voter stand with everybody that was going to vote and every body was getting curious because they had 3 tests that were not hard but it took more time and we did not have anymore time allotted to us. So, it was a pretty interesting time for me and I helped the best way that I could to be helpful, the best way I knew how to. I am glad that I was here to do it.

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

**Q:** Any response you want to make to that.

**A:** I am not sure. I could not hear everything that she was saying. It was pretty rough, true enough. I could remember the times that we had to have a white to vote for a black. You could not find a white to vote for a black. After they started registering, we did not have to do that in Lowndes County. You did not have to have anybody to vote for you. That was some our problems we were having. The voter registrar did not assist on that. The federal came down and registered most of our people in our county.

**Q:** Was lynching a part of your community also?

**A:** There were many people that were lynched or had things done to them. I do not know much about that, but there were people that were lynched in Lowndes County not during the Civil Rights Movement but before that time. Once we organized, there were no blacks killed by whites except one person and that was before I took office. He was killed because he was hunting rabbits. The dog went across the county line. They shot and killed him and tried the case. That was the first case tried when I got there and they found him guilty. They charged him 100 dollars and a year's probation. This is the kind of thing that happened. This was a white guy who killed a black guy and they charged him 100 dollars plus court cost and a year's probation.

**Q:** How much would it help if they rewrote the constitution in the state of Alabama. Would that kind of blanket or help throughout out the state if the constitution itself was dealt with?

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

**A:** I was in a meeting not long ago and the Alabama New South Coalition was trying to put a committee together to start doing this with the state legislatures, but it may help some. You can rewrite all you want to, but it has to come from the inside of your heart.

**Q:** There are many of the young people today that do not seem to have the right stuff? I would like to know what would be your message to them.

**A:** Those of us who understand what the Civil Rights mean we should go into our communities sit down and talk to our young folks and try to encourage them to do the right thing. Our churches ought to be a part of doing that.

**Q:** Was Lowndes County as violent as it was because black people outnumbered white people by the margin that they did? We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go. What, in your opinion, do we still need to do or still need to accomplish?

**A:** I am going to give you a number of incidents that people have just killed people. There were a group of folks from Birmingham one time that came down to move somebody off of a plantation. They killed a guy on a Saturday or Sunday night and rode around in a truck and that Monday they were riding around that courthouse on the back of the truck and nothing was done about it, but this is the kind of thing that happened. If something happened in your family like, you would get afraid. I knew other people that would go out and hunt. I had a cousin that went out one night just hunting. The guys ran up on him hunting in the woods and started shooting under his feet and made him dance all night long. This is the kind of thing that went on in Lowndes County, but in order to change this we are going to have to come together and let drugs go. That is one of the things that is ending us now. Drugs are getting to most of our people. Stop committing

# The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

crimes, stay out of trouble, go to the polls and register to vote and start treating one another like they are human beings. Black or white, we are going to have to start doing that together or we will never move on.

**Q:** Is there still racial tension between blacks and whites in Lowndes County today.

**A:** There may be a few older people. It may not show up around me, but it may show up around a few people. Most people, when you treat folks right, they do not have any problems. I can go any place in Lowndes County in almost anybody house and I do not have any problems.

**Q:** And when you have ran for office, you have gotten considerable white votes?

**A:** At this age, I am 73 years old. I will be 74, November 19<sup>th</sup> and I wish it was this month. I have had more than 1800 people to call me already and talk to me. I believe I could go back and run for sheriff again. I don't why, but this is something. Let me say this. If someone burglarize a community, a house, a church I get out and work on it night and day until that person has come to justice just about. If somebody has shoot somebody or cut somebody, they are going to jail and everybody knows that. I do not know what is happening to the sheriff and bothering other folks now, but I try to do what is right for the people in our county. I guess that is why they want me back. They are not trying to get me back because I am going to let them do something wrong. If it is a drug dealer in town, he better leave. He better get his stuff and go to some other county. I believe that is what we out to do. They have a drug task force and I want to be sure I get with that drug task force if I am successful in winning and try to get them to do a much better than what they been doing and get these drug dealers out of time.

# **The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama**

UAH – The University of Alabama in Huntsville

**Q:** Will you run again?

**A:** If my health holds up, my name will be on the ballot.

**Closing:** Well, Sheriff Hulett thank you for sharing these stories with us tonight. We really appreciate it.