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Groundwork

Local Black Freedom Movements in America

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Chapter 6

Organizing for More Than the Vote

The Political Radicalization of Local People in Lowndes County, Alabama, 1965–1966

Hasan Kwame Jeffries

At the start of 1965, in Lowndes County, Alabama, racist voting registrars and the state's voter registration exam guaranteed the exclusion of African Americans from the ballot box. Of the county's 5,122 African Americans of voting age, precisely none were registered to vote. At the same time, more whites were registered to vote than the 1,900 who were eligible. Absolute disenfranchisement reflected the thoroughness with which whites kept African Americans out of politics. So complete was this exclusion that not a single African American had held public office in the county in the twentieth century.[1]

Things began to change in March 1965 when a handful of working poor black residents launched a voter registration drive. The pace of progress, however, was slow. During the first month of agitation, Lowndes activists added only two African Americans to the voting list. Nevertheless their work generated significant movement momentum, resulting in the formation of the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights (LCCM), through which they coordinated future voter registration tries.[2]

Lived experience ignited the desire of black residents to fight for the vote. A lifetime without the ballot had made clear to them the importance of having a say in who set public policy and enforced the law, especially at the local level. Meanwhile, the Selma voting rights movement, which had started in January 1965, determined the timing of the campaign by serving as an example of the new kind of collective protest that was possible.[3]

The folk who started the Lowndes movement were permanent residents of the county. They were homegrown activists who labored not only to change the place where they lived but also the place where they intended to live for the remainder of their lives. Literally they were local people. Their status as local people was derived partly from the moment—their current place of residence—and partly from the future—where they planned to reside in years to come. It was also a function of the past. Almost all these folk had been born in Lowndes, and many of their parents, grandparents, and great grandparents had been born in the county as well. Thus their local roots were intergenerational, extending as far back as the Reconstruction and Antebellum eras. Their bloodlines, therefore, linked their activism directly and concretely to the struggle for freedom, justice, and equality that the county's black residents had waged since the daybreak of freedom.

Field secretaries of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), led by Stokely Carmichael, partnered with Lowndes activists at the end of March 1965.[4] Although they joined a movement already under way, the myth persists that the struggle in Lowndes did not begin until they arrived. This misconception reflects the tendency of mainstream narratives of the civil rights movement to subsume the activism of local people to that of activists affiliated with national organizations. It also echoes the mistaken belief that black Southerners, particularly those in the rural black belt, had become so accustomed to Jim Crow and cowered by white violence that they had lost the will to fight. The implication is that neither the Lowndes movement nor the larger civil rights movement could have occurred without outside organizers.

The myth of movement messiahs obscures the symbiotic relationship that existed between local people and activists associated with national civil rights groups. Outside organizers brought to the partnership with local people an organizing expertise that allowed the latter to challenge white power in previously unimaginable ways. SNCC organizers, for example, introduced Lowndes County residents to the idea of forming a countywide third party, which resulted in the formation of the original Black Panther Party. Local people, meanwhile, challenged white power in ways that validated new organizing models. SNCC's brand of Black Power, for instance, drew heavily on Lowndes activists' tactical approaches to change.

By mid-summer 1965 the partnership between Lowndes activists and SNCC organizers had prompted more than one thousand black residents

to file voter registration applications. The determination of African Americans to secure the franchise, however, did not break the will of whites to keep the ballot out of black hands. Five months into the voting rights campaign, county registrars had added only two hundred African Americans to the voter list, and these they added only to avoid federal intervention.[5]

Despite the nominal increase in the number of black registered voters, the mobilization effort was worthwhile because it put movement activists in perfect position to take advantage of the Voting Rights Act, which President Lyndon Johnson signed into law on August 6, 1965. It also forced the Justice Department to send federal registrars to the county, a notable accomplishment since Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach dispatched registrars to less than 1 percent of the counties that, by law, ought to have received them. It is important to note that although the Voting Rights Act unlocked the door to black participation in electoral politics, it did not open it. This door remained closed until local people pushed it open by forcing the federal government to dispatch registrars, and by registering with them even though it remained dangerous to do so. In these ways, movement leaders and everyday people gave meaning to federal legislation.[6]

African American re-enfranchisement created new political opportunities that local people exploited. In December 1965 movement leaders announced the formation of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), an independent, countywide third party that the press dubbed the Black Panther Party because local activists had selected a snarling black panther as the party's ballot symbol. In the November 1966 general election, the LCFO ran a full slate of African American candidates for local office against white Democrats and Republicans.[7]

Forming an all-black independent party in the heart of Dixie was a remarkable accomplishment given the depth of black political exclusion. Six months earlier, registering eligible black voters even in small numbers was inconceivable. Even more remarkable, however, was the party's embrace of democratic politics. LCFO supporters worked hard to democratize political participation. Dissatisfied with simply mobilizing eligible black voters, they labored to expand the politically educated electorate by arming black voters with knowledge of the legal limits and obligations of officeholders. This prepared black residents to critically evaluate candidates. They also made available to black voters everything they needed to know about Alabama election law and county government, from how to get on the ballot to how to mark one. This helped residents avoid being bamboozled on

Election Day. In addition, LCFO supporters committed themselves to democratizing office holding. Party activists sought to pave the way for public officials who eschewed personal agendas in favor of a people's agenda by deemphasizing political experience and expertise as prerequisites for holding office. Finally, party supporters embraced a democratic platform. The LCFO policy agenda, for example, included fighting poverty by redistributing white wealth through major tax reform. "Tax the rich to feed the poor" was the campaign slogan of LCFO candidate for tax assessor Alice Moore, which captured the essence of the party's democratic program.[8]

By the November 1966 election, African Americans in Lowndes County had reached levels of political awareness rarely achieved by others in the civil rights movement. Life experiences greatly informed their political sophistication. When Frank Miles Jr., one of the first county residents to become active in the movement, was asked why local people had formed the party, he explained, "it didn't make sense for us to join the Democratic Party when they were the people who had done the killing in the county and had beat our heads." Life experiences, however, do not adequately explain grassroots political radicalization. Local people throughout the South, in counties identical to Lowndes, did not form democratic third parties at the moment of re-enfranchisement. Rather than life experiences, the political radicalization of local people in Lowndes County resulted from specific movement experiences that began, but did not end, with trying to register to vote.[9]

The movement in Lowndes was about more than the vote. In addition to access to the ballot box, local activists agitated for quality education by boycotting segregated African American schools and transferring African American students to white schools. They fought to lessen the economic distress of the working poor by developing a job-training program. They worked to help black farmers break free of cyclical debt by forming a farmers' cooperative and organizing for control of the county committees that set farm assistance policy. They sought to improve quality of life by bringing War on Poverty programs to the county. They also waged war against jury discrimination and courtroom corruption by filing federal lawsuits against the county's jury commission clerk and a justice-of-the-peace. The victories, and even more so the defeats, that accompanied these struggles taught local people valuable lessons that pointed them and the local movement in the direction of independent politics.

The uncommon degree of political insightfulness exhibited by the black residents of Lowndes County was as much a result of their having

participated in political education workshops designed specifically for them by SNCC organizers, as it was a product of lessons learned from organizing for social and economic justice. Starting in December 1965 SNCC workers hosted a series of workshops for the residents of Lowndes at which they discussed the guidelines that governed third parties and independent candidates, and the duties associated with the offices up for election. These workshops helped local people make informed decisions about what to do with the vote and, in doing so, laid the foundation for the LCFO's democratic structure and policy agenda.

Scrutinizing local people's experiences organizing for social and economic justice, and their participation in a structured political education program, makes clear the process that radicalized their politics. The efforts of Lowndes County residents to improve the quality of black schools, bring the War on Poverty to the county, and control the committees that assisted and regulated farmers, along with their participation in SNCC's workshops, heightened their level of political awareness, leading them to create an all-black, democratic third party as their primary political solution to racial injustice. Studying this process also illuminates important aspects of the larger civil rights movement. It shows that local people organized for more than the vote, underscores the way in which they gave meaning to federal legislation, and demonstrates the ability of America's most forgotten and forsaken citizens to formulate and organize around their own critique of society. Moreover, it shines new light on the give-and-take relationship that existed between local people and outside organizers. SNCC field secretaries had a significant influence on the political solutions pursued by local people, and local people, through their organizing activities, had a profound effect on SNCC's ideological approach to social change.

A decade after the U.S. Supreme Court ordered school desegregation with "all deliberate speed," Lowndes County schools remained completely segregated. The county board of education maintained the dual system by shamelessly diverting resources away from black schools to white schools. In this way, white elected officials denied African Americans the quality education they deserved. One indicator of the poor state of black education was the African American adult illiteracy rate, which neared 80 percent.[10]

Shortly after the county's black residents mobilized to register to vote, they organized to improve the quality of black education. Young people were the catalysts behind this push. In April 1965 John Jackson and Timothy Mayes, neighbors and upperclassmen at Lowndes County Training School (LCTS), the county's oldest and largest public high school for African Americans, petitioned superintendent of education Hulda Coleman to increase the school's library holdings, extend the library's hours of operation, ban mandatory extracurricular activities during class hours, and add a breakfast program. Predictably Coleman dismissed the appeal without discussion. Her arbitrary decision, however, did not deter the two friends. On the contrary, they moved forward by calling for a school boycott, and turned to the leaders of the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights to help them execute the protest.[11]

LCCM leaders rallied substantial community support for the school boycott. The protest unraveled, however, when word spread that the local law "ain't going to let nobody register" until the students returned to school. Knowing that whites in power would make good on the threat, and realizing that black residents had more faith in registering to vote as a means to create change than in boycotting a high school, movement leaders called off the protest. At the same time, however, they agreed to renew it in the fall. In the interim, they planned to broaden the base of support for the boycott by having voter registration workers discuss its importance as they canvassed. The need to increase people's awareness of the possibility of change through protest other than voter registration had become clear.[12]

LCCM leaders announced their intention to renew the boycott at a mass meeting on August 29, just days before the start of the 1965 school year. As planned, they had discussed the merits of boycotting LCTS with parents during the summer as they knocked on doors encouraging folk to register. This political education work helped the boycott last longer than the first one but was not enough to keep it from disintegrating in less than a month. Once again, parents withdrew their support prematurely. School board intransigence had made it painfully obvious that parents would have to keep their children out of school indefinitely, which they were unwilling to do; poor schooling was better than no schooling. Their unwillingness to sustain the boycott led local leaders to create the county's first freedom schools. Former public school teachers who had been fired because they supported the movement, and SNCC volunteers, taught math, reading, French, and black history at the schools, which met in church sanctuaries and household living rooms. With an alternative in place, LCCM leaders, in mid-October, launched a third school sit-out. At first participation was high, but only a handful held true to the protest for an

extended period. The freedom schools, as a temporary stopgap measure, were not enough to allay parents' worries about their children losing classroom time.[13]

Although ineffective, the boycotts provided movement leaders with valuable insights. First, local activists learned the importance of political education, not to raise consciousness about oppression (local people knew all about oppression from lived experience) but rather to raise awareness of the potential of collective action other than voter registration. Second, through the freedom schools, local activists glimpsed the potential of parallel structures to help sustain struggle. Later, when Stokely Carmichael suggested that they create a third party, the idea of working outside existing structures did not seem strange. Third, local leaders began to see that asking for change, even demanding it through organized protest, was not enough to create new public policy. With increasing clarity, movement leaders saw the need to control the school board. There was even talk of "running the county themselves," recalled LCCM chairman John Hulett, a thirty-seven-year-old father and husband who farmed land that had been purchased by his grandfather, a former Lowndes County slave.[14]

Concurrent with the fight to improve education was the effort to raise the standard of living of the county's working poor. By the 1960s agricultural mechanization and the conversion to dairy farming had sharply curtailed labor opportunities, enabling obscene levels of poverty to persist. In 1965 Lowndes County was the poorest county in Alabama, ranking dead last in per capita income. Not surprisingly, conditions for African Americans were the worst. While the median income for the county's white families was $4,400, the median income for the county's African American families was $935. According to the federal government, the minimum income necessary for a family to maintain a decent standard of living was $3,000.[15]

LCCM leaders looked to the War on Poverty to help alleviate the prevailing condition of poverty. In early August 1965, in a letter to Sargent Shriver, the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), movement leaders explained: "The war against poverty offers hope for the future to Negroes in Alabama's black belt." Local activists were particularly impressed with the War on Poverty's Community Action Program (CAP), which, on paper, allowed ordinary people to plan and implement federally funded programs designed to improve quality of life. Programs established elsewhere provided poor black folk with preschools, adult education, job training, legal aid, and health clinics.[16]

LCCM leaders launched the effort to bring the War on Poverty to the county by hosting a series of neighborhood meetings at which they asked black residents to identify their most pressing problems and suggest possible solutions. A consensus soon emerged that first they ought to address the wretched state of housing. Dilapidated and deteriorating housing was a key component of poverty in Lowndes. Nine of ten African American homes lacked bathrooms and indoor plumbing. LCCM secretary Lillian McGill, a thirty-three-year-old single mother who had given up a decent-paying clerical job in Montgomery to work for the movement full-time, explained that most black residents had to haul water in coverless, sixty-gallon barrels once a week, from as far as fifteen miles away, to meet their household needs. The only alternative was to draw water from ponds used by cattle.[17]

Members of the LCCM executive committee also held neighborhood elections for representatives to a CAP planning committee. They opted to elect representatives rather than appoint them to ensure that the committee was a "broadly based representative group of Negro citizens." Acting on these same democratic sensibilities, they reserved a minority of the seats on the committee for representatives from the white community. They were willing to work with whites but unwilling to surrender their right to make decisions.[18]

The county's white power brokers, however, were unilaterally uninterested in working with African Americans and secretly organized to make sure that they did not have to. In early June 1965 members of the Board of Education and the Board of Revenue, together with a group of leading businessmen, joined with counterparts from three predominantly white counties to file an application for a CAP planning grant under the name Area 22. White power brokers wanted to win recognition as the county's OEO representative before African Americans had a chance to organize, and sought to neutralize the potential strength of the county's black majority by allying with majority white counties. In another shrewd move, they named a single African American, William "Sam" Bradley, a small farmer and businessman who had taken no interest in the movement, to the governing board of Area 22. Bradley's appointment was nothing more than a calculated attempt to dupe the OEO into believing that Area 22 represented African Americans.[19]

When local people discovered that a white group had submitted a CAP proposal and that the group was masquerading as a "biracial committee" they were stunned. In a letter to the OEO protesting the "formation and

maneuverings" of Area 22, LCCM leaders wrote: "We are willing to work with the white community but [unwilling to] let them totally represent us. . . . We no longer wish to be spoken for without being asked what is best for poor people and how we will be governed in relation to Federal funds."[20]

White disinterest in interracial cooperation did not stop black residents from forming a CAP planning committee. It did stop the OEO from approving their grant application, as well as the application of Area 22. In both instances, OEO officials cited a failure of the planning committees to adequately meet the criteria for fair racial representation.[21]

Attempts by white power brokers to block supporters of the freedom movement from bringing a CAP to Lowndes County was a key experiential component of the political radicalization of local people. The covert formation of Area 22 provided activists with a snapshot of the extent to which whites in power would resort to political trickery and deception to maintain the status quo. In addition, the refusal by whites to recognize the right of African Americans to have the determining say in programs that would affect them most underscored white unwillingness to allow African Americans to make the decisions that shaped their lives.

Black farmers, especially black tenant farmers, felt keenly the economic distress that movement activists sought to alleviate through the War on Poverty. Some eighty-six white families, accounting for less than 3 percent of the population, owned almost all the land in the county. LaRue Haigler was typical of this class. Haigler owned approximately five thousand acres and contracted with thirty-five African American tenants to work a portion of it. By Haigler's own estimate, his tenants owed him between $100,000 and $150,000; some owed on loans that were thirty-five and forty years old. Debt of this sort was widespread, even among black landowners; they, too, had to borrow heavily from white financiers to run the agricultural year. Unfortunately overcoming privately financed debt was virtually impossible because white landowners controlled the county's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), which offered the only alternative to borrowing from local white financiers.[22]

ASCS was the division of the Department of Agriculture that provided farmers with price supports in the form of loans and direct cash payments. It also decided the amount of cotton, peanuts, and tobacco that a farmer could plant, set penalties for those who exceeded their allotments, and determined eligibility for participation in conservation programs. In assessing the power of ASCS, one astute news reporter observed that it alone could decide a farmer's annual earnings.[23]

Committees of local farmers elected by their neighbors set ASCS policy at the county level. Theoretically ASCS elections were open to any farmer above the age of twenty-one. Unfortunately nominal federal oversight enabled large landowning whites to dictate election outcomes. Not a single African American had ever been elected to an ASCS county committee (the local policy-making board) in the entire South, and in 1964, of the thirty-seven thousand committeemen elected to the South's seven thousand community committees (the groups that selected county committeemen), only seventy-five were African American.[24]

In July 1965 SNCC field secretaries organized a series of ASCS education workshops for groups of ten to fifteen farmers in each ASCS community in the county. At the workshops, SNCC workers shared everything they knew about ASCS programs and electoral procedure. Providing local people with information that whites traditionally withheld helped black residents understand the support structure that undergird the status quo and envision new ways of undermining it. The tremendous value of having access to previously denied information was not lost on local people. They absorbed what SNCC workers uncovered and enthusiastically shared it with friends, family, and neighbors. Mathew Jackson Sr., a landowning farmer and the father of high school student John Jackson, was one of more than two dozen local people who canvassed the county and spoke at churches to increase ASCS awareness. "I'd do it in practically every church I went to," he said. "I just explained to them as I went along . . . [that] it was time out for letting white people make a monkey out of us. In other words, [letting them] use us for working tools."[25]

In September twenty-five African American farmers agreed to run for ASCS community committee seats. Mathew Jackson was one of those farmers. When asked why he chose to run, he explained: "I thought probably that I knew more about these people in here, their needs, more so than the people that were already in these offices."[26]

In years past, white farmers had manipulated the outcome of ASCS elections by refusing to nominate black farmers. "I've gotten one of those ASCS ballots in the mail for over five years now," explained a young black farmer. "I started voting but it was always the same kind of people on the ballot." In the October 1965 ASCS election, however, a new candidate nomination procedure mandated by Washington, which allowed any

farmer to nominate a candidate simply by securing the signatures of six farmers who lived in the candidate's neighborhood, gave local people a fighting chance.[27]

Rather than submit to the democratic process, large landowning whites continued to subvert it. When black residents received their mail-in ballots they discovered that an additional 109 African American farmers had been listed alongside the 25 supported by the LCCM. In Mathew Jackson's district, white committeemen had added an extra 36 African Americans. In another district they had nominated an additional 68 black farmers. Obviously they were trying to split and dilute the African American vote by abusing a second federal mandate that instructed local ASCS officials to nominate African Americans in proportion to their percentage of the population.[28]

Lowndes County whites did not limit their effort to retain control of ASCS to ballot manipulation. According to SNCC field reports, whites physically threatened black candidates and those who signed their petitions, torched the home of candidate James Harris, and evicted candidate Threddie Lee Stewart, along with his wife and three children, from land that his family had worked for several generations.[29]

Through intimidation and ballot manipulation, white candidates won fifteen of the eighteen seats that carried voting privileges. In December these fifteen white farmers elected three of their own to the policy-making county committee.[30] Much like the outcome of the October vote, the result of this election was tremendously disheartening. The frustration born of both defeats prompted many local people to discontinue their affiliation with the freedom struggle. "Some of them," explained Elzie McGill, the stepmother of LCCM secretary Lillian McGill and a movement stalwart in her own right, "they wasn't strong enough to just go on, they just decided that you can't tell [white people] nothing." For others, the lessons learned were quite different. Some came to better appreciate the reach of white power. LCCM founding member Frank Miles Jr. observed: "When we had the ASCS election, we found out how we was tricked by the ASCS . . . the white people had control over that." For many, bearing witness to the shortcomings of democracy and the great lengths their white neighbors were willing to go to protect their power made clear that whites would neither share nor yield power without a dogged fight. This realization inspired them and others to redouble their support of the freedom movement. More important, it pushed more people squarely into the camp of independent politics. In retrospect, it was one of the most important experiential components of local people's political education. "The white folks tricked us in the ASCS election, that's when I started to get wise to the Democratic Party," explained Sidney Logan Jr., a World War II veteran and the imminent Freedom Party candidate for sheriff. "That's what gave me the idea I better stick with the Black Panther if I want to win. The Democratic Party is full of tricks. White people control it."[31]

The ASCS debacle confirmed what local people had learned from organizing to bring the War on Poverty to the county—white power brokers would use fraud, deception, and violence to maintain the status quo. In doing so, it extinguished what little possibility remained that supporters of the LCCM would cast their lot with the Democratic Party. LCCM chairman John Hulett explained, shortly after announcing the establishment of the LCFO, that "many people in the Christian Movement and SNCC felt that Lowndes County public officials threw away their last chance to court the Negro vote in this election."[32]

Meanwhile, significant black voter registration following the arrival of federal registrars in August 1965 prompted LCCM leaders to discuss the best ways to translate African American votes into political power. Stokely Carmichael, who had not forgotten the Democratic Party's duplicitous treatment of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in Atlantic City in 1964, suggested that they take advantage of an obscure Alabama law left over from the post-Reconstruction era that allowed for the formation of countywide, independent political parties.[33] The suggestion captured the imagination of LCCM leaders. "We thought about what we were going to do with these 2,500 registered voters in the county, whether or not we were going to join Lyndon Baines Johnson's party," explained John Hulett. "Then we thought about the other people in the state of Alabama who were working in this party. We thought of the city commissioner of Birmingham, Eugene 'Bull' Connor; George Lingo, who gave orders to those who beat the people when they got ready to make the march from Selma to Montgomery; [and Jim Clark,] the sheriff of Dallas County." Upon reflection, it was painfully obvious that these were the people "who kept Negroes from voting in the South and in the State of Alabama." Simply stated, local people did not want to support a party that supported white supremacists. That the standard bearers of white supremacy in the county were Democratic Party leaders further diminished the appeal of the party.[34] Also, losing their political voice was a great concern. "If we went into the Democratic Party they would still control us," explained Hulett. "We would have to do the things they wanted us to do."

He added: "We had to find some ways or means to get our own people on the ballot." Thus, in September 1965, LCCM leaders voted to investigate the possibility of creating a third party.[35]

It is important to note that local people made the decision to pursue independent politics. As much as Stokely Carmichael and his fellow organizers may have wanted the county's black residents to develop a third party, it was not their decision to make. In true SNCC fashion, they provided information that revealed a new possibility for creating change, and then stepped aside to let local people decide the next move. "The SNCC workers brought the idea to us that we could organize our own political group if we wanted to," explained John Hulett. He added that the decision of whether to organize the party "was left entirely to the people of Lowndes County."[36]

As LCCM leaders assessed the viability of a third party, they turned to SNCC for help. They did so with a clear idea of the kind of assistance they wanted. The disappointing outcome of the ASCS crusade had taught them that winning political power required more than having the vote and fielding a slate of black candidates. They realized that they had to elevate political awareness, much as they had done during the school boycotts. Accordingly, they asked SNCC organizers to devise a political education program for their fellow residents that focused on local government. The thinking was that unless they knew the ins and outs of county government, trying to form a third party was pointless. They also believed that it made no sense to focus on "glamorous offices" such as the governorship that were too far removed from the local situation to make an immediate difference.[37]

In December 1965 SNCC organizers scheduled four weekend workshops for Lowndes activists at SNCC's Atlanta headquarters. The goal of the workshops was to teach local people everything they needed to know about Alabama election law and county government. To this end, each workshop began with a discussion of the statutory and constitutional guidelines for nominating third-party candidates and conducting elections. The focus then shifted to the legal powers associated with the positions up for election in November 1966, which included the offices of sheriff, tax assessor, tax collector, and coroner, as well as seats on the school board. It is important to note that SNCC facilitators purposefully steered talk away from abstract theories until, as they put it, "the participants had a clear idea of the statutory powers of the office." For example, they discussed theories of arrest and habeas corpus, differences between civil and criminal procedures, and dispossession and foreclosure only after everyone knew the statutory powers of the sheriff. By deconstructing political power and authority, they removed the mystery behind county government.[38] Also, by grounding political theory in actual Alabama law, they gave political power concrete meaning and demonstrated that local politics was an appropriate way to build the kind of society local people wanted. A conversation about the power and authority of the school board, for example, led to a discussion about physical plant necessities, curriculum change, and teacher requirements. This approach also brought into sharp focus the extent to which serious abuses of power were taking place. A SNCC report noted that, after discussing the duties of the coroner, "it became clear to everyone" that murder at the hands of persons unknown could not have gone "uninvestigated and unpunished" without the coroner's "connivance and collusion." Thus the workshops armed participants with valuable criteria for evaluating officeholders.[39]

Movement leaders learned enough at the initial workshops to announce the formation of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization at the end of December 1965. When a reporter asked an unnamed movement supporter about the new organization, she explained: "White folks think they can let a few of us vote and fool us. [But] we're starting to see how to use the vote to help ourselves instead of helping them."[40]

Although the Atlanta workshops helped local leaders to see the potential and practicality of independent politics, too few county residents made the trip to Atlanta for the workshops to have had a significant effect on the size of the politically educated electorate. Only twenty-five local people attended the first workshop in December, and no more than fifty people attended the last meeting in February. Local interest, however, was much greater than the attendance figures imply. From the outset, enthusiasm for the workshops ran high as participants returned from Atlanta and shared what they had learned with friends, family, and neighbors. Unfortunately the cost of traveling to Atlanta proved too burdensome for most. In response to this dilemma, SNCC organizers, at the end of February 1966, began conducting biweekly workshops in the county. At these workshops, just as at the Atlanta workshops, local people learned about electoral procedure, county government, and the duties of officeholders. In this way the workshops reached hundreds of people and dramatically increased the size of the politically educated electorate.[41]

Educating as many people as possible about county government was essential to building the independent party's democratic foundation. So,

too, was increasing the number of residents who believed themselves qualified and capable of holding office. To boost the latter, workshop facilitators deemphasized experience and expertise, the twin pillars of political professionalization, as prerequisites for holding office. This not only increased the number of local people who believed that they could hold office but also elevated a people's agenda for socioeconomic empowerment above personal agendas. This explains why, on April 2, 1966, when some sixty ardent supporters of independent politics met to officially organize the LCFO, they did not discuss candidates. In a radically democratic way, candidates were irrelevant.[42]

Twelve potential LCFO candidates did eventually step forward. In this group of six men and six women were landowners and landless laborers, college graduates and elementary school dropouts, mothers of many and fathers of a few, and parishioners at large community churches and worshipers at small family churches. These fallible, fear-filled, yet determined people, who because of the fickleness of history had been born into an extreme situation at a unique time, very much reflected the core demographic of the Lowndes movement; they were the epitome of local people.

On Sunday, April 24, 1966, less than two weeks before the LCFO held its candidate nomination convention, each would-be nominee addressed party supporters at a countywide mass meeting. The high point of the meeting was the speech given by the lone candidate for tax assessor, Alice Moore, a forty-two-year-old wife and mother who divided her time between working on her farm with her husband, Joseph, caring for their seven children, and volunteering at Mt. Elam Baptist Church.[43] Holding the crowd's rapt attention, Moore declared: "Tax the rich to feed the poor—that's my slogan." The two hundred people in attendance applauded feverishly. "If everyone had been taxed their fare share," she continued, "we'd have better schools and good roads today." If elected, she promised to execute the duties of tax assessor in such a way as to provide the most benefit to all citizens. She pledged to be a servant of the people and committed herself to implementing a people's agenda rather than a personal agenda. Before taking her seat, she declared that it was time for black residents to take over county government.[44] Moore's speech revealed an understanding of the central significance of the unequal distribution of wealth to the problems plaguing local people, a firm grasp of the power of the office she sought, and knowledge of the extent to which white officeholders had been derelict in their duties. It also reflected the lessons local people had learned while organizing and attending workshops.

Grassroots enthusiasm for the LCFO persuaded SNCC organizers to make winning control of local government the centerpiece of their organizing work. In May 1966, at a staff meeting held in Kingston Springs, Tennessee, they voted to apply the political program developed in Lowndes to existing and future projects. This development is particularly noteworthy because it highlights the reciprocal relationship that existed between local people and outside organizers. The success of the political program that emerged in Lowndes validated Black Power—SNCC's new ideological and tactical approach to change. Indeed, the Lowndes County political program defined Black Power, which SNCC organizers understood to mean developing grassroots, independent political parties through which African Americans could win local office and secure a definitive say in the decisions that affected their lives. That Lowndes County was the seedbed from which Black Power sprang was not lost on SNCC organizers. "SNCC's Alabama experience was the immediate genesis of the concept of Black Power," wrote Ivanhoe Donaldson, the director of SNCC's New York office, in October 1966. Writing at the same time, Stokely Carmichael explained: "Our last year of work in Alabama added a new concrete possibility." That possibility was the creation of grassroots, independent political parties, and local people made it viable.[45]

Months of exhausting electoral preparation gave rise to high hopes for victory. Unfortunately, on November 8, 1966, LCFO candidates lost every race by a couple of hundred votes. African American nonparticipation hurt LCFO candidates considerably. Some 50 percent of the county's eligible black voters had not yet registered, and about 20 percent of those who had registered stayed at home on Election Day, fearing reprisals for voting.[46] The primary reason the party lost, however, was electoral fraud. In several communities, for instance, plantation owners handed employees marked sample ballots, trucked them to the polls, and commanded them to vote for the white candidates marked on the sample.[47] Despite the campaign of chicanery, LCFO candidates polled 40 percent of the total vote, an extraordinary accomplishment for a third party.[48]

SNCC's political education workshops deserve much of the credit for the LCFO's strong showing. The workshops dramatically increased the size of the politically educated electorate and, in the process, democratized political participation, a significant accomplishment given the history of exclusion in the county. Perhaps more extraordinary, however, was the contribution the workshops made to democratizing political decision making. By teaching local people everything they needed to know about Alabama

election law and county government, the workshops armed black residents with knowledge of the legal limits and obligations of officeholders—information needed to critically evaluate candidates and curb the abuses of those already in office. Equally remarkable was the contribution the workshops made to democratizing office holding. By teaching movement activists about the procedures for forming a third party, promoting a people's agenda, and deemphasizing political experience and expertise as prerequisites for holding office, the workshops paved the way for candidates like Alice Moore who rejected personal politics in favor of what was best for the county's working-poor black residents.

The struggle of local people for social and economic justice radicalized their politics. The defeats and victories that accompanied their efforts to improve black education, ameliorate poverty, and gain access to new sources of capital revealed the importance of political education and the extent to which whites would fight to maintain the status quo. At the same time, information about county government, electoral law, and alternatives to the Democratic Party disseminated at SNCC workshops sharpened their political analysis and provided them with a blueprint for actualizing insights gained from organizing.

The radicalization of the grassroots in Lowndes makes clear that no single organizing endeavor, or individual, dictated local people's political beliefs and aspirations. Local people's political awareness was not a result of apocalyptic events or movement messiahs but was the product of a process of critical reflection that began with filtering movement experiences through a framework of premovement memories. This led local people to conceive of an entirely new social order, one in which the disenfranchised and dispossessed made the decisions that affected their lives, and local and federal government assumed a leading role in creating and sustaining equality of opportunity and outcome. Their participation in a structured political education program, meanwhile, unveiled the specific mechanics of their oppression and helped them translate their political insights into a concrete organizing program.

The radicalization of Lowndes County's black residents also illuminates the purpose of voting rights agitation. For local people, securing the vote was just one aspect of a much larger struggle. Rather than fighting solely for political inclusion, they fought to dramatically transform the society in which they lived. Voting rights agitation, therefore, was a means to an end that transcended legislation. More so than a voting bill, local people wanted the power to shape public policy. In Lowndes, local people sought

the vote and created the LCFO to implement their broadly configured organizing agenda. This empowered them politically and gave meaning to the Voting Rights Act.

In addition, political radicalization in Lowndes underscores the symbiotic relationship that existed between local people and outside activists. Local people started the movement that took root in the county, and SNCC organizers contributed to its development by providing invaluable organizing assistance. Undoubtedly the Lowndes movement would have taken place without the participation of SNCC organizers. However, it would have evolved differently because the information and organizing expertise that SNCC field secretaries shared with local people significantly shaped the ways that local people prosecuted their struggle. It is highly unlikely, for instance, that county residents would have formed an independent party had SNCC not joined their struggle. At the same time, while SNCC organizers gave much to local people, they received much in return. The political program that developed in the county, for example, gave final form to SNCC's version of Black Power.

In Lowndes County the journey local people traveled as they organized for more than the vote determined their political destination to a greater degree than anything else. This was not unique. In local struggles across the country, organizing experiences shaped the political orientation and objectives of movement participants, which helps to explain the strikingly dissimilar outcomes of local movements that emerged in remarkably similar places. It also serves as a reminder of the importance of taking full measure of local people's organizing experiences when assessing movement aims and results.

NOTES

1. Lowndes County is located in south central Alabama, between Montgomery and Selma. It is the geographic buckle of the state's Black Belt region, which consists of a string of fifteen counties with fertile, black clay soil and majority African American populations stretching 170 miles, east to west, across the middle of the state. For voter registration statistics on Lowndes and other Alabama counties, see Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder* (New York: Harcourt, 1967), Appendix ii, "Voter Registration in the South—1962, 1964, 1966"; SNCC, "Special Report" (February 1965), 2, Martin Luther King Jr. Archives (hereafter, MLK Archives), *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers* (hereafter,

SNCC Papers), box 35, folder 5; and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, *The General Condition of the Alabama Negro* (Atlanta: SNCC, 1965), 24–26.

2. Lowndes County residents named the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights after Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth's Birmingham-based Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights.

3. Interview with John Hulett by Stanley Smith, 30 May 1968, Howard University Archives (hereafter, HU Archives), *Civil Rights Documentation Project* (hereafter, *CRDP*); "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," *The Movement* (June 1966), in Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Student Voice, 1960–1965: Periodical of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee* (Westport, Conn.: Meckler, 1990), 126; interview with John Hulett by Hardy T. Frye, 1973, Auburn University Archives, *Hardy T. Frye Oral History Collection,* RG 621, box 2, folder 27; interview with John Hulett by author, 17 July 2000; and Charles Eagles, *Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 120–25.

4. SNCC organizers entered Lowndes County six months after the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party failed to unseat the lily-white Mississippi delegation at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City in 1964. The defeat soured veteran organizers on the Democratic Party. At the same time it heightened their interest in independent politics. Soon after the challenge, several SNCC organizers discussed converting the MFDP into an independent party, but native Mississippi activists opposed the idea; they had not yet given up on liberal Democrats. Respecting their wishes, SNCC field secretaries withdrew from Mississippi and resettled in Selma, Alabama, where they worked with Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) organizers on the Selma voting rights drive. Tactical disagreements, however, made working with SCLC untenable and prompted SNCC organizers to relocate to Lowndes County, a place that they believed was too violent and oppressive to interest SCLC.

5. John Herbers, "9 Counties to Get Vote Aides Today," *New York Times,* 10 August 1965, 1; and SNCC WATS Report, 13 August 1965, 2, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 40, folder 5.

6. By the end of October 1965 more than 40 percent of Lowndes County's eligible black voters had registered. SNCC WATS Report, 13 August 1965, 2, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 40, folder 5; SNCC WATS Report, 24 October 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 41, folder 2; Gene Roberts, "Voting Officials Sign 1,444 Negroes First Day of Drive," *New York Times,* 11 August 1965, 1; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *The Voting Rights Act . . . The First Months* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965), 16, 35; Gail Falk, "New Federal Examiners Register Negro Voters in Hale, Dallas, Marengo, Lowndes Counties," *Southern Courier,* 13 August 1965, 1; and Eagles, *Outside Agitator,* 197.

7. Alabama required political parties to have ballot symbols because of the high rate of adult illiteracy. The Democratic Party's ballot symbol was a white rooster. Movement activists selected a panther because, as one local leader put it, cats chase roosters. Moreover, black panthers, when cornered, fought back with fury and without forgiveness. Black folk not only felt cornered but also felt the need to fight back. "Lowndes County Forms Local Political Group," *Student Voice,* 20 December 1965, 2, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 51, folder 3; and Gene Roberts, "Student Rights Group Lacks Money and Help but Not Projects," *New York Times,* 10 December 1965, 37. For more on the selection of the black panther as the LCFO's ballot symbol, see Charlie Cobb, "Ready for Revolution," *Emerge* (June 1997): 43; and "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126.

8. "Mass Meeting Day Tuesday for Lowndes County Party," *Southern Courier,* 30 April–1 May 1966, 1; and "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126.

9. Frank Miles Jr., as quoted in "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126.

10. Plaintiff's complaint in *USA v. Lowndes County Board of Education et al.,* filed 11 January 1966, 3, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter, ADAH), Alabama Governors' Papers 1963–1967, SG 20061, folder 22; and Alabama Department of Education, "Lowndes County Survey, 182," 1964, 12–13, ADAH, Alabama Department of Education, School System Surveys, SG 22324.

11. Edward Rudd, "Negro, White Lowndes Parents Wonder about School Integration," *Southern Courier,* 13 August 1965, 4; John Benson, "A New Freedom Party—Report from Alabama," *The Militant,* 2 May 1966, 1, 3; and *The Black Panther Party. Speech by John Hulett. Interview with Stokely Carmichael. Report from Lowndes County* (New York: Merit, 1966), 19.

12. Interview with Lillian McGill by Stanley Smith, 29 May 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP*; "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126; and "[Minutes of] Staff—People's Meeting [at Selma, Alabama, SNCC Office], 24 May 1965, 3, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 94, folder 22.

13. Edward Rudd, "Lowndes Renews Boycott," *Southern Courier,* 25–26 September 1965, 1, 5; interview with Lillian McGill by Smith, 29 May 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP*; and SNCC WATS report, 24 October 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 41, folder 2.

14. John Hulett, as quoted in *The Black Panther Party. Speech by John Hulett. Interview with Stokely Carmichael. Report from Lowndes County,* 19.

15. SNCC, "Special Report," February 1965, 2, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 35, folder 5; and Staff Report, "A Population, Employment, and Income Profile of Negroes in a 16–County Area of South Central Alabama," in U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing before the United States Commission on Civil Rights: Montgomery, Alabama, 27 April–2 May 1968* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), 688–722.

16. Gail Falk, "Anti-poverty Programs Offer Many Chances for Progress," *Southern Courier,* 16–17 October 1965, 4; and John Hulett, Frank Miles, and Lillian

McGill to Sargent Shriver, 8 August 1965, and "Resident Participation," in application for OEO grant submitted by the Lowndes County Anti-Poverty Action Committee, November 1965, 3, Exhibit E, MLK Archives, *SCLC Papers,* box 148, folder 2.

17. In 1960 the U.S. Census Bureau defined dilapidated housing as that which "does not provide safe and adequate shelter and in its present condition endangers the health, safety, or well-being of the occupants." The same year census enumerators judged 28 percent of African American houses in rural Alabama dilapidated and another 34 percent deteriorating. SNCC, *The General Condition of the Alabama Negro,* 23. Testimony of Dr. Albert Wolf, in U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing Held in Montgomery Alabama, 27 April–2 May 1968,* 251–55. Albert Wolf based his testimony on a 1965 survey of one thousand of the three thousand African American homes in Lowndes County. He also reported that less than 4 percent of white homes lacked indoor bathrooms and plumbing. Interview with Lillian McGill by Smith, 29 May 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP.*

18. "Resident Participation," in application for OEO grant submitted by the Lowndes County Anti-Poverty Action Committee, November 1965, 1–4, MLK Archives, *SCLC Papers,* box 148, folder 2.

19. Ibid., and M. E. Marlette Jr. to Senator John Sparkman, 18 July 1966, ADAH, Alabama Governors' Administrative File, SG 22400, folder 31 (2 of 2).

20. "Resident Participation," and John Hulett to Community Action Program, Office of Economic Opportunity, 22 August 1965, in application for OEO grant submitted by the Lowndes County Anti-Poverty Action Committee, November 1965, 6, Exhibit E, MLK Archives, *SCLC Papers,* box 148, folder 2.

21. Lowndes activists did succeed in securing a $240,640 OEO grant to develop a self-help housing and job-training program. For more on this award, see Nelson Lichtenstein and Robert Smith, "$500,000 to CR Groups," *Southern Courier,* 16–17 July 1966, 1. "Description of structure of Lowndes County Anti-Poverty Action Committee," in application for OEO grant submitted by the Lowndes County Anti-Poverty Action Committee, November 1965, 1, MLK Archives, *SCLC Papers,* box 148, folder 2; M. E. Marlette Jr., "Report of Attempts in Lowndes County, Alabama, to Organize an Interracial Community Action Program," 18 November 1966, 2–3; M. E. Marlette to Lister Hill, 5 December 1966, 2, ADAH, Alabama Governors' Administrative File, SG 22400, folder 31 (2 of 2); and Sargent Shriver to Lister Hill, 17 January 1967, 1, ADAH, Alabama Governors' Administrative File, SG 22400, folder 31 (2 of 2).

22. Testimony of L. R. Haigler in U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing Held in Montgomery, Alabama, 27 April–2 May 1968,* 163–72; "Farm Talk: ASCS Committeemen Decide Cotton Allotment," *Southern Courier,* 20 August 1965, 2; Fay Bennett, "The Condition of Farm Workers, in 1962," in *Report to the Board of Directors of National Sharecroppers Fund,* n.d., 1, 3, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 55, folder 14; and Sarah Heggie, "Rural Study Links Poverty with USDA Discrimination," *Southern Courier,* 2–3 December 1965, 4.

23. SNCC, "ASCS Organizers Handbook," 1965, 1–2, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 51, folder 2; Department of Agriculture, "ASCS Background Information," *Bulletin,* no. 1 (February 1965): 1–4, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 51, folder 2; Eagles, *Outside Agitator,* 135; and Mike Kenny, as quoted in Nelson Lichtenstein, "ASCS: 'A Gut Issue,'" *Southern Courier,* 30–31 July 1966, 1.

24. "Farm Talk: ASCS Committeemen Decide Cotton Allotments," *Southern Courier,* 20 August 1965, 2; Fay Bennett, "The Condition of Farm Workers in 1962," in *Report to the Board of Directors of National Sharecroppers Fund,* n.d., 1, 3, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 55, folder 14; and Memo to Friends of SNCC, "ASCS Elections," 5 November 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC* Papers, box 51, folder 3.

25. Elmo Holder to B. L. Collins, 18 July 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC* Papers, box 51, folder 1; Edward M. Rudd, "Farmers Plan ASCS Races," *Southern Courier,* 30–31 October 1965, 1; Edward M. Rudd, "New Political Group in Lowndes to Name Own Negro Candidates," *Southern Courier,* 1–2 January 1966, 1; Alabama SNCC Staff Report, August 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 94, folder 21; Memo from Janet [Jemott], Tina [Harris] to Silas [Norman], Murial [Tillinghast], September/October 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 94, folder 21; and interview with Mathew Jackson Sr. by Robert Wright, 4 August 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP.*

26. Interview with Mathew Jackson Sr. by Robert Wright, 4 August 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP.*

27. SNCC, "ASCS Organizers Handbook," 1965, 9, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 51, folder 2; unnamed black farmer as quoted in Edward M. Rudd, "Negro Farmers Must Use the Vote Well to Win in This Fall's ASCS Elections," *Southern Courier,* 25–26 September 1965, 4.

28. Memo to friends of SNCC, "ASCS elections," 5 November 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 51, folder 3; Edward M. Rudd, "Moves Hurt Negroes in ASCS Campaign," *Southern Courier,* 13–15 November 1965, 5; Affidavit of Stokely Carmichael taken by Edward Reed Jr., [Special Agent, Office of Inspector General, USDA], 11 March 1966, 1–2, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 51, folder 3; and SNCC press release, "Alabama ASCS Elections Held Today," 15 November 1965, MLK Archives, *Papers of Bob Mants,* box 1, folder "Ala Lowndes Co—LCFO ASCS Community Committee Election, 1965."

29. "SNCC Program: ASCS Elections, 1965," October 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 51, folder 3; and SNCC press release, 28 December 1965, 2, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 35, folder 5.

30. Affidavit of Stokely Carmichael taken by Edward Reed Jr., 11 March 1966, 4; "No Negroes Elected to New ASCS County Committees," Lowndes *Signal,* 8–9 October 1966, 1; Doug Harris and Tina Harris to Reverend Kenneth K. Marshall, 2 December 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 149, folder 1b; John Lewis to Orville Freeman (Secretary, Department of Agriculture), 30 November 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 2, folder 10; "New ASC Community Committee Elected," Lowndes *Signal,* 9 December 1965, 1; Stokely Carmichael, as quoted in

Edward M. Rudd, "Freedom City, Alabama: Lowndes Families Start Tent Village," *Southern Courier,* 8–9 January 1966, 1; and Rudd, "New Political Group in Lowndes," 1.

31. Interview with Elzie McGill by Wright, 4 August 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP*; and Frank Miles Jr. and Sidney Logan Jr., as quoted in "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126.

32. John Hulett, as quoted in Rudd, "New Political Group in Lowndes," 1.

33. *The Black Panther Party. Speech by John Hulett. Interview with Stokely Carmichael. Report from Lowndes County,* 8; interview with John Hulett by Smith, 20 May 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP*; SNCC Research Department, "Background on the Development of Political Strategy and Political Education in Lowndes County, Alabama," 1, MLK, Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 46, folder 11; Rudd, "New Political Group in Lowndes," 1; "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126; and interview with Mathew Jackson Sr. by Wright, 4 August 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP.*

34. John Hulett, as quoted in *The Black Panther Party. Speech by John Hulett. Interview with Stokely Carmichael. Report from Lowndes County,* 8; and Frank Miles Jr., as quoted in "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126.

35. Staff Report, "Voting and Political Participation by Blacks in the 16 Alabama Hearing Counties," in U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing held in Montgomery, Alabama, 27 April–2 May 1968,* 922–40; "Negroes Urge Court to Bar Alabama Act," *New York Times,* 9 March 1966, 81; John Herbers, "U.S. Sues to Force a Vote in Alabama," *New York Times,* 23 March 1966, 1; interview with John Hulett by Smith, 20 May 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP*; SNCC Research Department, "Background on the Development of Political Strategy and Political Education in Lowndes County, Alabama," 1, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 46, folder 11; John Hulett, as quoted in Rudd, "New Political Group in Lowndes," 1; and in "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126; and interview with Mathew Jackson Sr. by Wright, 4 August 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP.*

36. John Hulett, as quoted in "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126.

37. Jack [Minnis] to Bill Strickland, 21 October 1965, 1, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 45, folder 1.

38. Jack Minnis, "The Story of the Development of an Independent Political Movement on the County Level" (Louisville, Ky.: Southern Conference Educational Fund, 1967), 1–2, Duke University, Library Pamphlet Collection.

39. SNCC Research Department, "Background on the Development of Political Strategy and Political Education in Lowndes County, Alabama," 4, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 46, folder 11.

40. "Lowndes County Forms Local Political Group," *Student Voice,* 20 December 1965, 2, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 51, folder 3; and unnamed movement supporter, as quoted in Roberts, "Student Rights Group Lacks Money and Help but Not Projects," 37.

41. SNCC WATS Report, 6 December 1965, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 41, folder 5; Benson, "A New Freedom Party," 1, 3; and Minnis, "The Development of an Independent Political Movement," 2.

42. SNCC, "News of the Field #4," April 1966, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 35, folder 9.

43. "Profile of Alice Moore," MLK Archives, *Papers of Robert Mants,* Box 1, Folder "Lowndes County—LCFO, Profile of Candidates."

44. "Mass Meeting Day Tuesday for Lowndes County Party," 1; and "Lowndes County Freedom Organization Leaders Talk about Their Party," 126.

45. Ivanhoe Donaldson to the Editors of the *New York Times,* October 1966, 1, *SNCC Papers,* MLK Archives; Stokely Carmichael, "What We Want," *New York Times Review of Books,* 22 September 1966; and Stokely Carmichael [Kwame Ture], as quoted in Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, ed., *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 167.

46. Viola Bradford, "Lowndes: A Good Day to Go Voting, but Black Panther Candidates Lose," *Southern Courier,* 12–13 November 1966, 1; Alice Moore, as quoted in Viola Bradford, "Election Aftermath in Lowndes: 'Sold His People for a Coke,'" *Southern Courier,* 19–20 November 1966, 1; Terence Cannon, "Lowndes County: Candidates Lose, but Black Panther Strong," *The Movement* (December 1966), in Carson, *Student Voice,* 183; Terrance Cannon, "Interview with Sidney Logan, Jr.: 'They'll come on over to us,'" *The Movement* (December 1966), in Carson, *The Student Voice,* 184; and interview with Lillian McGill by Smith, 29 May 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP.*

47. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing Held in Montgomery, Alabama, 27 April–2 May 1968,* 596–603; Cannon, "Lowndes County: Candidates Lose," 183; Cannon, "Interview with Sidney Logan, Jr.," 184; interview with John Hulett by Smith, 30 May 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP*; and interview with Lillian McGill by Smith, 29 May 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP.*

48. The LCFO's strong electoral showing won local people the right to change the LCFO's name to the Lowndes County Freedom Party. For election results and reports on white chicanery, see Bradford, "Lowndes: A Good Day to Go Voting," 1; "How Lowndes County Voted," Lowndes *Signal,* 10 November 1966, 2; SNCC, "Election Reports (Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi)," 10 November 1966, 1, MLK Archives, *SNCC Papers,* box 35, folder 9; "Dallas: DCIFVO Head Not Discouraged," *Southern Courier,* 12–13 November 1966, 1; Fred P. Graham, "Rural Deep South Elects 10 Negroes," *New York Times,* 12 November 1966, 16; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearing Held in Montgomery, Alabama, 27 April–2 May 1968,* 594–96; Bradford, "Election Aftermath in Lowndes," 1; Cannon, "Lowndes County: Candidates Lose," 183; Cannon, "Interview with Sidney Logan, Jr.," 184; and interview with Lillian McGill by Smith, 29 May 1968, HU Archives, *CRDP.*