



Interview with **Bob Mants**

Date: October 18, 1988

Interviewer:

Camera Rolls: 1011-1014

Sound Rolls: 105-106

Team: A

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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**Note:** These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in bold italics was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #1011]

[sound roll #105]

[slate]

[00:00:12:00:00]

Interviewer:

OK. So we've been over our discussion about what we're doing now and keep in mind that I want you to—talk in full sentences and speak clearly.

[00:00:17:00]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it. Camera roll 10, 11. Sound 105—

Interviewer:

—talk in full sentences and speak clearly.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Take 12.

[00:00:21:00]

Bob Mants:

OK.

[00:00:25:00]

Interviewer:

OK, Bob. First question that I have for you is what we were talking about. Can you describe Black Power and how it happened? I know you were saying it's something that came by the seat of the pants, so.

[00:00:35:00]

Bob Mants:

The—

[camera malfunction-audio only]

Bob Mants:

—describe Black Power?

[00:00:37:00]

Interviewer:

Mm-hmm. What it means.

[00:00:39:00]

Bob Mants:

Oh, well, I think what Black Power means is the empowerment of Black people to make decisions that effect their lives. Essentially, that's what it means. Not just politically but economically, socially, culturally. Those kind of things that—decisions that effect their lives.

[00:00:57:00]

Interviewer:

Now, you were saying it came by kind of haphazardly.

[00:01:01:00]

Bob Mants:

No, I didn't say—

[00:01:02:00]

Interviewer:

[inaudible].

[00:01:03:00]

Bob Mants:

[laughs] I didn't mean Black Power came about haphazardly. What I was talking about the—in many instances people take for granted that there was—when, when things happen that there was some very carefully thought out process to make them happen. In many instances that's not the case. It just happened to be by happenchance or circumstance that things come about.

[00:01:26:00]

Interviewer:

OK. Can we stop for a minute now?

[cut]

[picture resumes]

[00:01:28:00]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sure. Just mark it.

[00:01:31:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Thirteen.

[00:01:34:00]

Interviewer:

OK, Bob, now I heard that—

[camera malfunction--audio only]

Interviewer:

—SNCC saw Lowndes County is a test case. I wanted to know, 'cause they said that something different was happening here. [Velcro in background] And I'm really asking, though, [Velcro in background] the question is why SNCC decided to come into Lowndes County—

[00:01:55:00]

Camera Crew Member #1:

You rolling?

Interviewer:

—that's what I want to get into. An understanding of what the conditions were.

Camera Crew Member #1:

You rolling? You rolling? OK.

[00:02:02:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible].

[cut]

[picture resumes]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Fourteen.

[slate]

[00:02:04:00]

Interviewer:

I've heard SNCC saw Lowndes County as something different, as a test case. And I wanted to know from you why SNCC first decided to come to Lowndes County.

[00:02:13:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, prior to 1965, SNCC had had staff members in Alabama. But there the, the staff was small. Lowndes County had the reputation of being the most violent county in the state of Alabama. It had a long history of violence and of repression. When we first—when Stokely Carmichael and I came to Alabama we came to participate, be a part in and around the Selma to Montgomery march. It was in Selma that we decided that we wanted to tackle Lowndes County. I had just come from South Georgia, working there with SNCC and Carmichael came over from Mississippi. Not so much as a, as a test case but in other places the civil rights movement, for the most part, had been built around students, young people. Here was an opportunity, especially with the Voting Rights Act passage in the, in the, in the making. It seemed to us that it would be a lot more appropriate to deal with those, that group of people, who were able to, to register and vote. And they were not youth at that time. So this, I think,

was a major contributing factor to our coming into Lowndes County and the abject fear that Black people had here.

[00:03:43:00]

Interviewer:

Did they ask you or did you ask them to come here?

[00:03:46:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, I think it was a combination of, of both. With the Selma to Montgomery march coming through Lowndes County, Carmichael and Judy Richardson, Scott B. Smith and myself came to Lowndes County to pass out leaflets and buttons and everything else, information, letting folk know that the Selma to Montgomery march was coming through. And some people asked us, why not come to Lowndes County. I remember very distinctly one lady described the march from Selma to Montgomery as, in the Biblical sense, that I, John saw that number no man can number. And she was quite pleased to see the civil rights activity coming through her county and coming to her county.

[00:04:38:00]

Interviewer:

OK. Can you stop now?

[00:04:41:00]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sure.

[cut]

[slate]

[00:04:41:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Fifteen.

[00:04:46:00]

Interviewer:

Now, getting back to that question of Black Power again.

[00:04:48:00]

Bob Mants:

Mm-hmm.

[00:04:49:00]

Interviewer:

Go back over it again. You—I want to put it in the context of Lowndes County and what was happening. Can you describe to us what Black Power means?

[00:04:57:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, I think what Black Power meant then and means, still means the same thing. It means a self determination of people. People being able to participate in the decisions that effect their lives. Politically, socially, economically, culturally. To put it very succinctly, the people have an opportunity to participate in decisions that effect their lives. And that means Black Power.

[00:05:26:00]

Interviewer:

Now, some people say that Whites increased the violence during the Black voter registration in Lowndes County and there were mass meetings and locals began to carry arms. I'd like to know whether the SNCC's non-violence philosophy was able to work in this kind of situation, this dangerous situation.

[00:05:45:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, there are many of us who, who come from—who came from different backgrounds. At the early part of my involvement in the civil rights movement we had tried to, to take non-violence as a way of life. It was my mother who told me differently [laughs]. It was not the people who call themselves the Black militants or revolutionaries. It was my mother, who told me that I could not be anything dead [laughs]. The situation here in Alabama at that time was one of, of violence all over and there was constant fear for our lives. It was immediate and present danger. The old folks talk about even the danger seen and unseen. So it was my mother who taught me differently [laughs] about around the question of violence and non-violence. It was not a question of...of violence and non-violence. It was a question of whether or not you'd be able to live to, to see the next day. And we had to do what was necessary at the time to ensure—

[camera roll ends]

[wild audio]

Bob Mants:

—that ourselves and our constituents, the people that we loved and worked for in these counties were able to live. It just, it was a matter of survival.

[00:07:03:00]

Interviewer:

Hold on. We're going to be changing the film.

[slate]

[00:07:06:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Ten-twelve, 16.

[00:07:08:00]

Interviewer:

I want to get more into the sacrifices that went on around registering to vote. And I understand that many people were homeless because they did register to vote, and they moved to Tent City. I want to get a little bit more into what Tent City was about in terms of what SNCC did to make it possible for people to begin to move toward independence.

[00:07:29:00]

Bob Mants:

Yeah. No, at that time 19—roughly 65, 1965, the population of this county was roughly eighty-one percent Black. This county has had a history, even during the period of, of slavery of being a majority, majority Black county. In 1860, I believe it is, was, this county was roughly seventy-five percent slaves during that time. So it has a history of, of, of being a majority Black county. One of the other things—the thing that happened during the, during the civil rights movement is that because people be—were living on plantations and because they were registered for the first time in record numbers, they were being put off the places. They were, they lived on plantations by these large, wealthy landowners and they were being put off as a result of their registering to vote. I'm reminded of a man who, for thirty-five years, who had worked on this plantation, and when he went to register to vote and it was found out that he had registered to vote, the man sent for him to bring his truck. What led to—that led to us trying to do something to keep those people who wanted to stay in Lowndes County, try to provide them with some place to stay. And we did that the best we knew how at the time by providing tents that was donated through SNCC and other people from around the country to locate these families that were being put off because of them attempting to register to vote. People made great sacrifices. Many of their families were split. There was some people who left the county, who moved north with relatives in Detroit and elsewhere. People left and moved to other places. One of the fortunate things, in retrospect, is that everybody who stayed here, who was put off because of their participation in voter registration, now owns their own home. The community came together at that time, they

would go to Montgomery and buy used or new building materials and people in the community would come together and build houses. There are a couple of instances in which folk got their houses that way. And that was another attempt on the part of some of us in SNCC, SNCC's staff to, to be able to purchase plots of land for people to be able to still live here in the county.

[00:10:10:00]

Interviewer:

OK. Hold it for a minute. Relax, relax.

[cut]

[00:10:13:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Seventeen.

[00:10:15:00]

Interviewer:

So we were talking then about the Alabama Poor People's land fund and how that came about.

[00:10:20:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, it really came about as a result of some people in SNCC—

[00:10:24:00]

Interviewer:

Now, you—I want you to tell me what came about, not just it.

[00:10:28:00]

Bob Mants:

OK.

[00:10:28:00]

Interviewer:

OK.

[00:10:29:00]

Bob Mants:



The Alabama Poor People's land fund came about as a result of some people in, in, with SNCC, especially here in, in Lowndes County and some other places in Alabama recognizing the need for people to own land as a, as a source of their independence. People—the people who had been put off, off the land for their participation in voter registration. Well, the people who did not own the land didn't have a place to go. The Alabama Poor People's land fund came about as a result of Tina Harris, Stokely Carmichael, myself putting together and raising monies to be able to buy land and were virtually given and hold that land in perpetuity for people who had been displaced because of their voter, voter registration, for their participation in voter registration. We underst—understood very clearly the relationship of, of the politics to the economics and the, and how land played an, an important part in that.

[00:11:36:00]

Interviewer:

Now I want to shift a little bit and go into the Jonathan Daniels murder. And I know this was something that was real big in the immediate and, and to America. But now, how did SNCC feel about the murder of Jonathan Daniels?

[00:11:49:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, with Jon—it was a murder and we've—and that's how our, I think, our position on it was a blatant outright murder of Jonathan Daniels and the shooting of Father Mor—who, Father Richard Morrisroe. There was some people who had been working with SNCC who was involved around that whole episode that still—it was a murder. During that time the racists in Alabama was so polarized that almost—I, I know very—for the first nine months that I was in Alabama I went to a funeral or memorial service every month. The violence that took place, and it had to do with the, the state of Alabama. Which is un, unlike Mississippi and Alabama—Mississippi and Georgia, for example. In Alabama, 1966, when the governor's wife ran for, for the governor's state of Miss—of Alabama, he could have ran his yard dog [laughs] and his yard dog would have ran—won as the governor of Alabama. The allegiance was to the state. It was much more organized as it was in, in Mississippi and, and in Georgia. The allegiance was to the state. So what you had at the state le—at the helm of the state was the last vestige of the old South, as I like to call it. And that was symbolized by George Wallace. To the extent that George Wallace could get on the television and in the news media and say we have these outsiders in the state stirring up trouble and we knew that somebody was going to die in Alabama that night or that day. It was just, it was that—the, the, the tension, the racial polarization and the violence was, was that pronounced in Al, Alabama during that time.

[00:13:45:00]

Interviewer:

Now, what about the Whites that came in to work with SNCC workers. How were they perceived? Did their presence make local Whites more violent?

[00:13:54:00]

Bob Mants:

Yes [laughs]. Yes, it did. And in most places in, in the civil rights movement, especially in the South, when there was obviously an effort at an integrated working team or an integrated civil rights workers. There was always—of course it got the attention, not only from Whites but it got attention from Blacks.

[00:14:14:00]

Interviewer:

OK. Now, what got attention?

[00:14:15:00]

Bob Mants:

The fact that they were integrated. There were Blacks and Whites working together. It was always a, a, a sor—a stand out, a sore thumb that folks [unintelligible] saw and always reacted to it in one way or another. If it's no more than stares or snickers or the other extreme—

Interviewer:

Was there a [unintelligible]—

Bob Mants:

—of violence.

[00:14:39:00]

Interviewer:

—with SNCC around what to do about that? Did you decide to keep working with Whites or—

[00:14:45:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, [clears throat] there were never many Wh—Whites [laughs] working in this situation here in, in Lowndes County. We'd had the experience. We had drawn a lot of years of experience in other places when we came here. We thought, with a county with this kind of population, that our best interests and the interest, the best interest of this county that to the, to the extent possible, we minimize the participation of Whites. There was some that did come. But they wasn't here for very long [laughs] as a matter of fact.

[00:15:21:00]

Interviewer:

OK. Could we stop now?

[00:15:22:00]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sure.

[cut]

[00:15:24:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Eighteen.

[00:15:26:00]

Interviewer:

So an independent Black political party was formed out of this struggle and I wanted to know why such a party was able to get formed. What was the reasons and rationale behind this forming?

[00:15:37:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, I think there are basically two reasons. One is that—

[00:15:42:00]

Interviewer:

Basically two reasons for?

[00:15:43:00]

Bob Mants:

For the, the establishment of the independent political party.

[00:15:46:00]

Interviewer:

Let's repeat that sentence.

[00:15:47:00]

Bob Mants:

Lowndes County—basically there were two reasons for the establishment of the independent political party here in Lowndes County. One is that Blacks were not allowed to participate in the Democratic Party here. When Blacks attempted to run, the entrance fee, the qualifying fees were raised to the extent that they could not raise the money to qualify. The other reason is very—is simply, there was a recognition on the part of those of us who were registering people to vote. Not just here in Lowndes County but other places in Alabama that, even after we got them registered to vote, the places where they voted were still controlled by the same people. The notion of forming an independent political organization—party at the local level is one that was attractive to a number of people, not just the, the civil rights workers but also people in the county. They needed to own their own political party so they could determine their own political destiny. As a result of that effort, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization was formed here in this county with the Black Panther as it's emblem.

[00:17:05:00]

Interviewer:

OK. Hold it now. Sounds like you're moving out.

[00:17:08:00]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yes.

[00:17:09:00]

Interviewer:

Yeah. OK.

[cut]

[camera roll #1013]

[00:17:09:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Ten-thirteen. Take 19.

[00:17:13:00]

Interviewer:

We're talking about the independent Black political party and what I want to know now is what role SNCC played in that and, and we have this wonderful comic book that gives a description of, of, for people as to what was going on. So I would like for you to talk about that comic book as well as other roles—

Bob Mants:

Mm.

Interviewer:

—that SNCC played in the forming of this party.

[00:17:33:00]

Bob Mants:

Mm. There was the recognition of—people decided they wanted to form an independent political party, then what was necessary was to do the research. Alabama state law, the code of Alabama, sets out how to form an independent political organization. SNCC researched the part [clears throat], did the research on it. Part of a way of educating the general public as to how to go about forming a political organization was through the use of a comic book. The, the emblem that was used, the PR that was used, the selection of candidates—my particular job was that, at that time, was, my job was to do the workshop with the candidates. My job was to, to go through in very careful details, what the job of the tax assessor was, what the job of the sheriff was as required by law, et cetera. And so SNCC played a major part in that. There was also an Alabama code, Alabama law that said what had to be done on the first convention, the first election and the formation, the formation of the organization that took place during, during that time for—

[00:18:57:00]

Interviewer:

But now, those comic strips, how did...how did that get done and what was the story behind that?

[00:19:02:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, part of it, in the rural South—the South is known for its storytelling, how people tell tales, anecdotes. The, the idea was to find a medium in which we commun—could communicate a political message to a constituency, to our constituency in Lowndes County. We thought the best way to do that was through the kind of comic book that we had. Using the kind of idioms and folk expressions that they were familiar with. And we thought it was quite successful. Again, the—one of the requirements of Alabama law was that each political party must have an emblem and the candidates must come on the emblem on, on the ballot. And I think that's, in large part, due to the fact that Alabama has one of the highest literacy rates—illiteracy rates in the nation. So to help people who cannot read and write be able to identify with a particular symbol. And for Lowndes County Freedom Organization the emblem was a black panther.

[00:20:21:00]

Interviewer:

Tell me more about that. How did that come about?

[00:20:24:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, the black panther [coughs] was drawn by Ruth Howard. Ruth Howard had been a student at Howard University along with Stokely Carmichael and Courtland Cox and others who were active in SNCC and in the civil rights movement. And it was said that Courtland Cox, who must have been 6'1", 6'2" at the time, big dark cat, who, in the college years I understand, used to wear this big cloak and he—Courtland would always go around like he was cold all the time in the middle of August. And some of his college buddies said he looked like a black panther. And so the idea of a black panther as an emblem [laughs] of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization came about. In, I guess, in recognition of the name and style of Courtland Cox. But Ruth Howard had a, a place right down the road. On the family's kitchen table is where the black panther's emblem was drawn, and people liked that here in the county and it became Lowndes County Freedom Organization's emblem.

[00:21:42:00]

Interviewer:

Now, was it hard convincing local people to run for office?

[00:21:47:00]

Bob Mants:

Yeah [laughs]. And you can sort of understand why. It has a lot to do with the economics. Those people who ran on [pause] the first, the first time Black people ran in this county, it had to do with the ownership of land. Historically in the civil rights movement, not only here but elsewhere, people who have a tendency to own their own land are much more independent. We got the greatest participation, not just here in Alabama, but throughout the South where people were independent landowners, hadn't been landowners, land had been in their families for a generation. So initially, there were, people were, were afraid but for the most part those people who were the first candidates here in this county were people who owned their own land.

[00:22:47:00]

Interviewer:

OK. Hold on.

[cut]

[slate]

[00:22:49:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Take 20.

[00:22:52:00]

Interviewer:

You got that slogan, vote for the panther, then go home.

[00:22:54:00]

Bob Mants:

Yes.

[00:22:55:00]

Interviewer:

Tell us about that.

[00:22:56:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, the idea was to create a kind of jingle that people could memorize. Vote for the panther, then go home. First of all, they could not vote in more than one political party. They could not vote for the panther and then vote in the Democratic or Republican Party, for example. So we wanted them to vote in—for the panther, then go home. People would associate, would memorize the jingle, associate it with the black panther as the emblem and pull the lever for the party. A classic photograph that was around for years was this fellow guarding this sign. We had posters all over, the homemade poster we made, that says pull the lever for the panther, then go home. It helped in the number of persons that turned out to vote and people—these are people, again, who are voting for the first time in their lives and some of these were elderly people.

[00:23:56:00]

Interviewer:

Can you tell me some story about someone who was particularly inspirational that you saw voting for the first time?

[00:24:03:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, not only vo—voting but registering for the first time. I think if there was any one incident that [clears throat] that heightened my spirit was, was at the old jailhouse where people are registering to vote. And the person who was the sheriff at that time came out and

said, y'all niggers get away from here. Y'all go, I'm gonna get my shotgun. Y'all disturbing my mother. And there was an old man whose name was Will Jackson who came to me and said, Bob, she [sic] said, said, we ain't going nowhere today. He said, if we back up now, we'll be backing up another 100 years. And for some reason or another spirit took off and everybody said, we ain't going nowhere today. You gonna have to kill us right here. It was that kind of spirit that overcame—that came over the group and we just stood there that day and if they were gonna kill us then they would have to kill us that day.

[00:24:59:00]

Interviewer:

So finally in May 1966, you reached that primary and that convention. What special took place during that day for you, that touched your heart?

[00:25:09:00]

Bob Mants:

Well [sighs] there was, there was several things that, I think, that took place. Here was the first time that, that Black people, and in a record number, registered to vote. But more important than, than registering to vote was you, was the beginning of the end to the fear. You can't imagine. And I cannot find words to describe the depth of the fear that people had historically in this county. The fear that they had of, of being killed or being maimed or economic reprisals. That was the beginning of a lessening of the fear that they had. And I think if anything significant happened that day, it was that people began to come out in record numbers to be able to actually take a, a stand. Literally take a stand for what they believed in.

[00:26:21:00]

Interviewer:

You tell us about your mother calling you up and talking to you? Can you give us that story? What happened there?

[00:26:25:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, what happened, my mother had had two heart attacks. A second heart attack behind the death of Sammy Young, who was killed in Tuskegee in early 1965. I'm the only son and my mother called me home to explain to me, as she laid on her bed, that I can be nothing dead. I can't [laughs] be a son or a civil rights worker or an uncle or a student or anything dead. Her experience had, had, like so many other of our parents, had been in situations in which, when the Klan and the racial violence was so prevalent, they knew through their experience that this was not a, a thing to play with. They knew that Whites and Southern Whites will kill you, no question about it. They told us that. We grew up with that as, as a part of our knowledge base, how do you live in a situation in the segregated south. My mother explained to me, in very graphic terms, that I couldn't be nothing dead. And I took her at her word. I



explained to her that—I promised her two things. I promised her that no White folk will kill me, and no Black folk will drive me crazy. Fifty percent ain't bad [laughs]. But it was that kind of thing that we learned from our parents. Our parents, especially those of—

[camera roll ends]

[wild audio]

Bob Mants:

—who were southerners. And that was the difference between growing up in the segregated South and for others who were civil rights workers who came from the North. That was a whole lot of—

[00:28:20:00]

Interviewer:

Can you hold off now? My bad. Just a minute.

[cut]

[slate]

[camera roll #1014]

[sound roll #106]

[00:28:25:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Ten-fourteen. 106 sound. 21 take.

[00:28:29:00]

Interviewer:

You were gettin' into something pretty important here. The difference between being a Southern civil rights worker and a Northern civil rights worker and how you related differently to Lowndes County people.

[00:28:43:00]

Bob Mants:

Well [clears throat] there—being [clears throat] reared in the South, I came along in the days of segregation when there was a distinct, there were distinct communities. There was a Black community, a White community. There were places or public accommodations you didn't go in. And we went to the movies, we went up to the peanut gallery at the Fox Theater on

Peachtree Street in Atlanta [coughs]. There was—and what happened as a result of the years of hearing your parents and grandparents and other folk tell you these horror stories, and some of the beauty to it, that's the other thing, is some of the beauty of coming up in the South. There were certain kinds of, of, of notions that we had. There was certain kinds of fixed attitudes. There was certain kinds of ideals and ideas that we had that were, that were—and there were some differences. For me to go into a restaurant, to sit in a restaurant, had nothing to do with trying to integrate a restaurant. It has to do with human dignity. It was my God given right to be—exercise my humanity. Because I was a human being. That's simply what it was. It wasn't to get a hamburger because we already knew [laughs] we found out, we knew Colonel Sanders secret recipe years ago. It was mama in the kitchen [laughs]. We knew who cooked the chicken, who did it. It was our parents because they had worked for these places and these homes for, for years. So, it has to do with human dignity, our right. As opposed to some political notion. It's just, it was just, it's just out right to do it. Our folks had told us. In my particular case, I used to stay with a, with a great aunt before I was school age. And she used to tell me things. And I knew before I was school aged what my mission in life would have to be. Because she told me the horror stories about her life and her husband and folks that gone on before them. And they would always tell you things about how to be a human being, how to stand, how to stand up for what was right, that kind of thing. So I think it, it was just a, a, a natural thing for some of us. We had to do it. It fell into our lot. Because our fore parents couldn't do it. And we were caught up in a historical time. Then, it was our generation, our time to, to run with the ball.

[00:31:34:00]

Interviewer:

Now, bring that all into Lowndes County and what that means here in your relating to Black people here.

[00:31:42:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, I think those of us who—there was no difference from my mother working as a domestic in the kitchen in Atlanta than folk in Lowndes County working in the cotton fields. The same kind of oppression, the same state of degradation was the same. And it has, it made, made no difference. A lot of it had to do with, again, with, with idioms. How folk talk. Because a lot of people who are not familiar with how people talk get—folk will say thing, folk talking what they say, what we say in the rural South. Say folk talk in parables. You think they're saying one thing, they're saying something entirely different. The—that was no problem in terms—and even, and even in some instances there's a distinction if you pay very close attention between the folk, the way folk talk in Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama. But basically, the, the, the lines of communication, because there's a cultural kind of bonding that make the communication a lot better. So when somebody—there's no—you don't have to sit and explain to somebody who comes from New England what Ms. Betsy Lou said, what she mean when she say I'm going on a Church tomorrow [laughs], for example [laughs].

[00:33:12:00]

Interviewer:

Hold up for a minute now.

[cut]

[slate]

[00:33:15:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Twenty-two.

[00:33:17:00]

Interviewer:

Was there something going on between separating the Black workers and the White workers, SNCC workers in Lowndes County?

[00:33:25:00]

Bob Mants:

Well—

[00:33:25:00]

Interviewer:

Speak to that.

[00:33:27:00]

Bob Mants:

Well, you must bear in mind the history. In 1964, there had been the Mississippi Freedom Summer where there had been a lot of Blacks and Whites working in Mississippi. I believe it was reported that during the summer of Mississippi, there must have been some 20-odd Churches burned in southwest Mississippi and around the state of Mississippi. There were Black and Whites, you know, Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner were killed during that time. They—the difference is that you—again, the history was that we were right at the beginning of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Which meant that our concentration had to be with those people who were of voting age. So it was not the young folk or, and like, that carried most of the movement. It was not the youth. It was the people, it was another focus that had to, had to, we had to focus on those people who were of voting age to get them the right to vote. And as far as the question of, of Black and White, the other thing that came in around the same time was the whole Black Power slogan and movement. The latter part of, of that same, of the same period. The other thing that was happening in terms of SNCC and with most civil

rights organizations that were, had been effective, was the lack of, of, of donations and public contributions were drying up. There were Whites who were in SNCC and in the movement that, prior to my coming to Lowndes County, were my friends. We had worked together. During that time, they were still my friends and since then they're still have been my friends. The vision between White—Blacks and Whites that a lot of people try to blow out of proportion, I think it was out of proportion, there were some of us who, who, especially during the early days when we talked about Black and White together and I distinctly remember my experience down in southwest Georgia. There was a White girl from Philadelphia who used to cook for about 15 or 20 of us on a one belly, one eye, kerosene stove. And now, she got through cooking and during the day she looked like Aunt Jemima. And that was never that kind of thing in the earlier years. The division between Blacks and Whites. I think that was part of the conspiracy to kill SNCC, as a matter of fact. I think, because once the, the division between Black and White became so pronounced in more places than Lowndes County, we—the question here was always one of survival. From day one, and always remember that, we had to do what was necessary for us to live here. This county had had the reputation of being the most violent county in this state, and perhaps throughout the South. So we were always mindful of, of, of, of, of trying to survive here. So if that meant not having White workers in so that we could live and get our mission accomplished, then that's what we had to do. And I think it's in that context that the whole question of Black and White must—should be raised. Especially here in Lowndes County, in, in, in the, in the historical setting as it were during those years.

[00:37:25:00]

Interviewer:

OK. Hold up.

[cut]

[slate]

[00:37:27:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Twenty-three.

[00:37:29:00]

Interviewer:

What else do we need to know?

[00:37:30:00]

Camera Crew Member #1:

No, second sticks.

[00:37:31:00]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Second sticks, 23.

[00:37:33:00]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK. Did you pull [unintelligible]? Thank you.

[00:37:35:00]

Bob Mants:

I think that every generation has it's—

[00:37:37:00]

Camera Crew Member #1:

One second, start again. I'm sorry. Mm-hmm.

[00:37:40:00]

Bob Mants:

I think that every generation has its race to run. During our time, during the '60s, it fell our lot to do what we have to do—we had to do in regards to our human dignity and civil rights or whatever you want to call it. Fell to our lot. I think the learning experience for me has been since I've gotten older. There's a thing that unites the people, there's a common belief. It transcends race, it transcends geography, it transcends marital ties, blood ties, political affiliation, the things that unite the people. There's a common belief. And until people are united in a common belief, we'll always have these kind of divisions that are superficial geography: north, south, race: Black, White, political: Democrat, Republican. That's all I have to say [laughs].

[00:38:42:00]

Interviewer:

Thank you.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:38:42:00

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