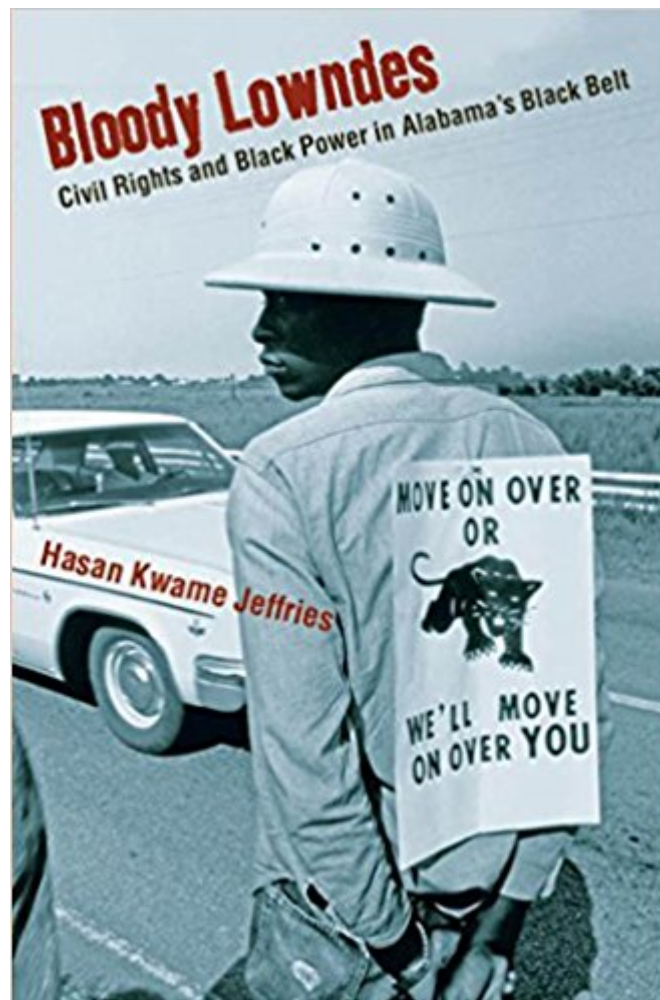




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# Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights And Black Power In Alabama

## Black Belt



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2010 Clinton Jackson Coley Award for the best book on local history from the Alabama Historical Association

Early in 1966, African Americans in rural Lowndes County, Alabama, aided by activists from the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), established an all-black, independent political party called the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO). The group, whose ballot symbol was a snarling black panther, was formed in part to protest the barriers to black enfranchisement that had for decades kept every single African American of voting age off the county's registration books. Even after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, most African Americans in this overwhelmingly black county remained too scared even to try to register. Their fear stemmed from the county's long, bloody history of whites retaliating against blacks who strove to exert the freedom granted to them after the Civil War. Amid this environment of intimidation and disempowerment, African Americans in Lowndes County viewed the LCFO as the best vehicle for concrete change. Their radical experiment in democratic politics inspired black people throughout the country, from SNCC organizer Stokely Carmichael who used the Lowndes County program as the blueprint for Black Power, to California-based activists Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton, who adopted the LCFO panther as the namesake for their new, grassroots organization: the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. This party and its adopted symbol went on to become the national organization of black militancy in the 1960s and 1970s, yet long-observed is the crucial role that Lowndes County played in spurring black activists nationwide to fight for civil and human rights in new and more radical ways. Drawing on an impressive array of sources ranging from government documents to personal interviews with Lowndes County residents and SNCC activists, Hasan Kwame Jeffries tells, for the first time, the remarkable full story of the Lowndes County freedom struggle and its contribution to the larger civil rights movement. Bridging the gaping hole in the literature between civil rights organizing and Black Power politics, *Bloody Lowndes* offers a new paradigm for understanding the civil rights movement.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Bloody Lowndes is an important book. The author's careful analysis of the 1966 election is both readable and quite useful to understanding the importance of the moment. EverythingAlabama.com

"Jeffries has written the book historians of the black freedom movement have been waiting for. His beautifully written account rescues Lowndes County from its role as merely a backdrop to Black Power, to being one of the key battlegrounds for democracy in the United States. Here are local people whose local struggles have contributed mightily to the kind of politics we desperately need in the Obama age—the politics of freedom democracy, a politics born in Reconstruction, rooted in social justice and human rights, and honed in the Alabama cotton belt.

—Robin D. G. Kelley, author of Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination

Jeffries' book sets a new standard for the political history of African Americans in the rural South by refocusing on the mechanics of power taken, used, lost, and retaken between blacks and whites, rather than the larger fabric of social and cultural politics. Given the stark and still unrelieved inequalities of the black belt, this is a salutary stance.

—Van Gosse, Journal of Southern History

"Hasan Kwame Jeffries' Bloody Lowndes provides a nuanced portrait of the marriage between federal policy initiatives and local activism in the battle to dismantle Jim Crow, focusing on the months from March 1965 through November 1966 when SNCC workers, led by Stokely Carmichael, were active in Lowndes County, Alabama.

—American Studies

"Without succumbing to the temptation to paint the struggle for black equality in broad strokes, Jeffries isolates the locus of the issues that framed the movement and uses these to explain how, through a variety of social networks, the movement spread regionally and ultimately nationally... is an exceptional piece of scholarship. Jeffries has produced an important work that will unquestionably reshape the debate over the origins and legacy of the civil rights and black power movements for years to come.

—Journal of American History

"Jeffries' Bloody Lowndes is an

important contribution to the literature of the African American freedom struggle. Jeffries reveals the deep historical roots of black struggles against racial and economic oppression in the Black Belt. He makes clear that the civil rights reforms of the 1960s were insufficient responses to the freedom politics that spawned the Lowndes County Freedom Organization the first Black Panther Party. -Clayborne Carson, author of *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*

Hasan Kwame Jeffries is Associate Professor of History at The Ohio State University, where he holds a joint appointment at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.

If you have a general understanding of the civil rights movement but want to take a closer look at how one particular community mobilized and progressed, this book is a great place to start. You will feel all sorts of emotions while reading this book, from anger to pride to disappointment to hope. Jeffries' writing is superb, as is his research. This is just a very, very good book. The only challenge to following a book like this is the dearth of well-known players, which can make it tough to remember who did what. But Jeffries does a wonderful job of introducing us to the movement leaders, as well as the men and women who worked tirelessly to sustain white supremacy. I felt like I was almost part of the community while reading the book, and not every history book can totally immerse the reader like that. In terms of style, he provides a nice introduction of race relations in Lowndes County from Reconstruction to the 1960s, then gets into great detail of the movement from 1965-1966, following both a chronological and thematic approach that made it a smooth read and easy to follow. His last chapter covered a very broad period almost up to the present. And each chapter ends with a nice summary of what you just read. I learned about the great grassroots work done by SNCC and Stokely Carmichael, as well as the particular structural impediments to progress that were built into these rural southern communities. Despite all the effort to change the education, law enforcement, electoral and political systems in Lowndes County, progress was remarkably slow because of the power wielded by a determined, united minority of whites. Courageous activists made great progress toward righting many wrongs, but the system and various other factors limited the advancements. This is a great book by a young historian, and I hope there's more from him in the future.

I LOVED this book. I had to read it for a class, so I was dreading it, but it was one of the best books I've ever read. Really thorough analysis of the importance of Lowndes County during the civil rights

movement.

Black Power was more than a slogan in rural Lowndes County in the 1960's; it was a call to action. Jeffries's book positions Lowndes County as the scene of one of SNCC's finest periods of community organizing. Jeffries scrupulously details both grassroots and legal actions through an activist scholar's eye. The fact that he moved to and lived with the people of Lowndes while he authored this book brings an authenticity and compassion that other historians lack, while not compromising his objectivity. Many people have heard of Lowndes County due to the murder of white seminary student Jonathan Daniels (August 20, 1965) who stepped in front of SNCC workers as they were coming out of a store. Although Jeffries touches on this outrageous incident, he reminds us of the daily danger faced by the Black community and why they welcomed the workers and strategies of SNCC. The reader is invited to share in the celebration of local people who fought to overthrow the minority white power structure and take their rightful place in leadership positions, and in history. Maria Gitin, Civil Rights Veteran (Wilcox County AL) and author of "This Bright Light of Ours: Stories from the Voting Rights Fight, University of Alabama Press 2014.

There are so many layers to this text that it would be difficult to describe its power in just a few lines. Jeffries has produced an excellent work, blending literary and historical writing in a work that is all at once powerful, beautiful and still so very relevant. I can only envision how tireless the author worked to track down all the records, the images, the interviews and texts and documents that he so seamlessly incorporates into his re-telling of what is a powerfully, important period in the movement for equality for Americans of African descent. I was riveted all while being educated and humbled by the work and the struggle of the newly-freed slaves and the first of their descendants that were born into the 'freedom' that was available to them at the time.

loved the history of my hometown and the struggle of my people to have the rights as everybody else in the "United States"

This is a deep text, at once local and universal. The author has plumbed some recondite archives, oral no less than archival, to compose a text astute of argument and lucid of prose. The stimulating role of external agitation (any number of major figures from the national black freedom struggle appear here), the depth of the local commitment to transformation, the legacy of the civil rights organizing tradition, the ideological impact of black power--all find a harmonious synthesis in this

outstanding work. BLOODY LOWNDES is also a disquisition on the possibilities, and the perils, of holding political power. It is a major contribution to scholarship. The bar has been raised. We have here the standard by which future studies on the permeable and imprecise boundaries between civil rights and black power, and specificity and universality of black power, must be judged. Three cheers for Professor Jeffries!!!

A bold and insightful portrait of the little Alabama county that changed the world. I live in Lowndes County, Alabama and was thrilled that someone put their time and talents into writing a history that's readable and fascinating. Loved it.

A MUST READ for anyone interested in civil rights, and particularly it's early roots in rural Alabama. HIGHLY recommended!

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