

Telephone Interview with Jimmy Rogers

February 4, 2013

Tape 1, Side A

PM: It is February 4, 2013. I'm speaking with Mr. Jimmy Rogers who is in Oakland, CA. We're going to be talking about his experiences in AL many years ago.

How did you get from Brooklyn to AL?

JR: I didn't intend to go to AL to do civil rights work, although I worked for an agency in NY that was a civil rights-type organization.

PM: I understand that was the state Anti-discrimination Commission.

JR: Yes, it was New York State Commission against Discrimination. What they did was investigate complaints of discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations.

PM: How did you get to AL.

JR: I went down on a bus—Greyhound. That was in 1961.

PM: When in '61? That's when the Freedom Rides were going on.

JR: That's right. That wasn't my purpose for going down there. My purpose was to return to Tuskegee Institute.

PM: You were going to go to graduate school? *all I was enrolling as an undergraduate*

JR: I wasn't a graduate student. *yes* was an undergraduate.

PM: I understand that Tuskegee was quite a lively place at that time.

JR: Not when I got there. There really wasn't that much going on. I'd say around 1965 it really took off, although there were two or three organizations within the university that were conducting civil rights activities. The YMCA. We had an organization, you've probably read about this organization, it was called TIAL—the Tuskegee Institute Advancement League. That was run by students. From there SNCC came onto the campus and that's when most of the people that were in TIAL became SNCC members.

PM: Including you?

JR: Including me and Ruby Sales, a Tuskegee Institute student at the time that Tuskegee students became part of SNCC.

PM: I'm going to talk with her when her mother is in more stable condition.

*Off
Campes*

Among the Tuskegee students who were involved with SNCC, what were you doing, on campus or off?

JR: I worked very closely with Stokely Carmichael and Bob Mants. Both of them have died.

Yes

PM: Was this at the time they were establishing the project in Lowndes Co.?

JR: Yes, this was right at the beginning of the time they started the Lowndes Co. project. I was there and Ruby Sales was there, and later on [Gloria] Larry came.

JR: She's a professor at some university, I don't remember which one.

PM: I could probably track her down. When did you begin working in Lowndes Co.?

JR: 1965.

PM: Was it in the summer time? *yes*

JR: It was in the summer time because when I met Morrisroe and Jonathan Daniels it was in August of '65. Before that particular demonstration I had only known them about two days. Most of the time I had with them was around those two days and the time that we spent in jail.

PM: That part I had read about. Before you met them what was your work? What kinds of things were you doing in the community?

JR: I was doing voter registration, taking people down ... Whenever they had registration day we would take people down and try to get them registered to vote and that sort of thing. What really changed things was when the federal people came in and started doing investigations. That's when things started to change. The voter registration rolls really opened up. Lowndes Co. was about 80% black. When we went there I can't recall that we had even one black registered voter.

PM: That was a pretty extreme case.

JR: They had quite a few of those places. That happened quite a bit.

PM: You probably were aware that you had some very difficult opposition there.

JM: You know that Viola Liuzzo was killed in Lowndes Co.

PM: I stood by her marker on Highway 80.

JR: Viola Luzzo, Daniels, and then when they had the Selma to Montgomery march there was a minister who was walking in Selma and he got killed and he was walking the street.

PM: Rev. [James] Reeb.

JR: That's correct. Six monthws later a friend of mine, Sammy Younge, I don't know if you're familiar with him.

PM: The first black student to die in the Movement.

JR: He was a Tuskegee student. He was a great friend; in fact, I had just seen him right before he got killed. We were at the Freedom House in Tuskegee; we received a call that something had happened to Sammy. Me and two other people went down to the bus station in Tuskegee. We found the body when we got there. He had been killed right by the gas station, but somebody dragged him and hld him between the bus station and the gas station. That's how we found his body.

PM: That must have been hard.

JR: That was really hard. That was only six months after Daniels had been killed. You can see how much action we had down there.

PM: In the time you were in Lowndes Co., before you met Daniels and Morrisroe, had you had any run-ins with the white folks there in Lowndes Co.?

JR: A few. (laughs) (Describes run-in with police in Montgomery bus station.)

PM: Let me ask you about some of the other people who were working there in Lowndes Co. What can you tell me about Ruby [Sales]?

JR: Ruby worked there for at least about six months. She came about the same time I did. She did everything that the rest of us did. She was active in the meeting that we had, going out talking to people about registering to vote, that sort of thing.

PM: I understand she [Ruby Sales] was a good bit younger.

JM: Yes she was. That's true. I was about 25 or 26. Before I was in New York I was in the Air Force. I was discharged from the Air Force in 1959 I think it was. Then I went to Alabama in '62. I got involved with SNCC in '65.

PM: One of the names I saw from Lowndes Co. was Willie Vaughn.

JR: Willie Vaughn was from MS. I worked very closely with him. He worked very well. I never did see him again after that day. He just disappeared.

PM: You mentioned Gloria Larry.

JM: Gloria was in jail with us. She was still active in the movement. I moved from Lowndes Co. back to Tuskegee after a while. I worked maybe another close to six months, then I went back to Tuskegee because I wanted to finish my degree. I did some student teaching and then I came out here [CA].

Went to
ALABAMA
IN '61

PM: One of the other people in jail was a young lady by the name of Joyce Bailey.

JM: Joyce Bailey, I didn't know her too well. While we were in jail I didn't have too much contact with her because they had the men and the women separated. I can tell you there were only four people who went to the place where the shooting occurred—Daniels, Morrisroe, Joyce Bailey, and Ruby Sales.

Turn the tape.

Tape 1 Side B

PM: When they went to the store, where were you? When the four of them went to the store, where were you at that time?

JR: I was about a half a block away, standing out in the middle of the street, where I could see the door [of the Cash Store]. I saw Daniels when he opened the door and I could hear Tom Coleman yelling and screaming like a lunatic. And all of a sudden he came charging out to the door with a shotgun and shot Daniels. I could see the impact of the shotgun lifted him off his feet and he went flying back. Then everybody else began to run and he fired again and hit Morrisroe.

PM: Hit him in the back.

JR: In the back. He hit Morrisroe. Joyce Bailey and Ruby Sales, they ran away. And Coleman ran to his car. Before he got to the car, he pointed the shotgun towards where our group was and we all ducked for cover. He got in the car and turned around and we don't know whether he went home or went to the courthouse, but I figure he did one of the two things.

PM: According to what I've read, he went to the courthouse.

JR: I figured that he either went home or to the courthouse.

PM: Now Daniels and Morrisroe were laying on the ground.

JR: Right. The other thing that happened, Daniels and Morrisroe were laying on the ground, I walked up there. Daniels was dead and Morrisroe was in shock. He was in pain and everything. When I turned around, there was about 15-20 guys standing there, and they told me I better get out of there or I was going to wind up lying down next to them.

PM: You're talking about white men?

JR: Rights. Of course, after that I had to leave. I walked up the street to where I had left the group. They had disappeared. It just so happened that Bob Mants, who was one of our Lowndes County SNCC workers, was coming down in a car. And he picked me up and I left. I guess some other people picked up all the other people. I never did find out how they got back. the way I got out of there was Bob Mants was coming through and he picked me up.

Coleman did exactly what he wanted to do 'cuz he could have killed me too, but he didn't. It was only the two white men that got shot, Daniels and Morrisroe.

PM: Now had you see or known about Coleman before that time?

JR: No, I did not.

PM: I guess he lived around the courthouse [in Hayneville] and were you more in Ft. Deposit?

JR: I was more near Ft. Deposit, but I also worked at a place called Trickham over by going to Selma.

PM: Let me back up a little bit. Tell me about the time you spent in the county jail.

JR: Just about everybody you have on this list was in there. But it was more than just these people.

PM: The count that I got was there were four women that were held and about sixteen men.

JR: Something like that. But then there was some people that got arrested, young people, and their parents came and got them out.

PM: So there were more that were arrested, but only twenty of you in the jail

JR: Something like that, yeah. Stokely Carmichael and Chris Wylie were in jail with us too.

PM: But they got balled out.

JR: Right.

PM: What were the conditions like in the jail? How many people in a cell?

JR: Oh, it was deplorable. There was only two cells that I can remember, that I saw. I figured that however many there were in there, it was evenly divided.

PM: You were in there for six or seven days. What did you do while you were in there?

JR: We sang freedom songs and that almost drove them crazy. (laughs) We entertained them, but they were glad to see us go.

PM: You sang as loud as you could?

JR: That's right.

PM: You probably did other things besides that. I don't imagine you were singing freedom songs 24 hours a day.

JR: Most days [we were].

PM: It was the middle of August, it must have been awfully hot.

JR: I didn't remember it being uncomfortably hot.

PM: Do you remember about the food you had?

JR: The food was terrible. I wasn't too anxious to eat the food anyway so I tried to eat as less as I could because I was worried about maybe getting poisoned. I don't think they would have been above doing something like that either.

PM: It was a demonstration in Ft. Deposit that got you in jail in the first place, right?

JR: Right.

PM: What can you tell me about that? What do you remember?

JR: What I can tell you about that is before we marched down to the place that we was going to picket, the FBI came by and told us that we shouldn't go down there. That's what they told me anyway, because I was supposed to be the leader. They told me we shouldn't go down there because they couldn't protect us and there were people down there waiting for us with rifles and shotguns, and pistols, and anything else they could get their hands on. So I approached the group and I told them what was happening. They told me that they didn't care who was down there, they were going to demonstrate. So that's what I told the FBI and we marched down there. When we got there, the [deputy] sheriff called Lucky Jackson came up and stuck the longest shotgun I ever saw in my life in my face and told me I was under arrest. I asked him what for? And he said for parading without a permit and disturbing the peace. Stokely Carmichael was there. He wasn't involved in the demonstration, but they had been chasing him and Chris Wylie. Stokely said, "Me too?" They said, "No. We haven't decided what to charge you with."

What they did was they got a garbage truck and they put all of us on the garbage truck. They took us to the local jail in Ft. Deposit and they transferred us to the county jail which was in Hayneville. Hayneville was the county seat.

PM: Why had the young people you were with chose those particular places to demonstrate?

JR: The place that they demonstrated was an eating place, sort of like a restaurant, and they didn't serve black people. It didn't bother me that they didn't serve black people, 'cuz I figured I could spend my money in better placed. They'd been so used to having to go around to the back door and you paid your money through the back window, and all that foolishness. Those youngsters were really affected by that. So they decided they wanted to do it [demonstrate] and I went with them.

PM: What did the older people in the community think about that?

JR: Some of the really weren't very happy about it because that was a big voter registration days and they figured it would scare off people from going down to register to vote which is understandable.

PM: But the young people were determined to go ahead.

JR: Right. And I didn't feel I could let them go and me not go, so I went.

PM: What about Daniels and Morrisroe? Why did they go?

JR: They were there. That's how we all got arrested.

PM: But they had only been there for a short time.

JR: They had only been with us [for a short time], but they had been in Selma for a while. I don't know how long that was.

PM: Daniels had been there for some time. Morrisroe has just come down from Chicago a little while before that. What was your impression of these two preachers?

JR: I thought they was very good people. I really appreciated what they did coming in to support us, but I'm just sorry they got hurt and killed.

PM: Do you think Coleman picked them out because he was more angry to see white people [in the demonstration]?

JR: I know for a fact that if anything happened to anybody it was going to be them. I wasn't surprised when they didn't kill any black people or shoot any black people. One time they chased Daniels all over the county.

PM: I didn't know that.

JR: They had chased Daniels all the way through Lowndes Co. and half of Montgomery. Somebody gave him a new car, a faster car. Everybody was into fast cars in those days.

PM: He was able to get away with that fast car?

JR: That time he was.

PM: I understand when you were let out of jail it was unexpected. Nobody really was counting on being let out of jail at that time.

JR: We didn't know. Just all of a sudden they let us go.

PM: Were you in Lowndes Co. or around there when Coleman was on trial?

JR: Yes, I was.

PM: Were you there? Did you see what happened?

JR: You mean in the courtroom? I didn't. But I'll tell you about that. When we got to the courtroom I went in the courtroom and the sheriff or somebody in the courtroom said, when they got ready to start the trial, And the people for the defense can stay inside the building, witnesses and whatnot.

PM: The witness for the prosecutions would be black and the witnesses for the defense would be white.

JR: Right. There was black people in the courtroom, but if they were witnesses they weren't allowed to stay in the courtroom.

PM: You were a witness. Were you called to testify?

JR: No.

PM: Why not?

JR: I want to tell you about that. Because people would come out and talk to me, telling me the things that were going on. At lunch time I decided I was going to talk to the prosecuting attorney and ask him when was he going to call me? He looked at me and laughed and said, "Never." I saw more of what happened than anybody that was there. The problem was that when they released us from jail, once we got outside the jail I made up my mind that I wasn't going to go too far from the jail until somebody came to get us. They kept insisting that I leave the area; that I couldn't stand outside the jail. And I asked them, I said, "This is country property, you can't tell me to do that. They said, "If you don't leave you're going to get rearrested." I said, "Oh, I don't want to do that."

PM: You just got out. You didn't want to go back in.

JR: But I made sure that I wasn't going to go around to that store, and I didn't. Most people didn't. I tried to stay as close to the jail as I could because I didn't want to get myself in a situation where they could say, "Oh, we didn't know nothing about that." I figured it was better if we stayed out of the way. Something told me not to go to that store that day. I'd been in there a lot of times. Those people were very nice, the people that ran it. I'd been in there a lot of times and never had any problems. But I knew this day not to do it. I told people and most people listened. Those that didn't paid the price.

Tape 2 Side A

PM: You said that the prosecutor never called you to testify.

JR: Never called me.

PM: Why was that? Did he explain it? Do you have any idea?

JR: I have a very good idea. He didn't care anything about Daniels. The people on the jury were Coleman's friends and neighbors. There might have been one black person on the jury at that particular time, but that didn't mean anything. They wanted to hurry up and get trial over because that way you'd be locked in [with a not guilty verdict]. He'd be acquitted and there wouldn't be nothing anybody could do after that.

PM: The men who killed Viola Liuzzo were not acquitted; it was a hung jury as I recall on that case.

JR: They had an FBI informant in the car with them.

PM: I know, and FBI witness to the murder and they still wouldn't convict.

JR: They did convict them.

PM: They did? My understanding is they went free. I'll have to go back and check.

JK: (Looks for information in his book.) I'm going to call you back and give you the information. Is there anything else?

PM: How long did you stay in Lowndes Co after the shooting?

JR: I left in something like September or October of '65.

PM: A couple of months after the shooting happened?

JR: That's right. I worked in Lowndes Co. when Sammy [Younge] got killed.

PM: Did you ever go back to Lowndes Co. after you moved to CA?

JR: Oh yeah. I've been back there two or three times after moving out here?

PM: Did you notice any changes?

JR: A lot of changes. When I was living there I never saw a black highway patrolman. Three or four years later I went back and I'd never seen so many black highway patrolmen. I couldn't believe it. In fact in the Selma area, Lowndes Co. and around there, it seemed like all of the highway patrolmen were black.

PM: Anything else besides that?

JR: You had black people eating with white people, just all kinds of changes had taken place. [Before] Things weren't integrated, but now, throughout the South, that seems to be way things are.

PM: What else do I need to know about the shooting of Daniels and Morrisroe there in Lowndes Co.?

JR: I'll call you back.

End of interview

Telephone Interview with Jimmy Rogers

Paul Murray February 4, 2013

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PM: When they tried the men who shot Viola Liuzzo



just a note

①

I never approached
Morrisee to give
him water. Also, I
never approached Morrisee
until after Coleman
had left the scene.
As I approached
Morrisee he was
in shock and screaming
in pain. The was about
over

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(2)

ten or ~~four~~ fifteen
men, hidden around
the store. We are
MORRISSE. They said
that I better leave
or I would be
lying down with
DANIELS and MORRISSE.
Neither MORRISSE OR
DANIELS had any
weapons.

(3)

ten or ~~five~~ fifteen
men hidden around
the store. ^{NEAR} THEY SAID
MORNISBOE. THAT I BETTER LEAVE
OR I WOULD BE
LYING DOWN AND MORNISBOE.
DANIELS AND MORNISBOE.
NEITHER MORNISBOE OR
DANIELS HAD ANY
WEAPONS.

just a note



1



I never approached
Morrisee. And, Morrisee
with water. He reached for an
until after the scene.
had left the scene.
As I approached he was
Morrisee and screaming
in shock. The kids about
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