Abstract

Association of African American Museums (AAAM)

Selma-to-Montgomery National Historic Trail (SEMO), NPS

SEMO VRA 60th Scholars Roundtable

"Forgotten Heroes of the Voting Rights Movement"

by

Prof. Gloria J. Browne-Marshall, JD/MA

In over the half century since the height of the Civil Rights Movement there are some aspects of history forgotten or left unexplained about the roles those ordinary women, men and children played from that time. The history of the Civil Rights Movement included many martyrs, leaders, and thousands of foot soldiers across the nation whose actions were important steps toward political and social change. Alabama was the epicenter in the fight for voting rights. The battle leading up to the Edmund Pettus Bridge, attack of peaceful protesters on the bridge, and the march from Selma to Montgomery captured global media attention. However, the African American citizens in Lowndes County lived in the shadow of Selma, their neighboring county. The battles in "Bloody Lowndes County," as it was known in that time, also had its vicious deaths and victories but with little attribution and fewer headlines. In Lowndes County there were places known as Tent Cities which were comprised of workers in company town jobs who were fired then evicted from company owned housing for attempting to exercise their constitutional right to vote. In addition, the Black Panther Party Movement is said to have begun in Lowndes County. Relatively few know that it was in Lowndes County during this period that the first Black woman ran for political office in Alabama. These challenges to ensconced White political power are rarely discussed in the realm of African American disenfranchisement, activism, and political participation in the voting rights struggle. An examination of these three areas will comprise this paper's focus on forgotten heroes of the Voting Rights Movement. Research will be supported by my previous scholarship in *The Voting Rights War: The NAACP and the Ongoing Struggle for Justice*, as well as primary and secondary sources.