



This discussion guide offers a structured approach to exploring themes from “Equity Speakers Series: Returning to the Roots of the Civil Rights Movement,” featuring Mrs. Lynda Blackmon Lowery. It examines the legacy of the Voting Rights Movement and its relevance to today’s voter suppression efforts. The guide also provides context for how human services professionals can support the communities we serve in registering to vote and staying informed about voting rights. It encourages reflection on the role of civic engagement in advancing equity.

## Lynda Blackmon Lowery Bio

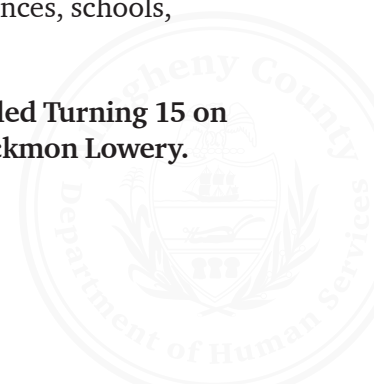
Lynda Blackmon Lowery is the first child of four children born to Alfred Charles and Ludie Wright Blackmon, she is the Widow of Collie C Lowery. She is a mother of two, Danita Christine Blackmon and Bonita Blackmon, a proud grandparent of Grady and Jenese Williams and Cherry Chenell Blackmon and a proud great-grandparent of Bryson Stephan Blackmon. Mrs. Blackmon-Lowery is a lifelong worshipper of the African Methodist Episcopal church, and is a member of the Ward Chapel A.M.E. Church, Selma, Alabama, where she serves as Steward. Mrs. Blackmon-Lowery currently resides in Selma, AL and is a beloved member of the community.



Mrs. Lowery is a graduate of the College of Staten Island. She was previously employed as a Senior Case Manager at Cahaba Mental Health in Selma AL. Her affiliations include, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and Optimist Club of Selma, Order of Eastern Star, President of the Board of Selma Aids Information & Referral (AIR), Alabama Democratic Conference. She is the author of Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom “My story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March” – Lowery’s collaborative project with Elspeth Leacock & Susan Buckley. She has received many awards and honorees. Recently, she was honored as an iconic and historic woman at an intimate celebration at the Mansion of Mayor Michael E. Duggan on March 19, 2024, where she received a key to the City of Detroit. She received the Theatre Arts & Humanitarian Award at the 2024 International Black Theatre Festival (IBTF) on July 29, 2024; as her book is made available as a musical play. She is selected as one of the 25 honorees of the This is Alabama 2025 Women Who Shape the State and will be honored at the Awards Luncheon on Thursday March 6th, 2025, at The Club in Birmingham, Alabama. She will receive an honorary Doctorate Degree from Carolina Christian College on May 3, 2025.

Lowery has been a witness and participant in some of our nation’s most consequential civil rights battles. She began her civil rights activism in the early 60s. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activists organized Lowery and other area children and teenagers to participate in the civil rights movement. In the front lines of the struggle, the young Lowery marched on “Bloody Sunday” and “Turn Around Tuesday,” and is the youngest marcher to walk every step of the successful March from Selma to Montgomery. Lowery was beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965, that day is now by a more descriptive name, Bloody Sunday. She received a total of 35 stitches for her injuries. Mrs. Lowery’s early involvement in the struggle against “Jim Crow”, American apartheid, has been the foundation for her civil and human rights work throughout her life. Blackmon-Lowery is a much sought after speaker with a compelling personal story of civil rights activism. Mrs. Lowery has presented at conferences, schools, colleges, and workshops across the country.

**Special Note:** As mentioned she is also an author, consider purchasing her book entitled *Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March* By Lynda Blackmon Lowery.



# Key Terms & Concepts + Notables Quotes

## Terms & Concepts

---

### **African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church**

A historically Black Christian denomination founded in 1816. It has played a significant role in social justice and civil rights, particularly in Black communities. Lynda Blackmon Lowery is a lifelong member and Steward at Ward Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma, Alabama.

### **American Apartheid**

A term used to describe the systemic racial segregation and oppression of Black people in the United States, particularly under Jim Crow laws. It draws a parallel to South African apartheid to underscore the severity of racial injustice in the U.S.

### **Bloody Sunday**

The violent confrontation on March 7, 1965, when civil rights demonstrators were attacked by law enforcement while crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Lynda Blackmon Lowery, then 14, was among the marchers and suffered severe injuries.

### **Civic Engagement**

Participation in the political and community life of one's society. This includes voting, advocacy, and volunteerism—central themes in Lowery's activism and relevant for those in human services supporting democratic participation.

### **Civil Rights Act of 1964**

Federal legislation that banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It laid the foundation for the Voting Rights Act and marked a major legislative victory for the civil rights movement.

### **Edmund Pettus Bridge**

A historic bridge in Selma, Alabama, and the site of Bloody Sunday. It has become an enduring symbol of the fight for voting rights and racial justice in the U.S.

### **Jim Crow**

A system of laws and customs that enforced racial segregation and disenfranchisement in the U.S., particularly in the South, from the late 19th century through the mid-20th century.

### **Selma to Montgomery March**

A series of three protest marches in 1965, led by civil rights activists to demand voting rights for Black Americans. The final, successful march led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Lowery was the youngest participant to complete it.

### **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**

A key civil rights organization founded in 1960 that engaged young people in grassroots activism, nonviolent protest, and voter registration efforts. SNCC organized youth, including Lowery, to participate in the Selma movement.

### **Storytelling**

A powerful method for sharing lived experiences and building empathy, particularly in movements for justice. Lynda Blackmon Lowery's personal narrative serves as a vital teaching tool for understanding the emotional and historical depth of the civil rights movement.

## **Trauma-Informed Care**

An approach in human services that recognizes the prevalence and impact of trauma, and seeks to provide support that emphasizes safety, empowerment, and healing. Understanding civil rights history through this lens allows practitioners to better serve individuals and communities affected by systemic injustice.

## **Trauma-Informed Responses**

Actions and strategies grounded in an awareness of how trauma affects individuals and communities. These responses prioritize emotional safety, respect, and dignity, and are especially relevant when engaging with historical narratives that involve violence, oppression, or loss.

## **Turnaround Tuesday**

The second Selma march on March 9, 1965, when demonstrators turned around after a prayer on the Edmund Pettus Bridge to avoid violence. It was a strategic and symbolic act of protest.

## **Voter Registration**

The process by which eligible citizens enroll to vote in elections. Encouraging and supporting voter registration—particularly among marginalized communities—is a vital component of civic engagement and equity-focused human services.

## **Voting Rights Act of 1965**

Landmark legislation passed in response to the Selma marches and other civil rights activism. It outlawed discriminatory practices like literacy tests and poll taxes, significantly expanding voting access for Black Americans.

## **Voting Rights Movement**

A central focus of the broader civil rights movement that aimed to dismantle barriers to voting for Black Americans, including legal restrictions, intimidation, and violence. Lowery's activism was rooted in this struggle.

## **Notable Quotes**

“My formative years were rooted in strength, rooted in love...”

“I just knew it was up to the young people to get this done... If change was going to be made, we would have to make it.”

“I didn’t know it then, but he was empowering me to stand up and move forward...”  
(*Reflecting on hearing Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak*)

“Up until November 2, 2020, I always thought I had passed out... But on that day, I was being interviewed by PBS News, and they showed me archival footage from that moment... I didn’t pass out—I was being beaten... For 55 years, I didn’t know what had really happened to me... I was 14 years old at the time—I wasn’t a threat to anyone... I still carry those physical and mental scars.”

“I don’t think it was courage, per se... I think it was more determination to complete something I had started.”

# Conversation Outline

---

## Facilitator: **Welcome**

Good [morning/afternoon/evening], everyone! Thank you for joining today's dialogue. It's my pleasure to guide us in a discussion about **"Returning to the Roots of the Civil Rights Movement"**, By Lynda Blackmon Lowery.

Facilitator: ""To enhance your learning and engagement with today's topic, we've provided digital and printable activities and tools. These resources are designed to deepen your understanding, increase your comfort level, and help you apply the concepts discussed during the session. **The activities and tools are intended to be used while viewing the Speaker Series**, encouraging attentiveness and focus on the content. **Please feel free to choose the tools that best support your learning experience.**"

## Activities + Tools

---

- **Activity/Tool 1: Bingo Card**

A bingo squares have key terms, phrases, quotes, and concepts listed in squares, folks can 'play' while they watch the Speakers Series to heighten engagement.

- **Activity/Tool 2: Feelings Card**

A card divided into three sections (beginning, middle, end) with feeling words listed in each. Participants circle or highlight the feelings they experience at each stage of the video to practice introspection and assess comfort levels throughout the engagement. This can be completed while viewing the Speakers Series.

- **Activity/Tool 3: Crossword Puzzle**

*The crossword puzzle consists of key terms and concepts to increase learning and understanding of the topic.* This can be worked on during the Speakers Series to heighten understanding of concepts and ideas.



# Warm-Up Questions

---

## Warm up Questions

“To start us off, we’ll dive into a few warm-up questions introducing today’s themes: returning to the roots of the Civil Rights Movement, civic engagement, and how human services professionals can support voting rights and equity. These questions serve as a useful tool to break the ice, encourage engagement, and set the stage for deeper discussions throughout the speaker series. **These are optional and can be used if time permits.**”

*Facilitator:*

- **Question 1:** Mrs. Lowery’s lifelong commitment to activism began when she was a teenager. Can you think of a time when a young person inspired you to think differently about justice or community change?
- **Question 2:** Mrs. Lowery has built strong ties to her church, sorority, and community organizations throughout her life. How have the communities you’re part of helped shape your own sense of civic responsibility?
- **Question 3:** Today, we’re exploring how civic engagement and voting rights connect to equity. In your experience, what’s one small but powerful way human services professionals can encourage community members to use their voices?

# Discussion Questions

---

*Facilitator:* “Let’s move into some discussion questions to deepen our understanding and begin a conversation. These are intended to help us process the content and resources we’ve learned about in the today’s speakers series viewing.”

- **Question 1: Storytelling as Advocacy and Healing**

Mrs. Lowery shares her personal story of marching for voting rights as a way to inspire, heal, and advocate for change.

How can encouraging clients—when they feel ready—to share their own stories help them find their voice, heal from past experiences, and become powerful advocates for themselves and their communities? Clients can include not only individuals receiving direct services, but also providers, staff, and others supported through your role—especially for those working in support offices. Consider the diverse groups you serve within your role at DHS.

We all carry lived experience, and storytelling—when done with care—can support healing, build trust, and spark collective action. As human services professionals, we can honor the dignity of each story by making space that is safe, non-extractive, and rooted in respect.

**What role can DHS staff play in creating safe, supportive spaces for storytelling?**

How can we help ensure stories are shared with consent, care, and purpose—and that people feel seen and heard when they speak?

**How can DHS staff reflect on and share their own lived experiences?**

How might practicing self-reflection and sharing personal narratives (when appropriate) help us connect more authentically in our equity and engagement work?

- **Question 2: Case Study –Address Change and Local Elections**

Imagine you're working with a client who recently moved and is unsure if they're registered at their new address. They mention they usually only vote in presidential elections because they don't think local elections really affect them.

**How would you thoughtfully approach this conversation to:**

Help folks understand why updating their voter registration matters;

Explain why participating in all elections is important for their community; and

Make sure they feel informed and empowered rather than pressured?

**Question 3: Case Study 2– Youth Engagement**

You are facilitating a group of young adults (ages 18–24) who are currently receiving services through DHS. While some participants express excitement about voting for the first time, others voice hesitation with comments such as, “My vote doesn’t matter,” or “I don’t know anything about this stuff.”

*Note: The goal of this engagement is not to influence how anyone votes, but rather to provide tools and information that empower informed, confident decision-making.*

How would you approach voter registration and education with this group in a way that feels empowering, relatable, and not overwhelming?

What messages or tools might connect with them?

How could you make voting feel relevant to issues they care about?

## Closing + Concluding Thoughts

---

### Concluding Thoughts

*Facilitator:* “Thank you all for your participation in today’s dialogue. It’s been a pleasure exploring the topic of **“Returning to the Roots of the Civil Rights Movement,”** together. As we wrap up, I invite any final thoughts or comments you’d like to share.”

**(Allow 5-10 minutes of closing thoughts or remarks)**

### Closing

“As we wrap up our discussion on **“Returning to the Roots of the Civil Rights Movement,”** I encourage you to stay curious, keep learning, and continue growing in your efforts to advance racial equity and civic engagement. Your dedication to this work is vital in helping the communities we serve access their right to vote, find their voices, and build collective power. Let’s keep the conversation going—and carry these lessons forward in everything we do to support and uplift our clients and communities.”

### References

Adapted from the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), Cornerstone for Resilient Communities and a Revitalized Economy and Primer on Productive Narratives.