



Melvin Todd

Melvin is a graduate of Tuskegee University (formerly Tuskegee Institute). He did advanced studies at the University of Vermont and the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Mr. Todd worked for over 35 years as both an engineer and scientist for the IBM Corporation, Monsanto Corporation, and the Johnson & Johnson family of companies. During his active work years, he commercialized many consumer and industrial products. He was awarded a U.S. Patent for inventing a sound-attenuating material for the automotive industry. His liquid filtration media helped the aluminum can industry improve its manufacturing efficiency. He was also responsible for getting many African Americans hired into professional positions in major corporations. He is currently retired but actively engaging in advocacy work for those suffering from mental illness. Mr. Todd is a primary source of information for students studying the true history of America. He is a steward of the St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church of Cliffwood, NJ, a member of the NAACP, and the Concerned Citizens of Greater Aberdeen NJ. He lives in Matawan, New Jersey.

Mr. Todd was born and raised in the industrial city of Birmingham, Alabama, during the height of the Civil Rights Movement (the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s). During these formative years for him, Birmingham was known to be a very rough city. It relished the distinction of being called the most thoroughly segregated city in America. Melvin's participation in the Birmingham Children's Crusade of 1963, left an indelible impression on him. It was a primer for him getting involved in the civil rights movement. It was the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church caused him to dedicate himself to actively advocate for both, civil and human rights.

In 1965, when he started his undergraduate education at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he along with hundreds of other Tuskegee students joined the Selma to Montgomery March. Two months after the march ended, Tuskegee Institute sent him and scores of other Tuskegee students to live with poor sharecropper families in the rural Alabama Black Belt counties. The purpose was to uplift the poor quality of education provided to the children of these sharecropper families. Mr. Todd chose to work in "Bloody Lowndes County." Lowndes County, Alabama had a reputation for Ku Klux Klan violence. This county was known for being one of the most brutal places for Black people to live. While there, he tutored the community's children in math and science. Most of the students that he tutored eventually rose from the depths of poverty into the American middle class.

Local news in Alabama was very biased. Stories that covered the positive aspects of Black people or events that were important to these people, were little or nonexistent. Mr. Todd started learning photojournalism while working for the Tuskegee Institute student newspaper: The Campus Digest. One of his first news reports was on the 1968 massacre of Black students at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, SC. He went on to do photo-journalism assignments for The Southern Courier Newspaper, headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama. His work spotlighted the typical lives of Southern Black people during the 1960s.

It was during his experience in Lowndes County that he learned that the only real power that poor people have is their right to vote. This prompted him to help the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (their political party symbol was the Black Panther), get out the vote. This was the first time that they had ever attempted to control their destiny. They sought county-wide elected political office. As a result, he met and worked with many of the historic civil rights leaders. These leaders were responsible for changing the course of American history. He was an eyewitness, and in some cases, a participant, in many important events that should have, but never really made it into the history books.

Mr. Todd believes that an accurate and unbiased teaching of American history is the first step in mitigating the effects of 400 years of racism and prejudice. Because he has been an eyewitness to so much of the twentieth century's civil rights movement, he is considered a primary source of historical information for students studying the civil rights movement. He has given interviews to National Public Radio, the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum, and spoken to college, high school, and middle school students across the country. He has also given talks to church groups. Melvin has appeared on the American Heroes Channel program: "What History Forgot – The Birmingham Children's Crusade." He has also been featured in the books: "Sammy Younge, Jr. – The First Black College Student to Die in the Black Liberation Movement", by James Forman and the "The Tuskegee Student Uprising" by Brian Jones. He has also been a speaker for a Brooklyn based coalition of groups, that trains children to become future leaders for civil and human rights.

You can learn more about some of Mr. Todd by going to the following website: www.kidsinbirmingham1963.org/category/melvin-todd/