

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

CATHERINE COLEMAN FLOWERS

rural development manager, senior fellow

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Background Information

Born December 21, 1946

Catherine Flowers was born and raised in Lowndes County, Alabama, a rural area integral to her current work of environmental justice activism.ⁱ Her parents participated in the Civil Rights Movement and acted against reproductive injustices.ⁱⁱ Inspired by her parents, Flowers wrote an exposé about the de facto segregation in her high schoolⁱⁱⁱ. She went on to graduate with a bachelor's degree in 1986 from Cameron University, and a master's degree in 2015 from the University of Nebraska,^{iv} Flowers' work broadens the view of environmental justice issues like unequal access to sewage and sanitation, specifically in the rural

South.

Flowers' Resistance

Flowers returned to Lowndes County as the county's economic development consultant.^v There she witnessed low-income residents unequally impacted by wastewater and sewage issues due to the county's poor sanitation infrastructure.^{vi} Underserved residents could not afford to install and maintain septic systems. However, the local government routinely issued citations and unjustly arrested residents instead of fixing the infrastructure.^{vii} The climate change crisis made sanitation issues worse. Environmental racism and pollution disproportionately impact marginalized communities, even in different geographical contexts.^{viii} Flowers created the Alabama Center of Rural Enterprise (ACRE) to increase residents' access to clean environments. This organization also works to reduce the interlinks of health, economic, and environmental disparities.^{ix} Flowers focused on highlighting the historical patterns of federal disinvestment in Black and tribal neighborhoods that resulted in the appearance of deadly ecological health issues.^x

Achievements

Flowers received the Genius Grant MacArthur Fellowship, published a memoir in 2020, and is a senior fellow at the Center for Earth Ethics.^{xi} Most importantly, her creation of the ACRE network addresses the importance of community-led responses and how change does not occur with one individual but through group collaboration.

Essential Questions

1. Flowers' actions began after observing injustices in her community.
 - a. What kind of social and political factors do you think influence people to take charge and advocate for change?

2. When Catherine Flowers settled back into her hometown and learned about the terrible conditions that local government imposed on low-income residents, she created the Alabama Center of Rural Enterprise (ACRE).
 - a. How did Catherine resist inequality by creating this organization?

3. ***"I think that it will help people to understand that you can get involved, no matter where you are, and there are different ways in which you can get involved."***
 - a. What does Flowers mean in this quote?
 - b. How can you get more involved in creating change in your community?

ⁱ "Born Country but Raised an Activist: Catherine Coleman Flowers of the Biden Climate Task Force Uncovers 'America's Dirty Secret' in 'Bloody Lowndes,' Alabama | Global Climate Pledge," July 27, 2020. <https://www.globalclimatepledge.com/born-country-but-raised-an-activist-catherine-coleman-flowers-of-the-biden-climate-task-force-uncovers-americas-dirty-secret-in-bloody-lowndes-alabama/>.

ⁱⁱ "Born Country but Raised an Activist: Catherine Coleman Flowers of the Biden Climate Task Force Uncovers 'America's Dirty Secret' in 'Bloody Lowndes.'"

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^{iv} Biography: Catherine Coleman Flowers. "Biography: Catherine Coleman Flowers." <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/catherine-coleman-flowers>.

^v Cohen, Ilana. "Q&A: An Environmental Justice Champion's Journey From Rural Alabama to Biden's Climate Task Force." Inside Climate News (blog), July 10, 2020. <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/10072020/catherine-coleman-flowers-environmental-justice-q-and-a/>.

^{vi} "Q&A: An Environmental Justice Champion's Journey From Rural Alabama to Biden's Climate Task Force."

^{vii} "Q&A: An Environmental Justice Champion's Journey From Rural Alabama to Biden's Climate Task Force."

^{viii} CREEJ. "Founder." <https://www.creej.org/founder>.

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^x "Born Country but Raised an Activist: Catherine Coleman Flowers of the Biden Climate Task Force Uncovers 'America's Dirty Secret' in 'Bloody Lowndes,' Alabama | Global Climate Pledge," July 27, 2020. <https://www.globalclimatepledge.com/born-country-but-raised-an-activist-catherine-coleman-flowers-of-the-biden-climate-task-force-uncovers-americas-dirty-secret-in-bloody-lowndes-alabama/>.

^{xi} CREEJ. "Founder." <https://www.creej.org/founder>.