

Cause of slain civil rights activist still resonates, 50 years later

by [Gretel Kauffman](#)

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([The Christian Science Monitor](#)) Fifty years have passed since the murder of civil rights activist Jonathan Daniels by an angry segregationist in Lowndes County, Alabama, but those who knew Daniels say his case still resonates today.

[Daniels](#) was a white Episcopal seminary student from New Hampshire who had traveled to Lowndes County to register blacks to vote during the civil rights movement. He was fatally shot in the chest in 1965 by Tom Coleman, a white highway engineer in favor of segregation.

Coleman was acquitted by a jury of 12 white men after a three-day trial, eliciting outraged reactions from elected officials across the state and country.

Renowned activist Ruby Sales met Daniels when she was a 17-year-old secretary with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Lowndes County. Today, she is the founder and director of [The SpiritHouse Project](#), an Atlanta-based nonprofit dealing with discrimination.

"Race relations today in the United States are an extension of that time period," Sales said, citing the recent deaths of black men killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri; Baltimore; New York; and Cincinnati; as well as the nine black churchgoers murdered in Charleston, South Carolina, in June.

"Tom Coleman was able to kill Jonathan Daniels under the cover of the law," she continued. "Despite the fact that it has been 50 years, we are still operating in a culture where police and vigilantes can murder African Americans."

Last Thursday marked the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, the details and nuances of which have been questioned in Supreme Court Cases frequently since its passing in 1965. Last week, a federal appeals court ruled that a strict voter identification law in Texas violated the Voting Rights Act, a victory for civil rights groups who had challenged it.

Richard Morrisroe, a former priest who participated in protests with Daniels and was injured by a bullet from Coleman the day Daniels was killed, says it's important for people from all backgrounds to come together for progress to occur.

"People have to break out of their ethnic shells," Morrisroe said. "I think too much activity is across picket lines where there is no communication, but rather an attitude of fear and shouting, attitudes that often generate hate rather than any sort of breakthrough."

*This report includes materials from the Associated Press.*