JULIAN BOND

Born into a legacy of education on January 14, 1940 in Nashville, Tennessee, Horace Julian Bond was destined to follow in great familial footsteps. His father, Horace Mann Bond, was not only an early activist against segregation, but also served as president of Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania and later as president of Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia.

Bond continued his family's tradition of educational excellence by attending Morehouse College in Atlanta. While a student, he helped create a literary magazine called The Pegasus and became involved in civil rights causes, most prominently starting the group Committee on Appeal for Human Rights. Bond was also one of the chief students who formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), for which he was the communications director.

The SNCC prompted Bond to run for office, believing it was crucial for the community to see blacks in political and governmental positions. Bond was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives. He was barred from taking his seat, largely because of his vehement statements opposing the Vietnam War. However, the Supreme Court ruled that he be allowed to take office and he served four terms as a representative. His life took an unexpected turn during the 1968 presidential election when the Democrats nominated him as a vice-presidential candidate, making him the first African American to receive such an honor. His political career continued when he was elected to the Georgia state Senate in 1976.

Throughout his political reign, Bond remained committed to Civil Rights causes as well as higher education. He taught at many prestigious universities, including Drexel, the University of Virginia and Harvard. He is a much-published author, with works that include Black Candidates: Southern Campaign Experiences, A Time To Speak, A Time To Act: The Movement in Politics, and Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table: A Documentary History of the Civil Rights Movement (with Andrew Lewis).

Bond has served as chairman of the NAACP since 1998 and is still an active supporter of human rights. Bond is also Chairman of the Premier Auto Group (PAG) (Volvo, Land Rover, Aston-Martin, Jaguar) Diversity Council and serves on the Boards of People for the American Way. He is President Emeritus of the Southern Poverty Law Center and is a Distinguished Scholar in Residence at American University in Washington, D.C. He was awarded the National Freedom Award in 2002.

Source: *Julian Bond.* NAACP Bold Dreams Big Victories. The People. NAACP. 14 March 2011<http://www.naacphistory.org/#/bio_detail/105>.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Martin Luther King, Jr., (January 15, 1929-April 4, 1968) was born Michael Luther King, Jr., but later had his name changed to Martin. His grandfather began the family's long tenure as pastors of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, serving from 1914 to 1931; his father has served from then until the present, and from 1960 until his death Martin Luther acted as co-pastor. Martin Luther attended segregated public schools in Georgia, graduating from high school at the age of fifteen; he received the B. A. degree in 1948 from Morehouse College, a distinguished Negro institution of Atlanta from which both his father and grandfather had graduated. After three years of theological study at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania where he was elected president of a predominantly white senior class, he was awarded the B.D. in 1951. He enrolled in graduate studies at Boston University, completing his residence for the doctorate in 1953 and receiving the degree in 1955. In Boston he met and married Coretta Scott, a young woman of uncommon intellectual and artistic attainments. Two sons and two daughters were born into the family.

In 1954, Martin Luther King became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Always a strong worker for civil rights for members of his race, King was, by this time, a member of the executive committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the leading organization of its kind in the nation. He was ready, then, early in December, 1955, to accept the leadership of the first great Negro nonviolent demonstration of contemporary times in the United States, the bus boycott described by Gunnar Jahn in his presentation speech in honor of the laureate. The boycott lasted 382 days. On December 21, 1956, after the Supreme Court of the United States had declared unconstitutional the laws requiring segregation on buses, Negroes and whites rode the buses as equals. During these days of boycott, King was arrested, his home was bombed, he was subjected to personal abuse, but at the same time he emerged as a Negro leader of the first rank.

In 1957 he was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization formed to provide new leadership for the now burgeoning civil rights movement. The ideals for this organization he took from Christianity; its operational techniques from Gandhi. In the eleven-year period between 1957 and 1968, King traveled over six million miles and spoke over twenty-five hundred times, appearing wherever there was injustice, protest, and action; and meanwhile he wrote five books as well as numerous articles. In these years, he led a massive protest in Birmingham, Alabama, that caught the attention of the entire world, providing what he called a coalition of conscience. and inspiring his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", a manifesto of the Negro revolution; he planned the drives in Alabama for the registration of Negroes as voters; he directed the peaceful march on Washington, D.C., of 250,000 people to whom he delivered his address, "I Have a Dream", he conferred with President John F. Kennedy and campaigned for President Lyndon B. Johnson; he was arrested upwards of twenty times and assaulted at least four times; he was awarded five honorary degrees; was named Man of the Year by *Time* magazine in 1963; and became not only the symbolic leader of American blacks but also a world figure.

At the age of thirty-five, Martin Luther King, Jr., was the youngest man to have received the Nobel Peace Prize. When notified of his selection, he announced that he would turn over the prize money of $54,123 to the furtherance of the civil rights movement.

On the evening of April 4, 1968, while standing on the balcony of his motel room in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was to lead a protest march in sympathy with striking garbage workers of that city, he was assassinated.

Source: "Biography: Martin Luther King, Jr." The Nobel Prize in Peace 1964. Nobelprize.org. 11 March 2011 <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html>.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL

Kwame Ture, was the flamboyant civil rights leader known to most Americans as Stokely Carmichael. He is best remembered for his use of the phrase "black power," which in the mid-1960's ignited a white backlash and alarmed an older generation of civil rights leaders, including the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Though his active participation in the struggle for civil rights lasted barely a decade, he was a charismatic figure in a turbulent time, when real violence and rhetoric escalated on both sides of the color line.

Stokely Carmichael was inspired to participate in the civil rights movement by the bravery of those blacks and whites who protested segregated service with sit-ins at lunch counters in the South.

"When I first heard about the Negroes sitting in at lunch counters down South," he told Gordon Parks in Life magazine in 1967, "I thought they were just a bunch of publicity hounds. But one night when I saw those young kids on TV, getting back up on the lunch counter stools after being knocked off them, sugar in their eyes, ketchup in their hair -- well, something happened to me. Suddenly I was burning."

Rejecting scholarships from several white universities, he entered Howard University in Washington in 1960. By the end of his freshman year, he had joined the Freedom Rides of the Congress of Racial Equality, hazardous bus trips of blacks and whites that challenged segregated interstate travel in the South. The Freedom Riders often met with violence, and at their destinations Carmichael and the others were arrested and jailed, the first incarcerations he experienced. One early arrest brought him a particularly harsh 49-day sentence in Parchman Penitentiary in Mississippi.

Graduating with a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Howard in 1964, he joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. It was "Freedom Summer" in the year that SNCC (popularly pronounced snick) was sending hundreds of black and white volunteers to the South to teach, set up clinics and register disenfranchised black Southerners.

As a SNCC field organizer in Lowndes County in Alabama, where blacks were in the majority but politically powerless, he helped raise the number of registered black voters to 2,600 from a mere 70, or 300 more than the number of registered whites.

The young Carmichael was radicalized by his experiences working in the segregated South, where peaceful protesters were beaten, brutalized and sometimes killed for seeking the ordinary rights of citizens. He once recalled watching from his hotel room in a little Alabama town while nonviolent black demonstrators were beaten and shocked with cattle prods by the police.

Horrified, he said that he screamed and could not stop.

Carmichael was arrested so often as a nonviolent volunteer that he lost count after 32. His growing impatience with the tactics of passive resistance was gaining support, and in 1966 he was chosen as chairman of SNCC, replacing John Lewis, a hardworking integrationist who is now a Congressman from Georgia.

Barely a month after his selection, Carmichael, then just 25, raised the call for black power, thereby signaling a crossroads in the civil rights struggle. Increasingly uncomfortable with Dr. King's resolute nonviolence, he sensed a shift among some younger blacks in the direction of black separatism. Many were listening sympathetically to the urgings of Malcolm X, who had been assassinated a year and a half earlier, that the struggle should be carried out by any means necessary.

It was June 16, 1966, and Carmichael, a spellbinding orator, was addressing a crowd of 3,000 in a park in Greenwood, Miss. James Meredith, who had integrated the University of Mississippi, was wounded on his solitary "Walk Against Fear" from Memphis to Jackson, and volunteers were marching in his place. When they set up camp in Greenwood, Carmichael was arrested and his frustration was obvious.

"This is the 27th time," he said in disgust after his release. "We been saying 'Freedom' for six years," he continued, referring to the chant that movement protesters used as they stood up to racist politicians and hostile policemen pointing water hoses and unleashing snarling dogs. "What we are going to start saying now is 'Black Power!' "

The crowd quickly took up the phrase. "Black Power!" it repeated in a cry that would soon be echoed in communities from Oakland to Newark. But if Carmichael's call for black power galvanized many young blacks, it troubled others, who thought it sounded anti-white, provocative and violent. And it struck fear into many whites.

Adverse reaction was powerful and immediate. After the integrationist, nonviolent speeches and sermons of Dr. King and others, few Americans, white or black, were prepared for the uncompromising demands of black militants who rallied to Carmichael's cry.

Many black leaders of the civil rights movement, though eager to avoid a split, were clearly upset by the use of the phrase and the separatism it seemed to advocate.

In the book "Black Power," which Carmichael wrote in 1967 he tried to explain the term. "It is a call for black people in this country to unite, . . .to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations." And as civil unrest flared in Detroit and Newark, Carmichael's call became associated, as Hamilton put it, "with riots and guns and 'burn, baby, burn.' "

Instead of young people singing "We Shall Overcome," new images of militant black men and women were being shown on television -- black berets, raised fists, men with guns. And along with goals of social justice and integration came ideas of black separatism and power harking back to the black nationalism that had been preached in the 1920's by Marcus Garvey.

In 1967 a declining SNCC severed all ties with him. Soon after, he became honorary prime minister of the Black Panthers, the ultra-militant urban organization begun by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. But he soon found himself embroiled with Panther leaders for opposing their decision to seek support among whites. He moved to Guinea, in West Africa, in 1969, saying, "America does not belong to the blacks," and calling on all black Americans to follow his example.

In July 1969, three months after he moved to Africa, he made public a letter announcing his resignation from the Black Panther Party because of what he called "its dogmatic party line favoring alliances with white radicals."

Adapted from an article by MICHAEL T. KAUFMAN, “Stokely Carmichael, Rights Leader Who Coined 'Black Power,' Dies at 57” The New York Times. 14 March 2011 <http://www.interchange.org/Kwameture/nytimes111698.html>.

MALCOLM X

Malcolm X was initially known for his controversial stance of racial separatism, but after his pilgrimage to Mecca, while he still advocated Black Nationalism, he also accepted a more orthodox Islam view of the "true brotherhood" of man. He came to believe that there was a potential for cross-racial alliance.

Named Malcolm Little by his parents, Malcolm X was born on May 19, 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska. Malcolm's father, Earl Little, was an outspoken supporter of the Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey. As a result, he received numerous death threats and was forced to move his family several times.

While the family was in Lansing, Michigan, their home was burned down. Two years later, Malcolm's father was murdered. Malcolm's mother had an emotional breakdown and was unable to care for Malcolm and his siblings. The children were split up and sent to foster homes.

By the time that Malcolm was a teenager, he had dropped out of high school. At first, he worked odd jobs in Boston, Massachusetts, but he soon moved to Harlem, New York and became involved in criminal activity. Malcolm moved back to Boston and shortly thereafter, he was convicted of burglary in 1946.

While Malcolm was in prison, he converted to the Muslim religious sect, the Nation of Islam. When he was released in 1952, he changed his last name to X because he considered the name "Little" to have been a slave name. The Nation of Islam's leader, Elijah Muhammad, made Malcolm a minister and sent him around the country on speaking engagements. Malcolm spoke about black pride and separatism, and rejected the civil rights movement's focus on integration and equality.

Malcolm was a charismatic speaker, and soon was able to use newspaper columns, television, and radio to spread the Nation of Islam's message. Membership to the Nation of Islam increased dramatically because of Malcolm's speeches. However, while many blacks were embracing his message, civil rights leaders rejected him. Malcolm also became a concern of the government. The Federal Bureau of Investigation began surveillance of him and infiltrated the Nation of Islam.

In March 1964, Malcolm left the Nation of Islam and founded the Muslim Mosque, Inc. A month later, he took a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It was there that his view of separatism changed. He discovered that white and black Muslims could coexist together. While he still advocated Black Nationalism, he also accepted a more orthodox Islam view of the "true brotherhood" of man and believed that there was a potential for cross-racial alliance.

When he returned to the United States, he stopped advocating separatism, and instead relayed the message of integration and world brotherhood. However, he discovered that the Nation of Islam wanted to assassinate him. On February 14, 1965, his home was firebombed, but no one was hurt.

A few days later on February 21, 1965, while Malcolm was on stage at the Manhattan Audubon Ballroom, three gunmen shot him to death. The gunmen were arrested and convicted. It was later discovered that they were members of the Nation of Islam. Malcolm was buried on February 27, 1965 in Hartsdale, New York.

Since his death his popularity has continued, and is partly due to the publication of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Spike Lee's 1992 movie, *Malcolm X*.

Source: *Biography of Malcolm X.* About.com. 14 March 2011 <http://afroamhistory.about.com/cs/malcolmx/a/bio_x_malcolm.htm>.

Fannie Lou Hamer

The youngest of 20 children, born to Mississippi sharecropper parents, Fannie Hamer had only 6 years of schooling (a year of schooling being only 4 months for black students then) and was a polio victim, yet she became one of the most recognized women of the civil rights movement in the early '60's.

Hardships abounded for Fannie as a child. When her father was able to finally purchase two mules to help with the farming chores, they were poisoned by whites in order to "teach a lesson" in maintaining one's place. African-Americans were treated as if they were less than the family dog by whites, even though slavery had been abolished for nearly 100 years. Fannie knew that feeling, and she knew what it was to be treated as less than an animal.

In 1962, when Hamer was 44 years old, SNCC volunteers came to town and held a voter registration meeting. She was surprised to learn that African-Americans actually had a constitutional right to vote. When the SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) members asked for volunteers to go to the courthouse to register to vote, Hamer was the first to raise her hand. This was a dangerous decision. She later reflected, "The only thing they could do to me was to kill me, and it seemed like they'd been trying to do that a little bit at a time ever since I could remember."

When Hamer and others went to the courthouse, they were jailed and beaten by the police. Hamer's courageous act got her thrown off the plantation where she was a sharecropper. She also began to receive constant death threats and was even shot at. Still, Hamer would not be discouraged. She became a SNCC Field Secretary and traveled around the country speaking and registering people to vote.

Hamer co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). In 1964, the MDFP challenged the all-white Mississippi delegation to the Democratic National Convention. Hamer spoke in front of the Credentials Committee in a televised proceeding that reached millions of viewers. She told the committee how African-Americans in many states across the country were prevented from voting through illegal tests, taxes and intimidation. As a result of her speech, two delegates of the MFDP were given speaking rights at the convention and the other members were seated as honorable guests.

Deeply committed to improving life for poor minorities in her state, Hamer, working with the National Council of Negro Women and others, helped organize food cooperatives and other services. She continued political activities as well, helping to convene the National Women's Political Caucus in the 1970s. She is buried in her home town of Ruleville, Mississippi, where her tombstone reads, "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired."

Sources:
"Fannie Lou Hamer." *Six Years of the Student NonViolence Coordinating Committee.* 14 March 2011 <http://www.ibiblio.org/sncc/hamer.html>.

"Fannie Lou Hamer." *Women of the Hall.* National Women's Hall of Fame. 14 March 2011 <http://www.greatwomen.org/women.php?action=viewone&id=72>.

ROSA PARKS

Rosa Louise Parks was nationally recognized as the "mother of the modern day civil rights movement" in America. Her refusal to surrender her seat to a white male passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama bus, December 1, 1955, triggered a wave of protest December 5, 1955 that reverberated throughout the United States. Her quiet courageous act changed America, its view of black people and redirected the course of history.

Mrs. Parks was born Rosa Louise McCauley, February 4, 1913 in Tuskegee, Alabama. She was the first child of James and Leona Edwards McCauley. Her brother, Sylvester McCauley, now deceased, was born August 20, 1915. Later, the family moved to Pine Level, Alabama where Rosa was reared and educated in the rural school. When she completed her education in Pine Level at age eleven, her mother, Leona, enrolled her in Montgomery Industrial School for Girls (Miss White's School for Girls), a private institution. After finishing Miss White's School, she went on to Alabama State Teacher's College High School. She, however, was unable to graduate with her class, because of the illness of her grandmother Rose Edwards and later her death.

As Rosa Parks prepared to return to Alabama State Teacher's College, her mother also became ill, therefore, she continued to take care of their home and care for her mother while her brother, Sylvester, worked outside of the home. She received her high school diploma in 1934, after her marriage to Raymond Parks, December 18, 1932. Raymond, now deceased was born in Wedowee, Alabama, Randolph County, February 12, 1903, received little formal education due to racial segregation. He was a self-educated person with the assistance of his mother, Geri Parks. His immaculate dress and his thorough knowledge of domestic affairs and current events made most think he was college educated. He supported and encouraged Rosa's desire to complete her formal education.

Mr. Parks was an early activist in the effort to free the "Scottsboro Boys," a celebrated case in the 1930's. Together, Raymond and Rosa worked in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP's) programs. He was an active member and she served as secretary and later youth leader of the local branch. At the time of her arrest, she was preparing for a major youth conference.

After the arrest of Rosa Parks, black people of Montgomery and sympathizers of other races organized and promoted a boycott of the city bus line that lasted 381 days. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was appointed the spokesperson for the Bus Boycott and taught nonviolence to all participants. Contingent with the protest in Montgomery, others took shape throughout the south and the country. They took form as sit-ins, eat-ins, swim-ins, and similar causes. Thousands of courageous people joined the "protest" to demand equal rights for all people.

Mrs. Parks moved to Detroit, Michigan in 1957. In 1964 she became a deaconess in the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME).

Congressman John Conyers First Congressional District of Michigan employed Mrs. Parks, from 1965 to 1988. In February, 1987, she co-founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development with Ms. Elaine Eason Steele in honor of her husband, Raymond (1903-1977). The purpose is to motivate and direct youth not targeted by other programs to achieve their highest potential. Rosa Parks sees the energy of young people as a real force for change. It is among her most treasured themes of human priorities as she speaks to young people of all ages at schools, colleges, and national organizations around the world.

The Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development's "Pathways to Freedom program, traces the underground railroad into the civil rights movement and beyond. Youth, ages 11 through 17, meet and talk with Mrs. Parks and other national leaders as they participate in educational and historical research throughout the world. They journey primarily by bus as "freedom riders" did in the 1960's,the theme: "Where have we been? Where are we going?"

As a role model for youth she was stimulated by their enthusiasm to learn as much about her life as possible. A modest person, she always encourages them to research the lives of other contributors to world peace. The Institute and The Rosa Parks Legacy are her legacies to people of good will.

Mrs. Parks received more than forty-three honorary doctorate degrees, including one from SOKA UNIVERSITY, Tokyo Japan, hundreds of plaques, certificates, citations, awards and keys to many cities. Among them are the NAACP's Spingarn Medal, the UAW's Social Justice Award, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Non - Violent Peace Prize and the ROSA PARKS PEACE PRIZE in 1994, Stockholm Sweden, to name a few. In September 1996 President William J. Clinton, the forty second President of the United States of America gave Mrs. Parks the MEDAL OF FREEDOM, the highest award given to a civilian citizen.

Published Act no.28 of 1997 designated the first Monday following February 4, as Mrs Rosa Parks' Day in the state of Michigan, her home state. She is the first living person to be honored with a holiday.

She was voted by Time Magazine as one of the 100 most Influential people of the 20th century. A Museum and Library is being built in her honor, in Montgomery, AL and will open in the fall of the year 2000 (ground breaking April 21, 1998). On September 2, 1998 The Rosa L. Parks Learning Center was dedicated at Botsford Commons, a senior community in Michigan. Through the use of computer technology, youth will mentor seniors on the use of computers. (Mrs. Parks was a member of the first graduating class on November 24, 1998). On September 26, 1998 Mrs. Parks was the recipient of the first International Freedom Conductor's Award by the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Mrs. Parks has written four books, Rosa Parks: My Story: by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins, Quiet Strength by Rosa Parks with Gregory J. Reed, Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue With Today's Youth by Rosa Parks with Gregory J, Reed, this book received the NAACP's Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work, (Children's) in 1996 and her latest book, I AM ROSA PARKS by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins, for preschoolers.

A quiet exemplification of courage, dignity, and determination; Rosa Parks was a symbol to all to remain free. Rosa Parks died on October 24, 2005.

Adapted from: *Rosa Louise Parks Biography*. Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. 14 March 2011 <http://www.rosaparks.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=118&Itemid=60>.

Thurgood Marshall

Thurgood Marshall was America's leading radical. He led a civil rights revolution in the 20th century that forever changed the landscape of American society. But he is the least well known of the three leading black figures of this century. Martin Luther King Jr., with his preachings of love and non-violent resistance, and Malcolm X, the fiery street preacher who advocated a bloody overthrow of the system, are both more closely associated in the popular mind and myth with the civil rights struggle. But it was Thurgood Marshall, working through the courts to eradicate the legacy of slavery and destroying the racist segregation system of Jim Crow, who had an even more profound and lasting effect on race relations than either King or X.

It was Marshall who ended legal segregation in the United States. He won Supreme Court victories breaking the color line in housing, transportation and voting, all of which overturned the 'Separate-but-Equal' apartheid of American life in the first half of the century. It was Marshall who won the most important legal case of the century, Brown v. Board of Education, ending the legal separation of black and white children in public schools. The success of the Brown case sparked the 1960s civil rights movement, led to the increased number of black high school and college graduates and the incredible rise of the black middle-class in both numbers and political power in the second half of the century.
And it was Marshall, as the nation's first African-American Supreme Court justice, who promoted affirmative action -- preferences, set-asides and other race conscious policies -- as the remedy for the damage remaining from the nation's history of slavery and racial bias. Justice Marshall gave a clear signal that while legal discrimination had ended, there was more to be done to advance educational opportunity for people who had been locked out and to bridge the wide canyon of economic inequity between blacks and whites.

He worked on behalf of black Americans, but built a structure of individual rights that became the cornerstone of protections for all Americans. He succeeded in creating new protections under law for women, children, prisoners, and the homeless. Their greater claim to full citizenship in the republic over the last century can be directly traced to Marshall. Even the American press had Marshall to thank for an expansion of its liberties during the century.

Marshall's lifework, then, literally defined the movement of race relations through the century. He rejected King's peaceful protest as rhetorical fluff that accomplished no permanent change in society. And he rejected Malcolm X's talk of violent revolution and a separate black nation as racist craziness in a multi-racial society.

The key to Marshall's work was his conviction that integration -- and only integration -- would allow equal rights under the law to take hold. Once individual rights were accepted, in Marshall's mind, then blacks and whites could rise or fall based on their own ability.

Marshall's deep faith in the power of racial integration came out of a middle class black perspective in turn of the century Baltimore. He was the child of an activist black community that had established its own schools and fought for equal rights from the time of the Civil War. His own family, of an interracial background, had been at the forefront of demands by Baltimore blacks for equal treatment. Out of that unique family and city was born Thurgood Marshall, the architect of American race relations in the twentieth century.

Source: *Thurgood Marshall.* 14 March 2011 <http://www.thurgoodmarshall.com/home.htm>.

Medgar Evers

Medgar Evers was a native of Decatur, Mississippi, attending school there until being inducted into the U.S. Army in 1943. Despite fighting for his country as part of the Battle of Normandy, Evers soon found that his skin color gave him no freedom when he and five friends were forced away at gunpoint from voting in a local election. Despite his resentment over such treatment, Evers enrolled at Alcorn State University, majoring in business administration. While at the school, Evers stayed busy by competing on the school's football and track teams, also competing on the debate team, performing in the school choir and serving as president of the junior class.

He married classmate Myrlie Beasley on December 24, 1951, and completed work on his degree the following year. The couple moved to Mound Bayou, MS, where T.R.M. Howard had hired him to sell insurance for his Magnolia Mutual Life Insurance Company. Howard was also the president of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL), a civil rights and pro self-help organization. Involvement in the RCNL gave Evers crucial training in activism. He helped to organize the RCNL's boycott of service stations that denied blacks use of their restrooms. The boycotters distributed bumper stickers with the slogan "Don't Buy Gas Where You Can't Use the Restroom." Along with his brother, Charles Evers, he also attended the RCNL's annual conferences in Mound Bayou between 1952 and 1954 which drew crowds of ten thousand or more.

Evers applied to the then-segregated University of Mississippi Law School in February 1954. When his application was rejected, Evers became the focus of an NAACP campaign to desegregate the school, a case aided by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the case of Brown v. Board of Education 347 US 483 that segregation was unconstitutional. In December of that year, Evers became the NAACP's first field officer in Mississippi.

After moving to Jackson, he was involved in a boycott campaign against white merchants and was instrumental in eventually desegregating the University of Mississippi when that institution was finally forced to enroll James Meredith in 1962.

In the weeks leading up to his death, Evers found himself the target of a number of threats. His public investigations into the murder of Emmett Till and his vocal support of Clyde Kennard left him vulnerable to attack. On May 28, 1963, a molotov cocktail was thrown into the carport of his home, and five days before his death, he was nearly run down by a car after he emerged from the Jackson NAACP office. Civil rights demonstrations accelerated in Jackson during the first week of June 1963. A local television station granted Evers time for a short speech, his first in Mississippi, where he outlined the goals of the Jackson movement. Following the speech, threats on Evers' life increased.

On June 12, 1963, Evers pulled into his driveway after returning from an integration meeting where he had conferred with NAACP lawyers. Emerging from his car and carrying NAACP T-shirts that stated, "Jim Crow Must Go", Evers was struck in the back with a bullet that ricocheted into his home. He staggered 30 feet before collapsing, dying at the local hospital 50 minutes later. Evers was murdered just hours after President John F. Kennedy's speech on national television in support of civil rights.

Mourned nationally, Evers was buried on June 19 in Arlington National Cemetery and received full military honors in front of a crowd of more than 3,000 people, the largest funeral at Arlington since John Foster Dulles. The past chairman of the American Veterans Committee, Mickey Levine, said at the services, "No soldier in this field has fought more courageously, more heroically than Medgar Evers."

On June 23, Byron De La Beckwith, a fertilizer salesman and member of the White Citizens' Council and Ku Klux Klan, was arrested for Evers' murder. During the course of his first 1964 trial, De La Beckwith was visited by former Mississippi governor Ross Barnett and one time Army Major General Edwin A. Walker.

All-white juries twice that year deadlocked on De La Beckwith's guilt, allowing him to escape justice. In response to the murder and miscarriage of justice, musician Bob Dylan wrote the song "Only a Pawn in Their Game" about Evers and his assassin. Phil Ochs wrote the songs "Too Many Martyrs" and

"Another Country" in response to the killing (Evers is also mentioned in the song "Love Me I'm a Liberal"). Matthew Jones and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Freedom Singers paid tribute to Evers in the haunting "Ballad of Medgar Evers." Malvina Reynolds mentioned "the shot in Ever's back" in her song "It isn't nice".

Evers' legacy has been kept alive in a variety of ways. In 1970, Medgar Evers College was established in Brooklyn, NY as part of the City University of New York. In 1983, a made-for-television movie, For Us the Living: The Medgar Evers Story starring Howard Rollins, Jr. was aired, celebrating the life and career of Medgar Evers, and on June 28, 1992, he was immortalized in Jackson with a statue.

In 1994, thirty years after the two previous trials had failed to reach a verdict, Beckwith was again brought to trial based on new evidence concerning statements he made to others. During the trial, the body of Evers was exhumed from his grave for autopsy, and found to be in a surprisingly excellent state of preservation as a result of embalming. Beckwith was convicted on February 5, 1994, after living as a free man for three decades after the murder. Beckwith appealed unsuccessfully, and died in prison in January of 2001.

Before his body was reburied, owing to his excellent state of preservation, a new funeral was staged for Evers. This permitted his children, who were toddlers when he was assassinated and had very little memory of him, to have a chance to see him. The new funeral was covered on HBO's Autopsy series.

The 1996 film Ghosts of Mississippi tells the story of the 1994 trial, in which a District Attorney's office prosecutor, Robert Delaughter, successfully retried the case, and won.

Evers's wife, Myrlie, became a noted activist in her own right later in life, eventually serving as chairwoman of the NAACP. Medgar's brother Charles returned to Jackson in July 1963 and served briefly in his slain brother's place. Charles Evers remained involved in Mississippi Civil Rights for years to come. He resides in Jackson.

Source: *NAACP History: Medgar Evers.* NAACP. 14 March 2011 <http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history-medgar-evers>.