

ROSA PARKS

On December 1, 1955 an unknown seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. This brave woman, Rosa Parks, was arrested and fined for violating a city law, but her act of defiance began a movement that ended legal segregation in America, and made her an inspiration to freedom-loving people everywhere.

In 1900, Montgomery had passed a law to segregate bus passengers by race. According to the law, no passenger would be required to move or give up their seat and stand if the bus was crowded and no other seats were available. Over time and by custom, however, Montgomery bus drivers adopted the practice of requiring black riders to move when there were no white-only seats left. Parks refused to give up her seat and was arrested.

Rosa Parks was born in Tuskegee, Alabama to James McCauley, a carpenter, and Leona McCauley, a teacher. At the age of two she moved to her grandparents' farm in Pine Level, Alabama with her mother and younger brother, Sylvester. At the age of 11 she enrolled in the Montgomery Industrial School for Girls, a private school founded by liberal-minded women from the northern United States. The school's philosophy of self-worth was consistent with Leona McCauley's advice to "take advantage of the opportunities, no matter how few they were."

After attending Alabama State Teachers College, the young Rosa settled in Montgomery, with her husband, Raymond Parks. The couple joined the local chapter of the NAACP and worked quietly for many years to improve the lot of African-Americans in the segregated south.

"I worked on numerous cases with the NAACP," Mrs. Parks recalled, "but we did not get the publicity. There were cases of flogging, peonage, murder, and rape. We didn't seem to have too many successes. It was more a matter of trying to challenge the powers that be, and to let it be known that we did not wish to continue being second-class citizens."

The bus incident led to the formation of the Montgomery Improvement Association, led by the young pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The association called for a boycott of the city-owned bus company. The boycott lasted 382 days and brought Mrs. Parks, Dr. King, and their cause to the attention of the world. A Supreme Court Decision struck down the Montgomery ordinance under which Mrs. Parks had been fined, and outlawed racial segregation on public transportation.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born Michael Luther King, Jr., but later his father changed his name to honor protestant reformer, Martin Luther. King 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. At Boston University, he received his doctorate degree in 1955. In Boston he met and married Coretta Scott, and 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. In December of 1955, he accepted the leadership of the boycott Montgomery Bus Boycotts. 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.

THURGOOD MARSHALL

Born July 2, 1908, Thurgood Marshall was the grandson of a slave. His father, taught in him an appreciation for the U.S. Constitution and the rule of law. After completing high school in 1925, Thurgood followed his brother, William Aubrey Marshall, at the historically black Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. In 1930, he applied to the University of Maryland Law School, but was denied admission because he was Black. This was an event that was to influence the future professional life. Thurgood sought admission and was accepted at the Howard University Law School that same year and came under the immediate influence of the dean, Charles Hamilton Houston, who instilled in all of his students the desire to apply the tenets of the Constitution to all Americans. Houston's stressed the importance for the need to overturn the 1898 Supreme Court ruling, *Plessy v. Ferguson* which established the legal doctrine called, "separate but equal."

Thurgood Marshall became Chief Counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As counsel to the NAACP, in 1954, he won the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, in which the Supreme Court ended racial segregation in public schools. He was also asked by the United Nations and the United Kingdom to help draft the constitutions of the emerging African nations of Ghana and what is now Tanzania. It was felt that the person who so successfully fought for the rights of America's oppressed minority would be the perfect person to ensure the rights of the White citizens in these two former European colonies.

President John F. Kennedy appointed Thurgood Marshall to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. He wrote over 150 decisions including support for the rights of immigrants, limiting government intrusion in cases involving illegal search and seizure, double jeopardy, and right to privacy issues. In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson appointed Judge Marshall to the office of U.S. Solicitor General. Marshall was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1967, and served for 24 years. He was the first African American to hold that position.

Until his retirement from the highest court in the land, Justice Marshall established a record for supporting the voiceless American. Having honed his skills since the case against the University of Maryland, he developed a profound sensitivity to injustice by way of the crucible of racial discrimination in this country. As an Associate Supreme Court Justice, Thurgood Marshall leaves a legacy that expands that early sensitivity to include all of America's voiceless. Justice Marshall died on January 24, 1993.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

STOKELY CARMICHAEL

Stokely Carmichael was an important civil rights leader and heavily influenced the Black Power movement. He was born in Trinidad, on 29th June, 1941. Carmichael moved to the U.S. in 1952 and attended high school in New York City. He entered Howard University in 1960 and soon afterwards joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

In 1961 Carmichael became a member of the Freedom Riders. After training in non-violent techniques, black and white volunteers sat next to each other as they travelled through the Deep South. Local police were unwilling to protect these passengers and in several places they were beaten up by white mobs. In Jackson, Mississippi, Carmichael was arrested and jailed for 49 days in Parchman Penitentiary. Carmichael also worked on the Freedom Summer project and in 1966 became chairman of SNCC.

On 5th June, 1966, James Meredith started a solitary March Against Fear from Memphis to Jackson, to protest against racism. Soon after starting his march he was shot by sniper. When they heard the news, other civil rights campaigners, including Carmichael, Martin Luther King and Floyd McKissick, decided to continue the march in Meredith's name.

When the marchers got to Greenwood, Mississippi, Carmichael and some of the other marchers were arrested by the police. It was the 27th time that Carmichael had been arrested and on his release on 16th June, he made his famous **Black Power** speech. Carmichael called for "black people in this country to unite, to recognize their heritage, and to build a sense of community". He also advocated that African Americans should form and lead their own organizations and urged a complete rejection of the values of American society.

The following year Carmichael joined with Charles V. Hamilton to write the book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967). Some leaders of civil rights groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), rejected Carmichael's ideas and accused him of black racism.

Carmichael also adopted the slogan of "Black is Beautiful" and advocated a mood of black pride and a rejection of white values of style and appearance. This included adopting Afro hairstyles and African forms of dress. Carmichael began to criticize Martin Luther King and his ideology of nonviolence. He eventually joined the Black Panther Party where he became "honorary prime minister".

When Carmichael denounced United States involvement in the Vietnam War, his passport was confiscated and held for ten months. When his passport was returned, he moved with his wife, Miriam Makeba, to Guinea, where he wrote the book, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* (1971).

Carmichael, who adopted the name, Kwame Ture, also helped to establish the All-African People's Revolutionary Party and worked as an aide to Guinea's prime minister, Sekou Toure. After the death of Toure in 1984 Carmichael was arrested by the new military regime and charged with trying to overthrow the government. However, he only spent three days in prison before being released. Stokely Carmichael died of cancer on 15th November, 1998.

MALCOLM X

"We're not Americans, we're Africans who happen to be in America. We were kidnapped and brought here against our will from Africa. We didn't land on Plymouth Rock --- that rock landed on us."

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska. His father, Earl, a Baptist minister and was under continuous threat by the Ku Klux Klan. The family moved to Lansing, Michigan, where their house was burned by white racists in 1929, and, in 1931, Earl was murdered. Malcolm's mother had a nervous breakdown and the eight children were sent to various foster homes.

The top student and only African American in his eighth grade class, Malcolm dropped out of school after his teacher told him that a "nigger" could never become a lawyer, which was his dream. He went to Boston to live with his sister Ella, and turned to crime. He became a street hustler and in 1946 he was arrested and sentenced to 10 years. While in prison, though, he began a period of education and self-transformation. He joined The Nation of Islam, a black supremacist group headed by Elijah Muhammad. He took "X" as his last name, signifying his unknown African tribal name that had been lost when his family was given the slave name "Little."

In prison, Malcolm X became a member of the Nation of Islam and after his parole in 1952 he quickly rose to become one of its leaders. For a many years Malcolm X was the spokesperson of the controversial group, but was let down by its leader. This led him to leave in 1964. Later that year, Malcolm traveled to Mecca, the holiest of Muslim shrines, he took the name El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, and began speaking of international black consciousness and integration rather than racial separatism. His change of views targeted him for assassination by some members of the Nation of Islam.

Historians consider Malcolm X among one of the most influential African-American leaders in history. His book, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, written with Alex Haley and published posthumously, is considered one of the most important non-fiction books of the 20th Century. Many black people felt that Malcolm X, by voicing the truth of their frustration and anger, gave them courage and self-respect. He told African-Americans that they had to stop defining themselves as whites had defined them in terms of subservience and inferiority. His message was strength and pride and truth. Malcolm X was shot dead at a party meeting in Harlem on 21st February, 1965. Three Black Muslims were later convicted of the murder.

ROBERT PARRIS MOSES

Robert Parris Moses became one of the most influential black leaders of the Southern civil rights era during the 1960s. Born on January 23, 1935, in New York City, Moses spent his early years in a public housing project near the Harlem River. In 1952 he graduated from Stuyvesant High School and won a scholarship to Hamilton College. He earned a masters. degree in philosophy in 1957 at Harvard University. He was forced to leave college because of the death of his mother and the hospitalization of his father. He finally returned to New York and became a mathematics teacher at Horace Mann School.

During the late 1950s Moses became increasingly active in the nascent black protest movement. In 1958 he helped veteran black activist Bayard Rustin (q.v.) with the Second Youth March for Integrated Schools, and in the summer of 1960, at Rustin's suggestion, he went to Atlanta to work with Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Moses left Atlanta to seek participants for the fall conference of a new organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), that Ella Baker, onetime executive secretary of SCLC had helped to found.

Moses returned to Mississippi in 1961 to become the head of SNCC's project in McComb and ultimately director for the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a federation of civil rights groups in the state. Seeking to develop leadership among poorly educated blacks at the bottom of the Southern social order, he influenced civil rights activists searching for alternatives to hierarchical and manipulative political modes. Moses' goal was to develop self-reliant organizations and leaders who could continue the struggle after organizers had departed. His fear that others would become dependent on his leadership led Moses and his wife, Donna Richards, to leave Mississippi after the massive 1964 summer project.

Temporarily changing his name to Bob Parris, he participated in several rallies against the Vietnam War, but by the end of 1965 Moses had ended his relations with white activists. After separating from his wife in 1966, he went to Canada to avoid the military draft. In June 1968 Moses and his new wife settled in Tanzania. They returned to the United States with their four children in 1976. Avoiding public attention, Moses resumed his graduate studies in philosophy at Harvard and in 1982 received a MacArthur Foundation award to continue his studies.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

MEDGAR EVERS

Medgar Evers was a black civil rights activist murdered in 1963 in Jackson, Mississippi. Medgar Evers, a field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was one of the most important figures of the African American civil rights movement. He became the first major civil rights leader to be assassinated in the 1960s. His death prompted President John F. Kennedy to ask Congress for a national civil rights bill, which President Lyndon Johnson signed into law in 1964.

A World War II veteran and a graduate of Alcorn College, Evers began working in 1952 for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Evers soon went to work for the NAACP full time. Within two years he was named to the important position of state field secretary for the organization. He was one of the most well-known NAACP members in his state. With his wife and children, he moved to Jackson, Mississippi, where he worked closely with black church leaders and other civil rights activists. Evers' message was of the need to overcome hatred and promote understanding and equality between the races. It was not a message that everyone in Mississippi wanted to hear.

Evers was featured on a nine-man death list in the deep South as early as 1955. He and his family endured many threats and other violent acts, making them well aware of the danger surrounding Evers because of his activities. Still he persisted in his efforts to end segregation (separating people based solely on their race) in public facilities, schools, and restaurants. He organized voter-registration drives and demonstrations. His days were filled with meetings, economic boycotts (to make a stand against a person or a business by refusing to buy their goods, products, or businesses), marches, prayer services, picket lines, and bailing other demonstrators out of jail.

Evers travelled Mississippi trying to encourage voter registration and working to enforce federally-mandated integration laws. On 12 June 1963, hours after President John F. Kennedy gave a televised speech condemning segregation, Evers was shot in the back by a high-powered rifle while returning home. He crawled to the house and collapsed in front of his wife and three children; he died an hour later. The rifle found at the scene belonged to Byron De La Beckwith, a member of the all-white Citizens' Council, a statewide group opposed to racial integration. Beckwith was tried twice, but both trials ended with a hung jury and he was released. Nearly thirty years later, thanks to the persistence of Evers's widow, Myrlie Evers-Williams, the case was reopened and Beckwith was tried and convicted in 1994.

The Evers legacy

Evers's assassination foreshadowed the violence to come, it also inspired civil rights leaders and their followers to work for their cause with still more dedication. Above all, it inspired them to work with the courage that Evers himself had shown.

CHARLES SHERROD

Charles Sherrod was an important civil rights leader in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) whose leadership led to the Albany Movement in Georgia. Born in extreme poverty to his fourteen-year old mother in 1937 in St. Petersburg, Virginia, he worked supporting six younger children. Sherrod worked received a two degrees while working his way through college. He joined SNCC in 1960, participating in the organization's first demonstrations and voter registration drives.

In October 1961, Sherrod became the first field secretary and SNCC director of southwest Georgia. He and Cordell Reagon opened an SNCC office near the all-black Albany State College. On November 1, they launched a student sit-in at the bus terminal station to test the recently enacted law desegregating bus and train terminals. When local law enforcement officials blocked the demonstrators, the single protest became the two-year Albany campaign. It eventually led to multiple protests by thousands of students as well as the involvement of Dr. Martin Luther King, a public plea from President John F. Kennedy to city officials, and resolution of the issue by local black leaders to resolve the issue. Ultimately the civil rights activists organized by Charles Sherrod would prevail. Developing local leadership was a strong point in Sherrod's leadership and was an important element in SNCC's organizational model. Rather than the SNCC or some other organization fighting for the "helpless" black community, the community organized itself with SNCC leaders facilitating that organization.

Sherrod also enlisted white workers to help with voter registration. Five of the 11 workers on SNCC's local staff were white Northerners. By using interracial voter registration workers, Sherrod intended to show white Southerners that whites were equals, not superiors.

In August 1964, the all-white Democratic National Convention refused to give more than a few token positions to African Americans despite the efforts of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in coalition with the SNCC. Sherrod traveled to Atlantic City, the site of the Convention to support MFDP. He urged them to refuse the compromise offered by Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale, and other leaders of the Democratic Party.

In 1966, SNCC changed direction – electing Stokely Carmichael as chairman, embracing the philosophy of black power, and expelling white members. Sherrod left the organization and in 1967 received his Doctor of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He returned to Albany, formed the Southwest Georgia Independent Voters Project, and began the agricultural cooperative New Communities Inc. In 1976, Sherrod was elected to the Albany City Council, serving until 1990. In 1996, he ran unsuccessfully for Georgia State Senate, his last attempt at political office. Sherrod continues to live in Albany.

JAMES LEONARD FARMER, JR.

James Leonard Farmer, Jr. (January 12, 1920 – July 9, 1999) was a civil rights activist and leader of the American Civil Rights Movement. He founded and organized the 1961 Freedom Ride, which eventually led to the desegregation of inter-state transportation in the U.S.

In 1942, Farmer and a group of students co-founded the Committee of Racial Equality, which later became the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an organization focused on bringing an end to racial segregation in the U.S. using nonviolence. Farmer was the organization's first leader, serving as the national chairman from 1942 to 1944. He held the position as an honorary chairman in the Democratic Socialists of America.

Farmer was born in Marshall, Texas. His father was a professor at Wiley College, a historically black college, and his mother was a homemaker. Farmer was a child prodigy; at the age of 14, he enrolled at Wiley College, where he was the captain of the debate team. His part in its winning performance was portrayed by Denzel Whitaker in the 2007 film *The Great Debaters*, directed by and starring Denzel Washington.

During the 1950s, Farmer served as national secretary of the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID), the youth branch of the socialist League for Industrial Democracy. SLID later became Students for a Democratic Society.

Freedom Rides

In 1961 Farmer, who was working for the NAACP, was reelected as the national director of CORE, at a time when the civil rights movement was gaining power. He immediately planned a repeat of CORE's 1947 Journey of Reconciliation, a trip of eight white and eight black men challenging segregation in transportation in the Upper South. This time, however, the group planned to journey through the Deep South. Farmer coined a new name for the trip: the Freedom Ride.

On May 4, the participants, this time including women as well as men [including white supporters], journeyed to the Deep South and challenged segregated bus terminals as well as seating on the vehicles. The riders were met with severe violence and garnered national media attention. Their efforts sparked a summer of similar rides by other Civil Rights leaders and thousands of ordinary citizens. Although the Freedom Rides were attacked by whites, they became recognized as an effective strategy, and the Congress of Racial Equality received nationwide attention. Farmer became a well-known civil rights leader. The Freedom Rides captured the imagination of the nation through photographs, newspaper accounts, and motion pictures. They inspired Erin Gruwell's teaching techniques and the Freedom Writers Foundation.

The Little Rock Nine

The “Little Rock Nine” were the first nine African-American students who desegregated Little Rock Central High School. Their entry into the school in 1957 created a national crisis when Arkansas governor Orval Faubus, going against a federal court order, called out the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the Nine from entering. President Dwight D. Eisenhower responded by sending in units of the U.S. Army’s Airborne Division to escort the Nine into the school on September 25, 1957. The military presence remained for the duration of the school year.

On May 24, 1955, the Little Rock School Board adopted a plan for gradual integration. The plan called for desegregation to begin in the fall of 1957 at Central High School

On September 4, 1957, the Nine attempted to enter Central HS but were turned away by Arkansas National Guard troops called out by the governor. When Elizabeth Eckford arrived at the campus, she was confronted by an angry mob of segregationist protestors. She attempted to enter at the front of the school but was directed back out to the street by the guardsmen. Walking alone, surrounded by the crowd, she eventually reached the sat down on a bench to wait for a city bus to take her to her mother’s workplace. Of her experience, Eckford later said, “I tried to see a friendly face somewhere in the mob—someone who maybe would help. I looked into the face of an old woman and it seemed a kind face, but when I looked at her again, she spat on me.” Others of the Nine arrived the same day were also turned away by guardsmen.

When the federal court ordered Gov. Faubus to stop interfering with the court’s order, Faubus removed the guardsmen from in front of the school. On September 23, the Nine entered the school for the first time. The crowd outside chanted, “Two, four, six, eight... We ain’t gonna integrate!” and chased and beat black reporters who were covering the events. The Little Rock police, fearful that they could not control the increasingly unruly mob in front of the school, removed the Nine later that morning.

Calling the mob’s actions “disgraceful,” Eisenhower called out 1,200 members of the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne Division—the “Screaming Eagles” of Fort Campbell, Kentucky—and placed the Arkansas National Guard under federal orders. On September 25, 1957, under federal troop escort, the Nine were escorted back into Central for their first full day of classes.

After the Nine suffered repeated harassment—such as kicking, shoving, and name calling—the military assigned guards to escort them to classes. The guards, however, could not go everywhere with the students, and harassment continued in places such as the restrooms and locker rooms. The Little Rock Nine did not have any classes together. They were not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities at Central. Nevertheless, they returned to school every day to persist in obtaining an equal education.

Huey Newton & Bobby Seale

Huey Newton

Huey Newton, along with Bobby Seale, founded the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Illiterate when he graduated from high school, Newton taught himself how to read and studied law at the San Francisco School of Law. He met Seale at Merritt, and in 1966 they formed the Black Panthers as an alternative to the nonviolent civil rights movement. The Panthers called on all blacks to arm themselves for the liberation struggle. The militant party engaged in several high-profile, violent confrontations with police. In 1967, Newton was convicted of voluntary manslaughter for killing a policeman. After three mistrials, Newton was cleared in 1971. That same year he announced the Panthers would embrace a nonviolent strategy and shift their focus to offering community services to African Americans. Newton earned a Ph.D. in social philosophy from the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1980. He was shot and killed in Oakland in 1989.

Bobby Seale

Seale, with Huey Newton, founded the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. After serving in the Air Force, Seale attended Oakland's Merritt College and was moved to radicalism after hearing Malcolm X speak. Seale and Newton formed the Black Panthers as an alternative to the nonviolent civil rights movement. The Panthers called on all blacks to arm themselves for the liberation struggle. The militant party engaged in several high-profile, violent confrontations with police. Seale was one of the "Chicago Eight" charged and convicted of conspiracy to violently disrupt the Democratic National Convention of 1968 (conviction later overturned) and was a codefendant in a Connecticut case charging murder of Alex Rackley, an alleged informer on the party. He was acquitted in 1971. That same year he abandoned militancy and endorsed a nonviolent strategy that focused on providing community services to African Americans.

Black Panthers

U.S. African-American militant party, founded (1966) in Oakland, Calif. Originally espousing violent revolution as the only means of achieving black liberation, the Black Panthers called on African Americans to arm themselves for the liberation struggle. In the late 1960s party members became involved in a series of violent confrontations with the police (resulting in deaths on both sides) and in a series of court cases, some resulting from direct shoot-outs with the police and some from independent charges. Among the most notable of the trials was that of Huey Newton for killing a policeman in 1967, which resulted in three mistrials, the last in 1971. Bobby Seale, one of the "Chicago Eight" charged and convicted of conspiracy to violently disrupt the Democratic National Convention of 1968 (conviction later overturned), was a codefendant in a Connecticut case charging murder of an alleged informer on the party. He was acquitted in 1971. A third major trial was of 13 Panthers in New York City accused of conspiring to bomb public places. They were also acquitted in 1971.