

MUHAMMAD ALI CENTER

Muhammad Ali

Boxer and Humanitarian : b. 1942

"If I thought going to war would bring freedom and equality to twenty-two million of my people, they wouldn't have to draft me. I'd join tomorrow. But I either have to obey the laws of the land or the laws of Allah. I have nothing to lose by standing up and following my beliefs. We've been in jail for four hundred years."



Over forty years after he burst upon the scene as a gold-medal winner at the 1960 Olympics, in Rome, Muhammad Ali remains a magical figure, known and loved throughout the world.

As a boxer, Muhammad brought unprecedented speed and grace to his sport, while his charm and wit changed forever what the public expected a champion to be. His accomplishments in the ring were the stuff of legend. But there was always far more to Muhammad than what took place in a boxing ring.

Muhammad's life and career have been played out as much on the front pages of national and international newspapers as on the inside sports pages. His early embrace of the Nation of Islam and his insistence on being called Muhammad Ali instead of his "slave name," Cassius Clay, heralded a new era in black pride. His refusal to be inducted into the United States Army anticipated the growing antiwar movement of the 1960's.

Traveling across continents, he has hand-delivered food and medical supplies to such needy sites as the Harapan Kita Hospital for Children in Jakarta, Indonesia; the street children of Morocco; and Sister Beltran's orphanage for Liberian refugees in the Ivory Coast, to name just a few.

At home, he has visited countless numbers of soup kitchens and hospitals. In schools across America, he has taught children the virtues of tolerance and understanding through his book HEALING. Muhammad has perhaps raised more money for American charities than any other living person.

Muhammad has been the recipient of countless awards. In addition to being honored by Amnesty International with their "Lifetime Achievement Award," the Secretary-General of the United Nations bestowed him with a citation as "United Nations Messenger of Peace." He was also named the "International Ambassador of Jubilee 2000," a global organization dedicated to relieving debt in developing nations. Former President Jimmy Carter has called Muhammad "Mr. International Friendship."

Muhammad's dream to share his inspiration with the world is now being realized through the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky. The Center appeals to the heart, spirit, and imagination by inspiring both children and adults to form new commitments in their lives in areas of personal growth, integrity and respect for others, and provide them the tools to make these commitments happen.

MUHAMMAD ALI CENTER

Anne Braden

Civil Rights Activist, Writer: 1924 - 2006

"As long as people of color can be written off as expendable, and therefore acceptable victims of the most extreme inequities, none of the basic injustices of our society will be addressed; they will only get worse."



Anne Braden is best known for a single act in 1954: helping a black couple buy a house in an all-white neighborhood of Louisville, Kentucky.

She and her husband were put on trial for sedition, blacklisted for jobs, threatened, and reviled by their fellow white Southerners for what they did. But, as she told the Kentucky Historical Society, "We never even thought of saying no...We didn't really think about it [because] our minds were on other things."

The "other things" on Braden's mind back then had to do with gaining equal access, regardless of race, to nearly every other aspect of life in the South: hospitals, schools, parks, public transportation, restaurants, hotels and more. "There was no organized movement to desegregate housing at that time," said Braden, "but it would have been unthinkable to us to say no."

Braden's long career as an activist began when she was 20 and spanned six decades. She's well known for her efforts to end racial discrimination, less known for her many other battles. She fought for workers rights, helped organize labor unions, and was especially interested when black and white workers joined forces to better conditions. She opposed war, fought for amnesty for those who refused to go to war, and worked for nuclear disarmament. She championed women's rights and what she termed environmental justice.

In addition to being a political activist, Braden was the wife of labor organizer Carl Braden and a mother of three. She worked both as a professional journalist and as a manual laborer. She wrote a book about her sedition trial, The Wall Between, which was nominated for the National Book Award. A biography of Braden's life titled Subversive Southerner, written by Catherine Fosl, was published in 2002.

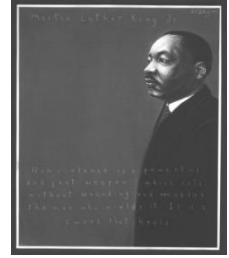
*Biography courtesy of www.americanswhotellthetruth.org

M U H A M M A D A L I C E N T E R

Martin Luther King Jr.

Clergyman, Civil Rights Leader : 1929 - 1968

"Non-violence is a powerful and just weapon which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it."



Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia, the son of a Baptist minister. He completed his formal education with degrees from Morehouse College, Crozier Theological Seminary and Boston University (Ph. D. in Systematic Theology, 1955). While serving as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, he led the boycott which resulted in the desegregation of that city's bus system. His resolve in the face of threats to his safety as well as that of his family, his conviction that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," and his ability to write and speak with extraordinary power and clarity brought him to national prominence as a leader of the movement to achieve racial justice in America.

He studied the writings and example of Mohandas K. Gandhi in India who powerfully influenced his philosophy of non-violence. When he accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, King said: "Non-violence is not sterile passivity, but a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation." Like Gandhi, King also understood the strategic value of non-violence: "We have neither the techniques nor the numbers to win a violent campaign." His commitment to non-violence led him to oppose the American war in Viet Nam.

Like Henry David Thoreau, Dr. King believed in the necessity of resisting unjust laws with civil disobedience. As a leader of many demonstrations in support of the rights of African-Americans, he was subject to frequent arrest and imprisonment. His *Letters from a Birmingham Jail* (1963) was a call to conscience directed primarily at American religious leaders.

When a fellow civil rights worker was killed after the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, King said: "If physical death is the price that some must pay to save us and our white brothers from eternal death of the spirit then no sacrifice could be more redemptive." Martin Luther King's own redemptive sacrifice was exacted by an assassin's bullets on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. *Biography courtesy of www.americanswhotellthetruth.org

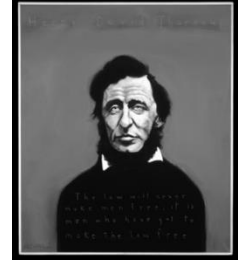
MUHAMMAD ALI CENTER

Henry David Thoreau

Naturalist, Writer, Social Critic: 1817-1862

"The law will never make men free; it is men who have got to make the law free"

In 1845, Henry David Thoreau moved to Walden Pond. The notes and journal entries he kept during the time he spent living at the pond would be transformed into the timeless American classic, Walden (1854). Walden and the essay "Civil Disobedience" are rich with observations that have influenced the thinking of people around the world, including Martin Luther King Jr. In the conclusion of "Civil Disobedience" Thoreau stresses the importance of the individual citizen stating: "There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor."



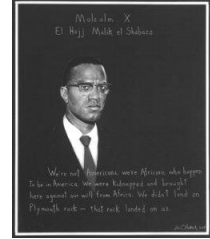
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M U H A M M A D A L I C E N T E R

Malcolm X

Black Nationalist, Muslim Leader : 1925 – 1965

"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."



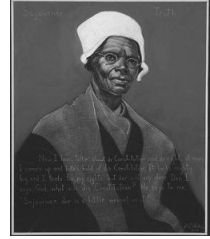
Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska. The top student and only African-American in his eighth grade class, Malcolm dropped out of school after his teacher told him that a "black boy" could never become a lawyer. After joining The Nation of Islam, he took "X" as his last name, signifying his unknown African tribal name that had been lost when his family was given the slave name "Little." Malcolm X became a brilliant and charismatic speaker, building the Nation of Islam from 400 to 30,000 members. In 1964, he broke with the Nation and formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Journeying to Mecca, he took the name El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and began speaking on international black consciousness and integration rather than racial separatism. While preparing to speak in a Harlem ballroom on February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was shot and killed by three assassins from the Nation of Islam. His book, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, is considered one of the most important non-fiction books of the 20th Century.

*Biography courtesy of www.americanswhotellthetruth.org

MUHAMMAD ALI CENTER

Sojourner Truth

Abolitionist, Evangelist, Feminist : 1797? - 1883



"Now I hears talkin about de Constitution and de rights of man. I comes up and I takes hold of dis Constitution. It looks mighty big, and I feels for my rights, but der aint any dare. Den I says, God, what ails dis Constitution? He says to me, "Sojourner, dere is a little weasel in it."

Born a slave, Sojourner Truth grew up with no schooling and was unable to read or write. Yet, she became one of America's greatest orators and wrote one of the 19th century's most inspirational autobiographies. In 1827, Truth escaped slavery by fleeing to a Quaker family. At six feet tall, Truth's commanding presence was complemented by a tremendous natural charisma. She became a powerful voice against racial oppression, and later, for the women's suffrage movement. In 1851, at a women's rights convention in Ohio, she gave her most famous speech, in which she repeatedly asked, "Ain't I A Woman?". Truth traveled as an itinerant preacher for about 10 years. She then settled in Battle Creek, Michigan for the last 30 years of her life. Her funeral there in 1883 was the largest that town had ever seen.

*Biography courtesy of www.americanswhotellthetruth.org

MUHAMMAD ALI CENTER

Harriet Tubman

Underground Railroad Conductor, Social Reformer, Nurse, Spy: 1820? - 1913

"I started with this idea in my head, There's two things I've got a right to, and these are, Death or Liberty — one or the other I mean to have."



Born into slavery, Harriet Tubman became the most famous leader of the Underground Railroad. Less than one year after escaping slavery, in 1850, Tubman joined the Underground Railroad. Her first expedition took place in 1851, when she managed to escape north with her sister and her sister's children. From that time until the onset of the Civil War, Tubman traveled to the South at least 18 times and enabled the escape of close to 300 slaves. During the Civil War, Tubman served as a nurse, scout, and spy for the Union army. She took part in a military campaign that resulted in the rescue of 756 slaves. After the war, Tubman continued her involvement in social issues including women's rights. In 1908, she established a home for elderly and indigent blacks in Auburn, New York that later became known as the Harriet Tubman House. She died there on March 10, 1913.

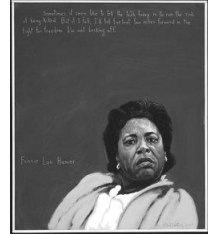
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MUHAMMAD ALI CENTER

Fannie Lou Hamer

Sharecropper, Civil Rights Activist: 1917 - 1977

"Sometimes it seem like to tell the truth today is to run the risk of being killed. But if I fall, I'll fall five feet four inches forward in the fight for freedom. I'm not backing off."



In 1962, the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNCC) came to Fannie Lou Hamer's town and encouraged blacks to register as voters. Hamer volunteered, even though she had not previously known that it was a Constitutional Right for blacks to vote. After working with SNCC, she lost her job, received death threats, and was severely beaten by the police in an effort to intimidate her. Yet Hamer remained undeterred. In 1964, she helped found the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) and in 1969, she helped to start Freedom Farms Corporation, which lent land to blacks until they had enough money to buy it. She worked with the National Council of Negro Women, organized food co-operatives, and helped convene the National Women's Political Caucus in 1970. In her last years, she received many honors and awards. Engraved on her headstone in her hometown of Ruleville, Mississippi, are her famous words: "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired."

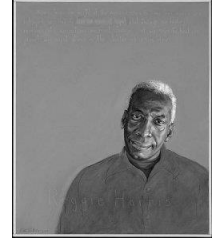
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M U H A M M A D A L I C E N T E R

Reggie Harris

Musician, Storyteller: b. 1952

"Many times the weight of the world crashes in... we feel broken and betrayed. We start to lose our sense of hope. But though our history remains, it's our actions we must change... if we hope to heal our planet we must stand... in the shelter of each other."



In 1974, Reggie Harris met Kim Richards. As their personal relationship deepened at Temple University, they began to sing together at local Philadelphia clubs and coffeehouses. Kim and Reggie began touring together in 1980. As they traveled the country in the early 1980s, Kim and Reggie began to develop educationally-oriented programs using songs such as 'Wade in the Water', 'Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees,' and 'Steal Away' from the Underground Railroad and Civil Rights movements. By the late 1980s, many schools included African American history in their curricula. At the same time, elementary schools, high schools and colleges, church groups, and performing arts centers such as the Kennedy Center became interested in Kim's and Reggie's work. With success, the couple went deeper into the music, realizing that the songs that had sung in church had been integral to freedom movements from the 1860s to the 1960s.

Through traditional music and storytelling, Kim and Reggie continue to teach the legacy of race and racism in this country and to inspire people to have the spirit, courage and decency to rise above it and heal. Reggie says that through their work they, "... bridge the gaps between those on the left and right...between the unaware and the true believers...between the oppressed and the oppressors and... provide a basis for dialogue and reconciliation."

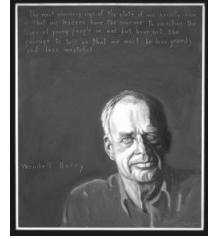
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MUHAMMAD ALI CENTER

Wendell Berry

Farmer, Essayist, Conservationist, Novelist, Teacher, Poet : b. 1934

"The most alarming sign of the state of our society now is that our leaders have the courage to sacrifice the lives of young people in war but have not the courage to tell us that we must be less greedy and wasteful."



For decades, Wendell Berry has advocated personal activism on behalf of the environment, social justice, and peace. In 1979, he participated in non-violent civil disobedience against the construction of a nuclear power plant in Marble Hill, Indiana. Opposing the use of coal as an energy source, in 2009 Berry joined over 2,000 others in non-violently blocking the gates to a coal-fired power plant in Washington, D.C., and, later that year, protested the construction of a coal-burning power plant in Clark County, Kentucky. As a result, in 2011 the Kentucky Public Service Commission cancelled the construction of this power plant. In 2010, he withdrew personal papers he had donated to the University of Kentucky because he objected to a decision to name a basketball-players' dormitory the Wildcat Coal Lodge. In 1965, Berry purchased a farm in Lane's Landing, Kentucky, where he has farmed, resided, and written to the present day.

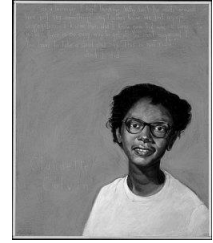
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MUHAMMAD ALI CENTER

Claudette Colvin

Civil Rights Activist : b. 1940

"...as a teenager, I kept thinking, Why don't the adults around here just say something? Say it so that they know we don't accept segregation? I knew then and I know now that, when it comes to justice, there is no easy way to get it. You can't sugarcoat it. You have to take a stand and say, 'This is not right.' And I did."



On March 2, 1955, fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin boarded a segregated, city bus on her way home from school. At one stop, several white passengers got on, and the bus driver ordered her and three others to move. Colvin stayed. As she says, "I felt like **Sojourner Truth** was pushing down on one shoulder and **Harriet Tubman** was pushing down on the other – saying, 'Sit down girl!' I was glued to my seat."

Colvin's refusal led to her arrest. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to Montgomery to fight her arrest, and leaders in the civil rights movement sought a way to end bus segregation. They looked at Claudette Colvin as a potential "face" of the movement. However, she was deemed too young and her complexion too dark to be the right fit. Nine months later Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus and the boycott that was contemplated when Colvin was arrested, began. Yet, Claudette Colvin's role was not over. She and the three other young women who were harassed on that bus were the plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed in 1956 that challenged the constitutionality of segregated buses. In *Browder v. Gayle* the Supreme Court decided that Montgomery's bus segregation was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, leading to a huge victory for civil rights.

Yet, rather than seeing her name on par with Rosa Parks' for the strength and courage she demonstrated in defying segregation, Claudette Colvin has been largely forgotten.

*Biography courtesy of www.americanswhotellthetruth.org