

# **Freedom Fighters**

**10 Great Men and Women**

**Who Fought For Freedom,  
Justice and Civil Rights**

**For**

**African Americans**

## **William H. Carney**

(1840-1908)

Sergeant William H. Carney was the first African American to earn the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery during war.

Carney was a member of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, a Colored Regiment that fought in the Civil War.

On July 18, 1863, the 54<sup>th</sup> charged Fort Wagner on Morris Island, South Carolina. The unit was met with heavy fire. During the battle Sergeant Carney carried the US flag. Although wounded, he continued on and never let the flag touch the ground.

The 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts lost 116 men in the battle, including their commander Colonel Robert Gould Shaw.

Carney earned his medal for distinguished service during the Civil War. The medal was not awarded to him until May 1900.



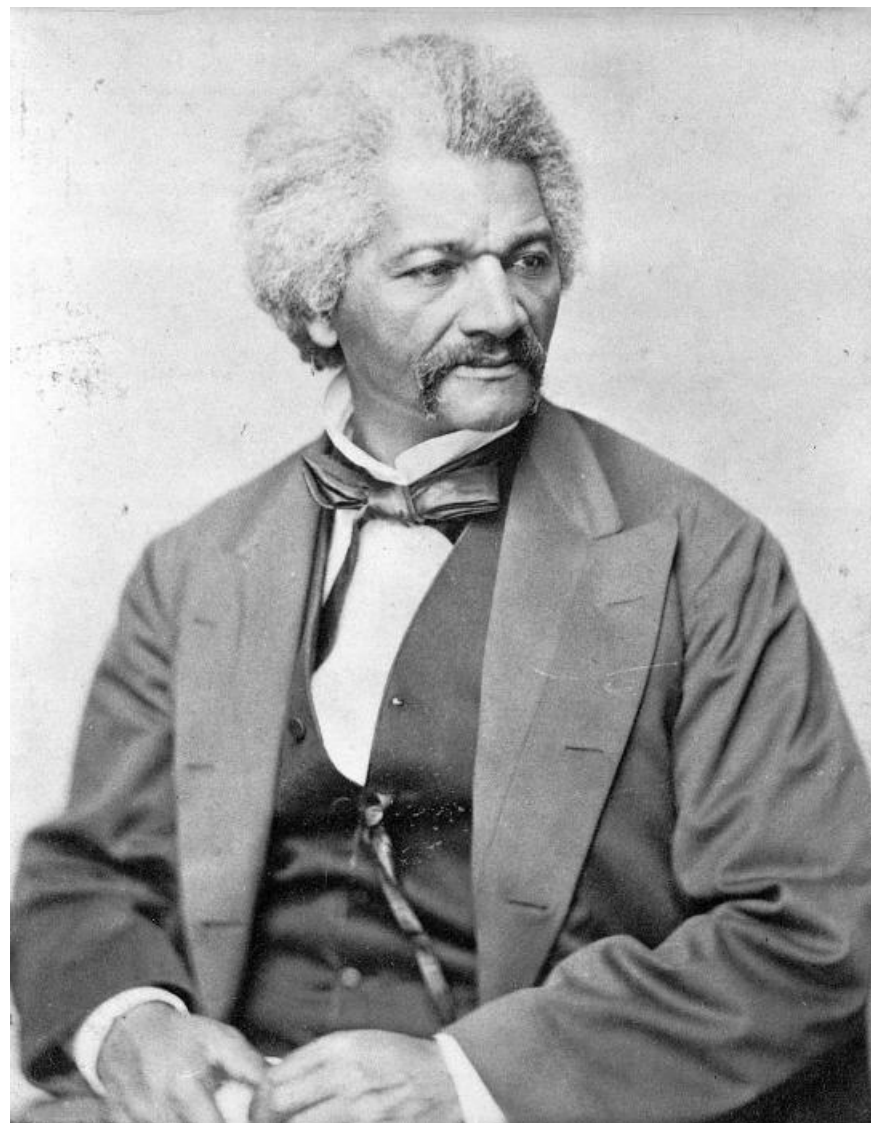
## **Frederick Douglass**

(c. 1818-1895)

Frederick Douglass (Frederick Bailey) was born into slavery on a plantation in Talbot County, Maryland. The exact date of his birth is not known but most historians believe he was born in February 1818.

In September 1838 Douglass, disguised as a sailor, escaped to New York and declared himself a free man. He changed his name from Bailey to Douglass to avoid being captured, and began working to help others held in bondage. Douglass became a well known orator and abolitionist and went around the country speaking out about the evils of slavery.

In 1863, when President Lincoln authorized black enlistment in the Union Army, the Governor of Massachusetts asked Douglass to help recruit Black men for the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. Douglass agreed and wrote an editorial that urged blacks to fight for the Union cause. His sons Charles and Lewis were among the first to join.



## **Fannie Lou Hamer**

(1917-1977)

Fannie Lou Hamer was born to sharecropper parents on October 6, 1917 in Montgomery County, Mississippi. As a child she worked in the fields alongside her parents.

In the summer of 1962, Hamer attended a protest meeting where she met civil rights activists who were in Mississippi to encourage African Americans to register to vote. Hamer joined the cause and dedicated her life to the fight for civil rights.

She worked for the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC), an organization of mostly African American students who engaged in acts of civil disobedience to fight racial segregation and injustice in the south.

Hamer was a founding member of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In August 1964 she spoke at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey.



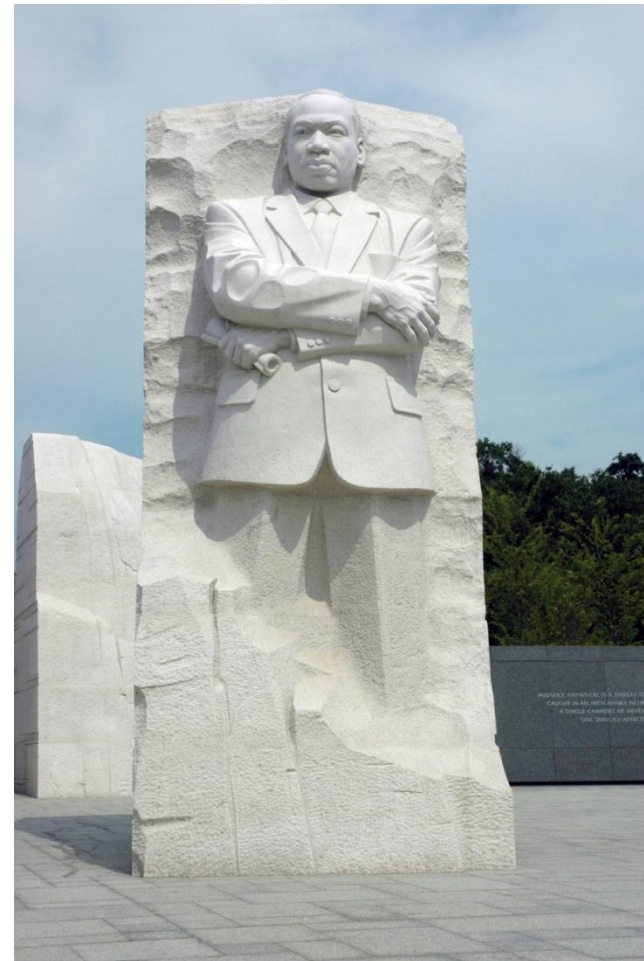
**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**  
(1929-1968)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the leader of the civil rights movement and led nonviolent protests in the 1950s and 60s fighting for equality for African Americans.

He served as spokesman for the *Montgomery Bus Boycott* and in 1957 was elected president of the *Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (SCLC).

In 1963, at the *March on Washington*, Dr. King made his now famous *I Have a Dream* speech. In 1964, at the age of 35, he became the youngest person and second African American to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 2011 a memorial in his honor was opened at the National Mall in Washington, DC. The memorial features a 30 foot statue of Dr. King, called the *Stone of Hope*.



Stone of Hope  
Washington, DC

## **John Lewis**

(born 1940)

John Lewis, US House of Representative from Georgia, was very active in the civil rights movement. He was a founder and served as Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee. In 1961 he participated in Freedom Rides to desegregate busing in the South.

Lewis worked with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and was one of the organizers of the 1963 *March on Washington*. He was also one of the leaders of the *Selma to Montgomery March for Voting Rights*.

In 1977 he ran for the US House of Representatives and lost. He ran again in 1986 and won. Lewis entered the House in 1987 and has served continuously since.



## Thurgood Marshall

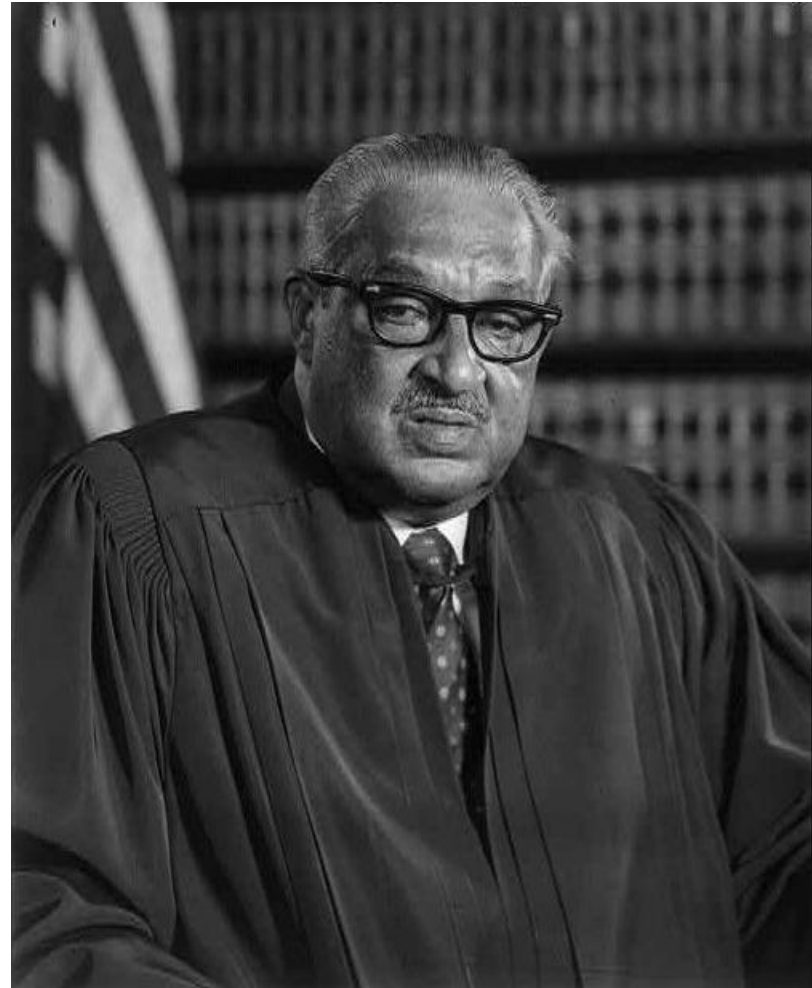
(1908-1993)

Thurgood Marshall was the nation's first African American Supreme Court Justice.

He was born in Baltimore, Maryland on July 2, 1908. After graduating from Lincoln University with honors, Marshall applied to the University of Maryland Law School and was rejected because of race. This set the tone for the rest of Marshall's career. He attended historically black Howard University School of Law and graduated magna cum laude in 1933.

After law school Marshall went to work for the NAACP and later became their full time legal counsel. Over the following decades he devoted his time to fighting cases of racism. His most famous case was the 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*.

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Marshall to serve as the first black United States Solicitor General. In 1967, Johnson nominated him for the United States Supreme Court, where he served for 24 years.



## Rosa Parks

(1913-2005)

Rosa Parks was a civil rights leader. She grew up in Montgomery, Alabama and attended all-black Alabama State College. Parks joined the NAACP in 1943 and was elected secretary of the Montgomery branch that same year.

Parks worked as a seamstress and rode segregated buses to and from work. On December 1, 1955 she was asked to give up her seat on the bus so a white man could sit down. Parks refused and was arrested.

Parks arrest triggered a 381 day boycott initiated by the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). More than 40,000 protesters walked, carpooled or took taxis rather than ride segregated buses. The MIA also filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court. The court ruled in their favor and “declared segregated seating unconstitutional.” The ruling was later upheld by the US Supreme Court.

After the boycott, it was difficult to find work so Parks and her husband moved to Detroit, Michigan. She remained a committed activist until her death in 2005.



Rosa Parks and President Bill Clinton



## **John S. Rock**

(1825-1866)

John S. Rock was a teacher, doctor, dentist, abolitionist and lawyer. He was born to free parents in Salem, New Jersey. Education was very important to the Rock family. At the age of 19, John had acquired enough to go to work as a teacher. While working as a teacher, he studied medicine under two white physicians.

In 1848 he applied to medical school and was rejected because of race. Rock turned his interest to dentistry and apprenticed with a white dentist in Philadelphia. In 1853 Rock moved to Boston and set up a dentistry and medical practice. Most of Rock's patients were fugitive slaves passing through Boston on their way to Canada and freedom.

When Rock became ill his doctors advised him to cut back on his work. He gave up his medical and dental practices and began to study law. In 1861 he was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar. As a lawyer Rock advocated for the rights of African Americans.

In 1865, John S. Rock became the first black attorney admitted to the bar of the United States Supreme Court. He died before he was able to argue a case before the court.



## **William Still**

(1821-1902)

William Still was an abolitionist and conductor on the Underground Railroad.

He was born in Burlington County, New Jersey on October 7, 1821. He moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1844 and began working for the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society.

William Still is sometimes referred to as the “Father of the Underground Railroad.” He helped countless numbers of fugitive slaves each month and kept detailed records. One of the fugitive slaves that he assisted was his older brother Peter, who had been left behind when their mother escaped forty years earlier.



## Harriet Tubman

(c.1820-1913)

Harriet Tubman was an abolitionist and Underground Railroad operator who helped hundreds of African Americans escape slavery.

Tubman was born to enslaved parents in Dorchester County, Maryland. When her owner died in 1849, she feared that she and other family members would be sold to someone in the deep south. Leaving her husband, a free man, behind she fled to Pennsylvania.

Harriet became allied with William Still of Pennsylvania and Thomas Garrett of Wilmington, Delaware. She returned to the South at least 15 times and helped more than 200 men, women and children escape.

When the Civil War broke out she was asked to assist the Union Army. Tubman nursed wounded soldiers, trained scouts and helped lead a raid against Confederate troops.



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1. What is a FREEDOM or RIGHT that you have?

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2. Why is that FREEDOM or RIGHT important to you?

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3. What would your life be like if you did not have that FREEDOM or RIGHT?

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Freedom Fighter: \_\_\_\_\_

What did they fight for?

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What do you like about the Freedom Fighter?

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