

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

FRED LEE SHUTTLESWORTH

pastor, soldier, activist

"You are made by the struggles you choose"

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COURTESY OF ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ALABAMA

Background Information

Born: March 18, 1922; Died: October 5, 2011

Shuttlesworth grew up with a mother who was very tough. She taught him to be combative, which prepared him to take a lead in the civil rights movementⁱ. He served in World War II as a truck driver, and after the war he decided to be a minister. Shuttlesworth graduated from Selma University in 1952. In 1953, he graduated from Alabama State Teachers College and became the pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church. He moved to Birmingham and became an advocate for voter registration efforts, as well as the bus boycotts.

Shuttlesworth's Resistance

Using his influence as a pastor, Shuttlesworth had a major impact on his community. In 1956, he founded the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), which organized boycotts and lawsuits against segregation in Birminghamⁱⁱ. In 1958, he was one of the founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which focused on direct action against segregation through civil dissentⁱⁱⁱ.

Shuttlesworth and his wife Ruby tried to enroll their children at an all-White high school. They were attacked by a mob of Klansmen and other White supremacists from Birmingham. Shuttlesworth and Ruby were badly injured in the attack, and the police didn't provide any protection. One of the attackers went on to be involved in the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing that killed four young Black girls.

With the support of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), Shuttlesworth started a campaign against segregation through demonstrations and boycotts. He was always ready to fight for the rights of African Americans, even when others around him thought it was better to wait. His fiery personality and determination supported the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Achievements

In 2001, President Clinton presented him with the Presidential Citizen's Medal in recognition of his hard work and dedication to support the civil rights movement and end segregation. The Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport was named in his honor. Even after 1965, Shuttlesworth continued to fight for justice in Birmingham and Cincinnati, leaving behind a legacy of activism and courage^{iv}.

Essential Questions

1. Why do you think Shuttlesworth continued to preach a message of non-violent protest, even after he was the victim of a violent mob assault?

2. Shuttlesworth was known for being confrontational, and not letting politeness get in the way of progress. What are the risks of being outspoken and confrontational in the fight for justice? What are the risks of being soft-spoken and overly polite?

3. *“You are made by the struggles you choose”*
 - a. What struggles have you faced that shape who you are?

ⁱ Fred Lee Shuttlesworth. (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1093>.

ⁱⁱ Fred Shuttlesworth (1922-2011) (U.S. National Park Service). (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/people/fred-shuttlesworth.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) (U.S. National Park Service). (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/articles/sclc.htm>.

^{iv} Nordheimer, J. (2011, October 5). Rev. L. Shuttlesworth, an Elder Statesman for Civil Rights, Dies at 89. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/06/us/rev-fred-l-shuttlesworth-civil-rights-leader-dies-at-89.html>.