

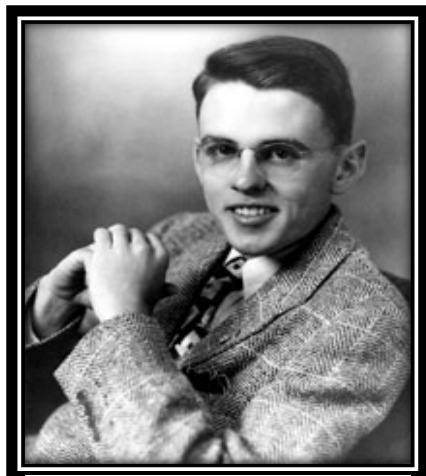
PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

JAMES REEB

soldier, activist, minister,

“A shining example of manhood at its best.” –Martin Luther King, Jr. on James Reeb

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Background Information

Born January 1, 1927; Died March 11, 1965

James Reeb was raised in Kansas and Casper, Wyoming. After a tour of duty in the Army at the end of World War II, Reeb decided to become a minister. He graduated from a Lutheran college in Minnesota and then from Princeton Theological Seminary. Reeb was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. He became an assistant minister at the All Souls Church in Washington, D.C., then he eventually moved to Boston to work for the American Friends Service Committee.

Reeb's Resistance

On March 7, 1965, Reeb and his wife watched news coverage of the “Bloody Sunday,” when the police attacked peaceful protesters while they marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. The next morning, Martin Luther King Jr. called on clergy from around the country to join him for the Selma to Montgomery March, and Reeb boarded a plane that evening. Several people warned him that he could get hurt in the march, but he “saw the decision as one of conscience, and felt he had no choice.”ⁱⁱ There was a pending court order to decide whether the march could legally be held, so a symbolic prayer was held the next day, known as “Turnaround Tuesday,”ⁱⁱⁱ to prevent a confrontation with police.

While some went home afterwards, Reeb decided to stay until permission for the march was granted. That evening, Reeb and some other friends were attacked outside a diner by a group of White supremacists. Reeb died from his injuries. The men who attacked him were initially taken into custody and then later acquitted. Reeb's death triggered a national uproar about the injustices occurring across the country during the Civil Rights Movement.

Achievements

His act of showing support as a White man, alongside thousands of other White people around the country, proved to White supremacists and those complacent in injustice that people of all backgrounds care about Black lives. Notably, Jamie Lee Jackson, who was Black, also died yet did not receive the same attention. Nevertheless, Reeb's death increased national attention on Selma and the Civil Rights Movement.

Essential Questions

1. James Reeb's murder gained much more attention than murders of Black activists because he was a White man. Does that still exist today? What should be done to fight against this disproportionate media coverage?

2. Reeb was a White man who fought for Black Americans' Civil Rights. What do you think the role of White people should be in the fight for Black Americans' Civil Rights? How can you imitate Reeb, and support communities that you don't necessarily identify with, particularly in your own school or town?

3. ***"A shining example of manhood at its best."*** –Martin Luther King, Jr. on James Reeb
 - a. Given what we know about Reeb, why do you think Dr. King described Reeb in this way?

ⁱ Editors, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute (2019). "James Reeb." Stanford university. Retrieved from <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/reeb-james>.

ⁱⁱ Teaching Tolerance Staff (2019). "James Reeb." Teaching Tolerance. Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/texts/james-reeb>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Preston, Hannah (2019). "What Happened to Rev. James Reeb? True Story Behind Subject of NPR's Podcast 'White Lies.'" Newsweek. Retrieved from <https://www.newsweek.com/white-lies-true-story-james-reeb-what-happened-facts-1434575>.