

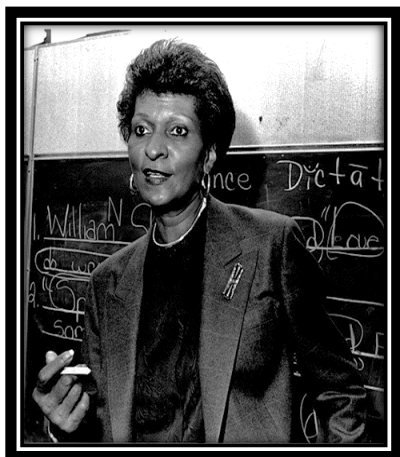
PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

MARVA COLLINS

educator, trainer, innovator

“When you believe in what you do and have a passion about what you do, it is easy. It’s like climbing a mountain – it’s difficult getting there, but it’s beautiful once you’re there.”

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Background Information

Born August 31, 1936; Died June 24, 2015

Marva Collins was raised in Atmore, Alabama. Collins’ father placed a high value on education, self-reliance and achievement, pushing Marva to succeed.ⁱ She attended the Bethlehem Academy and then studied secretarial sciences at Clark College. However, she was unable to work as a secretary because of her race.ⁱⁱ She later taught at Monroe County Training School, and eventually moved to Chicago and married Clarence Collins.

Collin’s Resistance

Collins was frustrated with the Chicago public school system. She thought it was failing inner-city children and intentionally neglecting students who were Black and low income. In response, she founded her own school to inspire student independence and success. Her core mission was to train teachers to create a more positive classroom environment and to put greater emphasis on English, math, reading and classic literature.

Her Westside Preparatory School was located on the second floor of her home. Her first students included her own children and some children from the surrounding neighborhood. At the end of the school’s first year, every student had scored at least five grades higher on their standardized tests.ⁱⁱⁱ Since Westside was founded, classrooms have been opened in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Florida. Collins has trained over 100,000 teachers.

Achievements

The school’s success led Collins to be featured on *60 Minutes*, *Good Morning America*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*; and her journey was depicted in the film, *The Marva Collins Story*. President Ronald Reagan even offered her the position of Secretary of Education. She declined the offer to continue developing Westside. Collins eventually returned to the Chicago Public Schools system to improve the schools with the most challenges. Collins received over 40 honorary degrees and was named one of the Legendary Women of the World in 1982.^{iv} Collins is remembered for how much she cared for students, and how she inspired them to be courageous and ambitious through their studies.

Essential Questions

1. Marva Collins felt the public school system was failing her, so she took matters into her own hands and created an alternative school. Do you think it is better to work within systems (for example, being a public school teacher) or to work outside the system (for example, starting your own school). Why?

2. Marva Collins turned down an opportunity to serve as Secretary of Education under President Ronald Reagan, but she declined to continue work in her community. Do you believe that is the best choice? Why or why not?

3. Marva Collins empowered her students through her teaching. Have you had a teacher who supported your success and wellbeing? What was special about that teacher?

4. *“When you believe in what you do and have a passion about what you do, it is easy. It’s like climbing a mountain- it’s difficult getting there, but it’s beautiful once you’re there.”*
 - a. What social issue is your mountain to climb?

ⁱ Johnson, Janis (2004). “Marva Collins: National Humanities Medal.” National Endowment for the Humanities. Retrieved from <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/national-humanities-medals/marva-collins>.

ⁱⁱ Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica (2019). “Marva Collins.” Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marva-Collins>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Goodman, Mark D. (2019). “Marva Collins Biography.” The History Makers. Retrieved from <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/marva-collins-40>.

^{iv} Bondi, Carrie-Ann (2018). “Marva Collins, Her Method, and Her “Philosophy for Living.” The Objective Standard. Retrieved from <https://www.theobjectivestandard.com/2018/08/marva-collins-her-method-and-her-philosophy-for-living/>.