

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

James Roebuck

politician, student activist

“I focus on things I believe in and that are important to bring about change, and that is what I think every student ought to do” Page | 1



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Background Information

Born: February 12, 1945

James Roebuck was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As a child, he learned about protesting and political activism from members of his church community. He went to college at Virginia Union University in Richmond. Roebuck then received a PhD degree at the University of Virginia (UVA). At UVA, he was the first Black person to be elected as the Student Council president. The photograph on this page shows Roebuck on the campus of UVA, reading his historic “May Days” speech to UVA president Edgar Shannon.

Roebuck’s Resistance

In 1970, many college students were protesting against the Vietnam War. At Kent State University, some National Guard troops shot and killed several student protestors. Roebuck was a college student at this time, and he was affected by the Kent State campus shootings. As student council president at UVA, Roebuck led the “May Days” protest in Charlottesville. At the protest, Roebuck read a list of nine demands to the UVA president. The event brought together members of the Black and White communities of Charlottesville. Students, faculty, and staff came together and stood up for what is right.

The UVA community supported Roebuck, but he still experienced discrimination when he travelled outside of campus. For example, he was forced to sit in “colored only” sections of restaurants.

Achievements

After college, Roebuck was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, where he has worked for 34 years. He is now a leader in the government. Roebuck is often invited back to the University of Virginia campus to speak about his time as the student council president.¹

¹ Newman, C. (2019, May 7). Former Student Council President Reflects on 'May Days,' His Historic Election. Retrieved from <https://news.virginia.edu/content/former-student-council-president-reflects-may-days-his-historic-election>.

