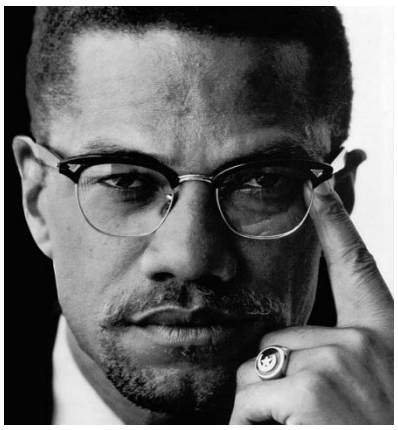
Rosa Parks and her famous act of defiance

"People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically [...]. I was not old, although some people have an image of me being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in".

From *My Story* by Rosa Parks and Jim Haskins (1992)

Malcolm X's fight



"Our objective is complete freedom, justice, and equality by any means necessary".
"If you're not ready to die for it, put the word 'freedom' out of your vocabulary".
"You can't separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom".

Born Malcolm Little in 1925, in Omaha, Nebraska, Malcolm was the son of a Baptist preacher. After The Ku Klux Klan made threats against his father, the family moved to Lansing, Michigan. There, in the face of similar threats, he continued to encourage blacks to take control of their lives.

Malcolm's father was murdered by the Klan-like Black Legionaries, but it was claimed he had committed suicide. The family experienced great difficulties and was destroyed. Malcolm, then six, was taken and placed in a foster home. Mrs. Little had a nervous breakdown from which she never recovered.

After the eighth grade, Malcolm abandoned school for a life of crime. When twenty-one, he was sentenced to prison for stealing and there encountered the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, leader of The Lost-Found nation of Islam, popularly known as The Black Muslims. Muhammad's thesis that the white man is the devil with whom blacks cannot live had a strong impact on Malcolm. He became a loyal disciple and adopted the X-symbolic of a stolen identity - as his last name.

After six years Malcolm was released from prison. Later, he became the minister of Temple No. 7 in Harlem, his accusations of racism and his advocacy of self-defense causing admiration, as well as fear, far beyond The New York black community.

In 1964, he left The Black Muslims organization, traveled to Mecca, and discovered that orthodox Muslims preach equality of the races, which led him to abandon the argument that whites are devils.

Having returned to America as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, he continued to be convinced that racism had destroyed the spirit of America and that only blacks could free themselves. In June 1964, he founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity and moved gradually in the direction of socialism. More sophisticated than in his Black Muslim days and of growing moral stature, he was assassinated by a Black Muslim at a rally of his organization in New York on February 21st, 1965. Malcolm X had predicted that, though he had little time to live, he would be more important in death than life.

Adapted from http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/malcolma-d

Martin Luther King Jr's dream

"We will not resort to violence. We will not degrade ourselves with hatred. Love will not be returned with hate".

"Not one hair of one head of one person should be harmed."

Martin Luther King Jr, near the Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC, on August 23rd, 1963.

Martin Luther King Jr was the second child of Martin Luther King Sr, a pastor, and Alberta Williams King, a former schoolteacher. He was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 15th, 1929.
A talented student, King went to segregated public schools and at the age of 15 was admitted to Morehouse College, where he studied medicine and law. He had no intention of following his father's career but changed his mind thanks to Dr. Benjamin Mays, an influential theologian, and open advocate for racial equality. After graduating in 1948, King entered Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, where he obtained a Bachelor of Divinity degree. King then earned a doctorate in systematic theology in 1955. While in Boston, he met Coretta Scott, a young singer. The couple wed in 1953 and settled in Montgomery, Alabama, they had four children.

Montgomery was a highly segregated city. After Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus and was arrested, activists coordinated a bus boycott that would continue for 381 days, placing severe economic tension on the public transport system and city center businesses. They chose Martin Luther King Jr. as the protest's leader and official spokesman.
The Supreme Court ruled segregated seating on public buses unconstitutional in November 1956. King, immensely influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and the activist Bayard Rustin, had become an inspirational champion of organized, nonviolent resistance. Reassured by the boycott's success, in 1957 he and other civil rights activists founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a group committed to accomplishing full equality for African Americans through nonviolence. He traveled across the country and around the world, giving lectures on nonviolent protest and civil rights as well as meeting with religious figures, activists, and political leaders.

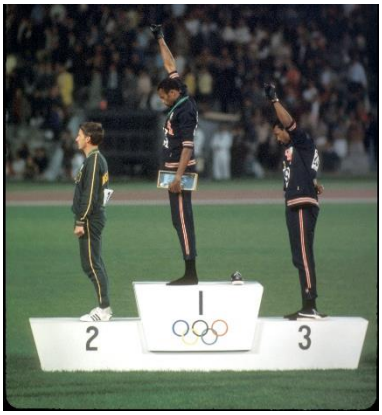
In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. worked with several civil rights and religious groups to organize the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, a peaceful political rally designed to highlight the injustices African Americans continued to face across the country. Held on August 28th and attended by some 200,000 to 300,000 participants, the event is widely regarded as a defining moment in the history of the American Civil Rights movement and a factor in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
The march culminated in King's most famous address, known as the "I Have a Dream" speech, a spirited call for peace and equality that many consider a masterpiece of rhetoric. Standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial - a monument to the president who a century earlier had abolished the institution of slavery in the United States — he shared his vision of a future in which *"this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."*

King's reputation was reinforced at home and abroad; he was named Man of the Year by TIME magazine and in 1964 became the youngest person ever awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The brutal attacks of state troopers in Selma intensified a conflict between Martin Luther King Jr. and young radicals who rejected his nonviolent methods and commitment to working within the established political structure. On the evening of April 4th, 1968, King was fatally shot while standing on the balcony of a motel in Memphis, where he had traveled to support a sanitation workers' strike. He hoped his Poor People's Campaign would help the fight for economic equality and social justice.

After years of campaigning by activists, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill creating a U.S. federal holiday in honor of King. Observed on the third Monday of January, it was first celebrated in 1986.

Adapted from http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-kinq-ir



Tommie Smith & John Carlos' silent gesture

"We had to be seen because we couldn't be heard."

"It is very discouraging to be in a team with white athletes. On the track you are Tommie Smith, the fastest man in the world, but once you are in the dressing rooms you are nothing more than a dirty Negro".

Tommie Smith reflecting on iconic Olympic moment.

Tommie Smith was born on June 6, 1944, in Clarksville, Texas, the seventh of twelve children born to Richard and Dora Smith. He grew to be a very athletic youth. He was voted "Most Valuable Athlete" in basketball, football, and track and field in his high school. At the 1968 Summer Olympics, Smith, aged 24, won the 200-meter sprint finals and gold medal in 19.83 seconds – the first time the 20-second barrier was broken officially.

His Black Power salute with John Carlos atop the medal podium to protest racism and injustice against African Americans in the United States caused controversy, as it was seen as politicizing the Olympic Games. It remains a symbolic moment in the history of the Black Power movement.

Tommie Smith and John Carlos were suspended from the US team and banned from the Olympic Village. They also faced consequences for challenging white authority in the U.S: the most serious of which were death threats against Smith, Carlos, and their families. Following their suspension by the International Olympic Committee, they faced great economic difficulty.

Extract from his autobiography:

On the night of October 16, 1968, I had stood on a platform on the infield of the Olympic Stadium in Mexico City, with a gold medal around my neck, black socks on my feet (for poverty), and a glove on the right fist I had raised in the air (for power). My head was bowed (for humility), and inside that bowed head, I prayed — prayed that the next sound I would hear, in the middle of the Star-Spangled Banner (American national anthem), would not be a gunshot, and prayed that the next thing I felt would not be the darkness of sudden death. I knew there were people, a lot of people, who wanted to kill me for what I was doing. It would take only one of them to put a bullet through me, from somewhere in the crowd of some 100,000, to end my life because I had dared to make my presence—as a black man, as a representative of oppressed people all over America, as a spokesman for the ambitious goals of the Olympic Project for Human Rights— known to the world.

That was my victory stand. Not only because I had won the gold medal in the 200-meter final a half hour earlier, in world-record time. This was my platform, the one I had earned by years of training my body and my mind for the ultimate achievement. The athletic achievement paved a road toward my quest for a social victory, where everyone would be listening to and watching my statement about the conditions in which my people and I were living in the greatest country in the world. I never said a word as the national anthem was playing. My silent gesture was designed to speak volumes. As hard as I had worked to climb the victory stand, I had worked just as hard to earn the platform that the stand provided. For me, and for all of those who had participated in the struggle to bring me there and to put that platform to its best use, this victory stand represented more than just a place to accept a medal.

Tommie Smith with David, *Silent Gesture* (2007)

Explore the lives of Civil Rights activists who courageously fought for their beliefs and left an indelible mark on history.

	Rosa Parks	**Martin Luther King Jr**	**Malcolm X**	**Tommie Smith & John Carlos**
Early life				
Influences & ideologies				
Actions				
Impact				