

Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Monument
Mississippi



INSET PHOTO AND TIE CLIP: MEDGAR WILEY AND MYRLIE BEASLEY EVERS PAPERS, MDAH; PIN: SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

The house that activists Medgar and Myrlie Evers shared holds memories of a loving family life and bears scars from its loss. If these walls could talk, they might tell of the couple's long hours of hard work shared over the kitchen table, or of an unforgettable night of bloodshed. Medgar Evers stood at the forefront of every major civil rights event in Mississippi from 1955 until his assassination in June of 1963, pivotal years of the long freedom struggle.

Hate is a Wasteful Emotion

As a boy, Medgar Evers walked 12 miles to school—each way—because the school closer to his home did not allow people like him to attend. In his hometown, he witnessed deadly violence against men that shared his skin color. At 18, he was drafted into the segregated US Army and fought at Normandy. He risked his life overseas, believing things would be different for black veterans once back home. Instead, he was bullied at the ballot box and even denied use of the restroom at many gas stations.

By the time he met Myrlie Beasley at Alcorn College, Medgar Evers was calling for change.

After graduation, Evers increased his civil rights activism while traveling the state selling insurance. He organized boycotts and voter registrations, and became involved with organizations like the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Freedom Has Never Been Free

In 1954, he tested the new *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by applying to the then-segregated University of Mississippi Law School. Though denied admission, the NAACP saw Medgar's potential. He would prove instrumental in the eventual desegregation of Ole Miss eight years later.

He became Mississippi's NAACP Field Director, which brought Medgar, his wife Myrlie, and their growing family to Jackson, where he helped organize campaigns to integrate parks, beaches, and public transit. He gave speeches and appeared in news media. His rising profile alerted white supremacists that he was a force to be reckoned with. He was slugged on a bus. A car attempted to run him over. His home was firebombed.

Despite the threats and danger, he continued to work and speak out. Meanwhile, Myrlie worked behind the scenes managing the field office, writing speeches, and making her home an unofficial extension of the NAACP.

Though insulated in the Elaine Subdivision, a close-knit black community, the Evers took precautions at home. The house had no front door, only one in the more-protected carport area. They placed their children's beds on the floor below windows to guard against snipers. They trained the children to crawl, infantry-style, into the bathroom in the event of an attack. Medgar tried to make a game of self-defense lessons, but the underlying fear became constant.



Group of neighborhood children (including Darrell and Reena Evers) in Evers's yard in 1959, showing home's entrance through carport

MEDGAR WILEY AND MYRLIE BEASLEY EVERS PAPERS, MDAH

Turn Me Loose

On June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy spoke to the nation about civil rights in a televised address. Medgar was not home to watch the address with Myrlie and the children that night. . .it was another late night of organizing and attending meetings. The family waited up for Medgar to arrive home, which he did just after midnight. While unloading t-shirts that said “Jim Crow Must Go” on them, a shot was fired from a tangle of bushes across the street.

The bullet passed through Medgar’s body, broke a window, passed through a wall and ricocheted off the refrigerator before coming to rest on the kitchen counter. Inside the house, Myrlie yelled to her children to get down, and ran to the carport to find Medgar lying in a pool of blood. Neighbors gathered as the children cried for their father. Medgar was rushed to the hospital, but did not survive. His final words: “Turn me loose.”

Only a Pawn in their Game

Byron De La Beckwith, a member of the racist and segregationist White Citizens’ Council, symbolizes the greater hatred that permeated much of the American South throughout the 1960s. Though he was arrested for the crime almost immediately after the murder, with

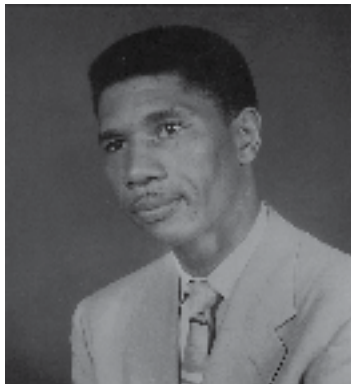
his rifle and fingerprints found at the scene, he was set free after two deadlocked trials with all-male, all-white juries. It would be 31 years before new evidence finally convicted Beckwith and sent him to prison.

You Can’t Kill an Idea

Myrlie Evers continued to champion the causes that were so important to both her and her late husband, becoming a speaker, author, and tireless activist (in addition to her corporate career). A year after Evers’s murder, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed segregation in private businesses.

Myrlie also refused to give up on justice for Medgar. Shortly after Beckwith was sent to prison, she was elected chair of the NAACP.

Evers’s story became a touchstone in an ongoing battle for fairness and equality, inspiring music by Bob Dylan and Nina Simone, stories, books, documentaries, and a feature film. Today Mississippi has more elected black officials than any other state, in addition to an international airport, college campus, boulevard, historic district, US Navy cargo ship, and national monument that all bear Evers’s name. Myrlie Evers still carries on the work they began together nearly 70 years ago. . . work that has not lost its importance.



The public faces of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement were often men, with women usually occupying roles behind the scenes. The Evers maintained such a partnership until Medgar’s assassination thrust



Myrlie into the spotlight, which she used to share the family’s tragedy, gathering attention and support for the cause. *Clockwise from top: Medgar; Myrlie and children; Myrlie speaking in 2011.*

Visiting Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home National Monument

The Medgar and Myrlie Evers Home is located at 2332 Margaret W. Alexander Drive in Jackson, Mississippi.

The new national monument is a stop on the Mississippi Freedom Trail, part of a larger US Civil Rights Trail that highlights people and places that played pivotal roles in Americans’ quest for equality.

The home is not yet open to the public. The National Park Service is working with its partners to establish visitor services and continue sharing Medgar and Myrlie’s inspiring stories of service and sacrifice.

If you visit the house and neighborhood, please respect the privacy and property of those that live nearby.

www.nps.gov/MEMY