



## Detroit's WALK to Freedom

The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. is among America's best-recognized civil rights activists. His many accomplishments include his "I Have A Dream" speech that he gave in August 1963 in Washington, DC. King first gave that speech in Detroit.

In the spring of 1963, Detroiters looked for a way to remember the anniversary of racial violence that tore through their city twenty years earlier. The 1943 **turmoil** between whites and blacks had left 34 people dead and hundreds injured. The Detroit Council for Human Rights called for a "Walk to Freedom," because many of "the same basic, underlying causes" of the 1943 disturbance were "still present."

On June 23, 1963, an estimated 125,000 people marched down Detroit's Woodward Avenue carrying **placards** and singing "We Shall

Overcome." National and state leaders who marched along with Reverend King included United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther, former Michigan governor John B. Swainson, and Detroit mayor Jerome Cavanagh.

The march ended at Cobo Hall where the Reverend King was cheered by thousands of marchers when he emphasized that **segregation** needed to end. King believed that it was the duty

of African Americans to take part in demonstrations like the Walk to Freedom, which he called "one of the most wonderful things that has happened in America."

In his speech, King spoke of having a "dream" where whites and blacks were "walking together, hand in hand," in harmony and equality. Two months later, he shared these thoughts with thousands of Americans—both blacks and whites—at a rally at the Lincoln Memorial in the nation's capital.



Martin Luther King Jr. in Detroit in 1963

Photos Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University unless otherwise noted



Martin Luther King Jr. leads marchers down Woodward Avenue with other civil rights leaders. Below, more than 125,000 Detroiters participate in the walk.



Detroit Free Press



This editorial cartoon appeared in the June 22, 1963, issue of the Detroit Free Press.

## Where to Take Your Family

The **Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History** is the world's largest museum dedicated to African American culture. Its main exhibit, *Of the People: The African American Experience*, tells the entire history of African Americans in North America, from African roots through the civil rights movement and up to the present day. The museum is located at 315 East Warren in Detroit. Telephone (313) 494-5800 or visit [www.maah-detroit.org](http://www.maah-detroit.org).

# Civil Rights FIGHTERS

The Reverend Bob Smith Jr. collection

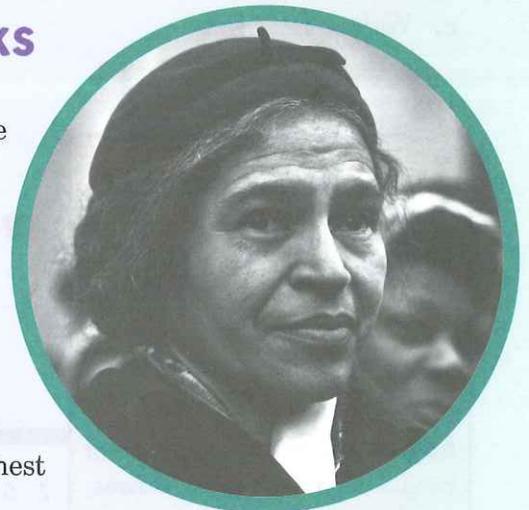


## REVEREND CLARENCE L. FRANKLIN

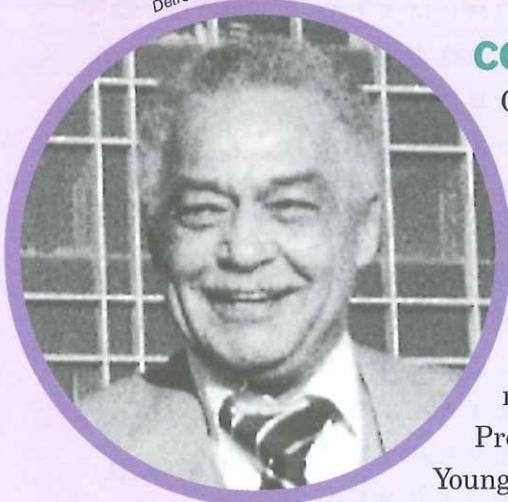
The Walk to Freedom was a warning “that what has transpired in the past is no longer acceptable” to the African American community, Clarence L. Franklin told a Detroit newspaper. Franklin was the pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church, a large African American congregation in Detroit. He was born in Mississippi in 1915 and came to Detroit in 1946. Franklin preached sermons over the radio, recorded albums, and toured the country giving speeches. Franklin’s daughter, Aretha, now a famous singer, traveled on some of these tours. The Reverend Franklin also helped found the Detroit Council for Human Rights in 1963.

## ROSA PARKS

In 1955, Rosa Parks, who lived in Montgomery, Alabama, was arrested when she refused to give up her seat on a bus for a white man. Parks and thousands of African Americans started a protest that ended segregation on the city’s buses. “Our mistreatment was just not right, and I was tired of it,” she said. Parks is known as the “Mother of the Civil Rights Movement.” She moved to Detroit in 1957 and worked with the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), a well-known civil rights group. In 1996, President William Clinton presented Parks with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor an American citizen can receive.



Detroit News



## COLEMAN YOUNG

Coleman Young was Detroit’s first African American mayor and held that job for twenty years. He was born in 1918 in Alabama and moved to Detroit in 1923. After high school, he went to work in a Ford Motor Company factory. Young protested segregation in the military as well as in Detroit’s neighborhoods and businesses. He was elected to the Michigan Senate in 1964. In 1973, Young was elected the mayor of Detroit. Young worked to bring more African Americans and women into jobs in city government. Projects to rebuild, improve, and clean up Detroit took shape under Young’s leadership.

# What Did You Learn?

## BONUS:

*Who was mayor of Detroit in 1963?*

- John B. Swainson
- Jerome Cavanagh
- Walter Reuther

## Vocabulary WORDS



**Placards:** signs with statements on them

**Segregation:** the separation of people of different races, classes, or ethnic groups

**Turmoil:** extreme confusion and agitation

1. *Where was the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech first given?*

- Detroit
- Washington, DC
- New York

2. *About how many people walked in the march down Woodward Avenue?*

- 3,000,000
- 25,000
- 125,000

3. *What did Clarence Franklin do?*

- he was a pastor
- he sang for Motown
- he was the governor of Michigan

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**FREEDOM MARCH**  
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