

0. MEDGAR EVERS in JACKSON - Story Preface

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Medgar Evers was assassinated after exiting his car in the carport of his home in Jackson, Mississippi in June of 1963. This image depicts the house and the carport where Evers was shot. Photo by Tim Adams; online via Wikimedia Commons. [LICENSE: CC BY 3.0.](#)

Medgar Evers and [his family](#) moved to [Jackson, Mississippi](#) in 1955 - the year Emmett Till was murdered. As the NAACP field secretary for Mississippi, Evers - a WWII veteran (who [arrived at Normandy](#), twenty-six days after D-Day) - had personally experienced the pain of racial segregation.

A native Mississippian, Evers wanted to study law at Ole Miss. He was [turned away](#), because of his color. That is why, among other reasons, he [did what he could](#) to make sure that [James Meredith](#) was accepted as a student at the University of Mississippi - the first African-American to gain acceptance there - despite [riots which erupted on the Ole Miss campus](#).

Medgar and his wife, [Myrlie](#), could have moved from Mississippi to a place that was safer for African-American families. Instead, they chose to remain in Jackson. It wasn't just making a difference, in the struggle for civil rights, which motivated them. As Evers once told a reporter for Ebony:

It may sound funny, but I love the South. I don't choose to live anywhere else. There's land here, where a man can raise cattle, and I'm going to do that someday. There are lakes where a man can sink a hook and fight bass. There is room here for my children to play, and grow, and become good citizens - if the white man will let them. (Medgar Evers, quoted in [For Us, the Living](#), by Myrlie Evers, [page xi](#).)

After graduating from college, Evers sold insurance to black sharecroppers living in the Mississippi Delta. His work took him to places where he saw mounting evidence of desperately poor people who needed to be freed from the shackles of Jim-Crow laws. Returning home from work, he told Myrlie stories

...of adults with nothing to eat; of sanitary conditions no self-respecting farmer would permit in his pigpen. He painted word pictures of shacks without windows or doors, with roofs that leaked and floors rotting underfoot. For a while he had ignored the worst of these shacks, sure that no one could live in them. But then he was sent to one and began to visit them all. "They are all of them full, Myrlie!" he would exclaim as he drove me by a cluster of the worst of them on a Sunday afternoon. "Every one of them! People live in there. Human beings. People like you and me." (For Us, the Living, [page xi](#).)

Working for the NAACP, Evers received constant requests for assistance from desperate people. Sometimes he could help; other times he couldn't. What, after all, could one black man do to stop the killing of other black men who had simply registered to vote (like Lamar Smith and [Herbert Lee](#)) or who spoke-out against racial injustice (like [Rev. George Lee](#))? In her book, Myrlie says her husband worked with "a furious sort of desperation."

By the spring of 1963, both Myrlie and Medgar realized he risked death by staying in Jackson. To protect themselves, they agreed to exit their car from the passenger side, when arriving [home](#), since the driver's side faced a vacant lot (where a waiting sniper could easily hide out). They also taught their children what to do if they heard gunshots.

Then ... [on the 11th of June, 1963](#), President Kennedy gave a [speech on civil rights](#). Addressing the violence against African-Americans, his words were JFK's strongest-ever on the topic. Medgar watched [the televised event](#) and was greatly encouraged by what he heard.

The next day, Evers had a busy schedule. By the time he arrived home that evening, it was shortly after midnight (on the 12th of June). Tired, he forgot the promise he'd made to Myrlie - that he would never exit

their car on the driver's side.

A fatal shot - fired from a high-powered rifle by Byron de la Beckwith - dropped Medgar to the ground. Bleeding, he crawled up the driveway where his wife and two of his children saw him. He died, soon thereafter, in a Jackson hospital. (Beckwith was finally convicted of the murder in 1994, after two previous hung-jury trials - for which the defense was aided by the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission).

The man who had so courageously fought for what was right did not personally experience the fruit of his efforts. His death, however - and the words of President Kennedy, together with the efforts of many people inside and outside Mississippi - galvanized the push for civil rights. (Later that summer, for example - during the "March on Washington" - Bob Dylan paid tribute to Medgar Evers with a song he wrote in his honor.)

Two years before Medgar's death, Jackson was the scene of violence when Freedom Riders came to town. The year after, "Freedom Summer" arrived in Mississippi.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/MEDGAR-EVERS-in-JACKSON-The-Help>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/MEDGAR-EVERS-in-JACKSON-The-Help>

Questions 2 Ponder

How Do We Decide When to “Stand Ground” or “Stay Safe?”

Medgar Evers chose to live in Jackson because he loved “the South.” He knew he was in danger but did not leave. Have you ever had to choose between “standing your ground” and “staying safe?” What happened?

Do you think Medgar made the right choice to stay in Jackson, despite the threats against him? Why, or why not?

How Do We Live a Life that Matters?

Medgar Evers would not be bullied into leaving “the South” because of racist attitudes against him and other African-Americans. Do you think that Medgar’s murder helped people in America to see the evils of racism?

Do you think that Medgar Evers lived a life that matters? Explain your answer.

Media Stream



Medgar Evers - Wife and Children

Photo online, courtesy Clarion-Ledger (a Jackson, Mississippi newspaper).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Medgar-Evers-Wife-and-Children>



President Kennedy on June 11, 1963

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/President-Kennedy-on-June-11-1963>



Funeral of Medgar Evers

Photo of people marching to the funeral of Medgar Evers, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Funeral-of-Medgar-Evers>



Myrlie Evers at Her Husband's Coffin

Photo of Myrlie Evers, at the coffin of Medgar Evers, online courtesy Library of Congress.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Myrlie-Evers-at-Her-Husband-s-Coffin>



Medgar Evers - News Reports of His Death

Image of the *Jackson Daily News* - from June 12, 1963 - online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Medgar-Evers-News-Reports-of-His-Death>



MEDGAR EVERS in JACKSON

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>



JFK - June 11, 1963 Speech on Civil Rights - Part 1

June 11, 1963 speech on civil rights. Clip online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/JFK-June-11-1963-Speech-on-Civil-Rights-Part-1>



JFK - June 11, 1963 Speech on Civil Rights - Part 2

Clip of JFK's June 11, 1963 speech on civil rights online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/JFK-June-11-1963-Speech-on-Civil-Rights-Part-2>



Medgar Evers - Civil Rights Leader

Clip from documentary on Medgar Evers, by Martin Kent Films. Online, courtesy Martin Kent Films and YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Medgar-Evers-Civil-Rights-Leader>



Medgar Evers - Fatally Shot

Clip from documentary on Medgar Evers, by Martin Kent Films. Online, courtesy Martin Kent Films and YouTube.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Medgar-Evers-Fatally-Shot>



Bob Dylan - "Only a Pawn in Their Game"

Clip of the "March on Washington," 1963, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Bob-Dylan-Only-a-Pawn-in-Their-Game->