

Civil Rights Champions

Remembering Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, and The Honorable Constance Baker Motley

Fifty years ago, in the 381 days between December 5, 1955 and December 21, 1956, African American citizens of Montgomery, Alabama united in peaceful protest to end segregation on city buses. Their success inspired a wave of grassroots activism against racial injustice that influenced the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Montgomery Bus Boycott is recognized as a watershed event of the civil rights movement in our country.

On September 28 and October 24 of 2005 two great champions of this movement—**Constance Baker Motley** and **Rosa Parks**—respectively passed away. On January 30 of this year **Coretta Scott King**, yet another pivotal figure of this movement, passed away, marking the end of a great chapter in our country's history. The lives and legacies of these three great women, each dedicated to ensuring that freedom and equal rights under the law be true for all, have forever changed our national consciousness and strengthened our democracy. In remembering and celebrating their contributions and achievements we are left with the challenge and inspiration to continue the work they nurtured.



Courtesy of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.

The Honorable **Constance Baker Motley** was born of West Indian parents in New Haven, Connecticut on September 14, 1921. As a young woman she became involved in community organizing activities through such organizations as the American Youth Council, the Connecticut Council for Youth, and the Dixwell Community House. She attended Fisk University in Tennessee, but in 1942 transferred to New York University where, a year later, she received a bachelor's degree in Economics. In 1943 she entered Columbia Law School and there met Thurgood Marshall, who would hire her in October 1945 as a law clerk in the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund office in New York. In 1946 she married Joel Wilson Motley. After graduating in 1946 she continued to work at the Fund, becoming assistant counsel in 1949. She would later become associate counsel and the Fund's lead trial attorney. During her many years at the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Constance Baker Motley played a crucial role in the most important school desegregation cases. The only female attorney on the legal team, she worked on briefs for the 1954 landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education*, and as a skillful trial lawyer was responsible for the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi in 1962. Indeed, between 1961 and 1964 she won nine of ten civil rights cases she argued before the U.S. Supreme Court. Judge Motley was also an outstanding public servant. In 1964 she became the first African American woman elected to the New York State Senate. She soon entered New York City politics, in 1965 becoming the first woman elected as Manhattan Borough President. Appointed as U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of New York by President Johnson in 1966, she became the first African American woman to assume a federal judgeship and, later in 1982, the first to be named Chief Judge for that court. She wrote and published numerous articles on civil rights and was the recipient of many honorary degrees, some from such prestigious Connecticut institutions as Yale University and Trinity College. Judge Motley was elected to the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1993 and to the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame in 1998. In 2001, President Bill Clinton awarded her the Presidential Citizens Medal, the second highest award given by the President to a

civilian. The NAACP honored her in 2003 with the Spingarn Medal, the organization's highest award.



*Photographs and Prints Division,
Schomburg Center for Research
in Black Culture, The New York
Public Library, Astor, Lenox and
Tilden Foundations*

Rosa Louise McCauley (Rosa Parks) was born in Tuskegee, Alabama on February 4, 1913. She grew up in Pine Level, Alabama, and attended school in nearby Montgomery. In December 1932 she married Raymond Parks, a Montgomery NAACP charter member. Imbued with a strong sense of justice and self-worth by her upbringing and education, she developed an interest in social activism. In 1943 she joined and was elected secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP. There she became involved in voting rights and desegregation activities and conducted field interviews to document racial discrimination. Foreshadowing her later famous defiance of Jim Crow laws, Mrs. Parks personally challenged Alabama's discriminatory voter registration practices. Refusing to be denied this most precious right, she repeatedly applied for admission as an elector until she succeeded, on her third attempt, in 1945. Balancing work, family, church, and activism, she was appointed secretary of the NAACP Alabama State Conference in 1948. In the 1950s she was adviser to Montgomery's NAACP Youth Council and coordinated activities designed to desegregate city services. On the fateful and historic day of December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man, and the white bus driver—the same one who had thrown her off a bus years earlier—had her arrested. But this time, her act of defiance and subsequent arrest and trial inspired Montgomery's African American community to boycott the city's buses for thirteen months, a huge mobilization effort that brought the city's public transportation to a halt and shook the foundations of segregation in the South. Despite death threats and the loss of her job, Rosa Parks helped organize the boycott, arranging carpools and working with the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and others to ensure its success. Victory came with the Supreme Court's 1956 *Browder vs. Gayle* ruling that segregation on city buses is unconstitutional. In 1957, ongoing harassment forced Mrs. Parks to move to Detroit, Michigan, where she remained active in civil rights struggles. In 1979 the NAACP awarded her the Spingarn Medal. In February 1987 Mrs. Parks co-founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, a nonprofit organization devoted to motivating youth "to reach their highest potential." It is worth noting that what Rosa Parks became most famous for, namely refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man, was but one of her many contributions to the movement.



*From a portrait by Bernie
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Coretta Scott King is known to most as the wife of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the most prominent of our civil rights leaders and one of our country's greatest orators. But to some she is known as a self-driven and longstanding champion of civil rights. Born on April 27, 1927 in Heiberger, Alabama, Coretta Scott was the third of four children. At the age of ten she worked as a cotton picker for a local white farmer. By age 15 she was director of her church's youth choir. A gifted vocalist, she soon appeared in school recitals and musical productions. She briefly left the segregated South to study at Antioch College in Ohio. She joined the NAACP chapter at the college and soon became involved in the Race Relations and Civil Liberties committees. After completing her studies at Antioch in 1951 with a major in Early Childhood Education, she moved to Boston to study at the New England Conservatory. In 1952 she met Martin Luther King Jr., who was pursuing doctoral studies at Boston University, and married him in June 1953. In 1954 she received her degree in voice and violin

from the New England Conservatory, and in September of that year moved to Montgomery, Alabama with her husband when he was named pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. With the onset of the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955, Mrs. King joined her husband and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in speaking engagements in support of the boycott and in Freedom Concerts she organized and performed in to raise funds. In 1964 she accompanied Dr. King to Norway to accept the Nobel Peace Prize. Long involved in peace and social justice organizations, Mrs. King may have inspired her husband to speak publicly against the Viet Nam war. Immediately after the assassination of her husband in 1968, Mrs. King led the sanitation workers march in Memphis, Tennessee, the very same march her husband had traveled there to support just before his assassination. After her husband's death she devoted herself to building the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change based in Atlanta, Georgia, and remained active in social justice, women's rights, and anti-poverty efforts. In 1979 she spearheaded the campaign to establish Dr. King's birthday as a national holiday, a goal achieved with the signing of a bill by President Reagan in 1983 that became effective on January 20, 1986.

In addition to their passion for and commitment to civil rights and social justice, these great women shared traits that passed the true test of character: dignity in the face of oppression, determination in the face of challenges, and courage in the face of danger and long odds. As we commemorate the lives and legacies of these pioneers of the civil rights movement, we are reminded of the words once spoken by the great Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." The contributions of these three women have brought us closer to achieving that dream. Let us follow their example!

I am honored to dedicate the 2006 edition of the *Connecticut State Register and Manual* to the memory of three extraordinary American women and champions of civil rights: **Rosa Parks**, **Coretta Scott King**, and The Honorable **Constance Baker Motley**.



Susan Bysiewicz
Secretary of the State

In Memory of

John A. Chapman

Phillip A. Jordan

Kemaphoom Ahn Chanawongse

Wilfredo Perez, Jr.

Richard Selden Eaton, Jr.

David Travis Friedrich

Anthony D'Agostino

Phillip R. Albert

Jeffrey Braun

Eric Thomas Paliwoda

Benjamin Gilman

Tyanna Avery-Felder

Felix Delgreco

Nathan B. Bruckenthal

Melissa Hobart

Jacob D. Martir

*Service members from Connecticut lost in
Afghanistan and Iraq,
March 2002 – September 2004**

* *Biographical sketches for the service members listed above were published in the 2004 Edition of the Connecticut State Register and Manual.*

In Memory of

William Brennan

Kevin J. Dempsey

Joseph Michael Nolan

Michael J. McMahon

Henry E. Irizarry

Robert Hoyt

Thomas E. Vitagliano

Lawrence R. Philippon

John T. Schmidt, III

Christopher Hoskins

Steve Reich

David Coullard

*Service members from Connecticut lost in
Afghanistan and Iraq,
October 2004 – October 2005**

* *Biographical sketches for the service members listed above were published in the 2005 Edition of the Connecticut State Register and Manual.*

In Memory of

Brian S. Letendre

Stephen Bixler

Jordan C. Pierson

Philip A. Johnson

Nicholas A. Madaras

*Service members from Connecticut lost in
Afghanistan and Iraq,
November 2005 – September 2006*



Marine Captain Brian S. Letendre

Marine Capt. Brian S. Letendre, a Virginia native who lived in New Britain for 18 months, was killed in combat in Al Anbar province on May 3, 2006, on his second tour of duty in Iraq. He left a wife and 3-year-old son.

For Marine Capt. Brian S. Letendre, New Britain was one community among many he lived in during his six-year career in the military. But for those in Connecticut who knew the Virginia native, he was not simply passing through.

They described a friendly man who developed strong connections in the area in a short time.

Letendre, 27, lived in New Britain with his wife, Autumn, and 3-year-old son, Dillon, for about 18 months while he was assigned to the Marine Reserve unit in Plainville.

Autumn Letendre worked as a teacher in the Farmington schools while they were living in New Britain.

Laura Carlin, a member of the United Methodist Church in West Hartford, met the Letendres when they joined the church. She also baby-sat for Dillon.

Carlin said she was particularly impressed at how well Letendre worked with the families of Marines from Connecticut who were killed in action. She said part of his job was to inform the families and help with burial arrangements.

“Brian was a very kind, compassionate young man who loved his country, his family and served his men and their families honorably during their worst times,” Carlin said. “He was only 27, but he was responsible and handled his job to the utmost. He firmly believed that this was what he was supposed to be doing and that his men needed him.”

The Letendres sold the [ir New Britain] house [when Capt. Letendre] anticipated being sent to Iraq soon, and his wife wanted to stay with her family in Indiana while he was overseas.

The military said Letendre was killed in Iraq’s Al Anbar province. His family said in a statement from Virginia that Letendre was serving his second tour in Iraq and had volunteered to train Iraqi troops.

“He was as good as they come—we’re all very proud of him,” said Bill Bann, a friend of Letendre’s family.

The family said Letendre could have left the Marines but wanted to stay.

“He felt a call to something much greater than himself at an early age and followed his heart to where he felt he could help make this world a better place,” Letendre’s family said in the statement.

Letendre joined the Marines in 2000. He was part of the force that invaded Iraq in 2003 and won the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal for valor during the fighting then, according to a biography that Letendre’s family released.

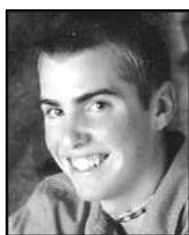
After returning from Iraq, Letendre was assigned to be the inspector-instructor for Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 25th Marines, a Marine Reserve unit headquartered in Plainville. His job there was working with the unit’s members to make sure they were ready for deployment. When the Plainville unit was called up recently for its first Iraq duty, Letendre went over, too.

Charlie Company is part of the battalion known as “New England’s Own” and was stationed in Fallujah. Many of the Marines with the unit concentrated on security in the city, but Letendre worked with Iraqi forces.

“He was one of the transition teams that worked with and dealt with Iraqi units,” said Lt. Col. Gerald Larghe, who was assigned to take over the Plainville Reserve Center after Letendre left. “His job was to train the Iraqi army units.”

Letendre was promoted to captain in 2005, and his record included two combat action ribbons, a commendation medal, and now a Purple Heart. According to the Marine Corps, Letendre had volunteered for the mission to teach infantry tactics to Iraqi recruits.

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Marine Corporal Stephen Bixler

Marine Cpl. Stephen Bixler, a 2003 graduate of Suffield High School, was killed May 4, 2006 while on foot patrol in the province of Fallujah in Iraq. He was 20.

Bixler felt bad when he was sent to Fallujah for his second tour of duty in Iraq. He thought it was too safe compared with the even more dangerous Ramadi, said Allen Hoffacker, a Suffield High School teacher whose children were friends with Bixler.

Hoffacker, who teaches English, said Bixler was “a very shy, soft-spoken, modest, very dedicated young man. Very patriotic, in a quiet, determined way.”

Bixler leaves behind his parents, Richard and Linda; a twin sister, Sandra; and dozens of people who knew him as intelligent and athletic, and as a quiet but strong leader, whether it was in the Boy Scouts or on the high school cross-country team.

“The town of Suffield—and I’m sure I speak for all on the board of selectmen—is extremely sorry to hear this,” said Selectman Douglas H. Viets. “Our prayers go out for him and his family, and we appreciate the service he has given the country.”

Gov. M. Jodi Rell ordered both the U.S. and Connecticut flags to be flown at half-staff until sundown on the day of Bixler’s interment. “The thoughts and prayers of all Connecticut residents are with the Bixler family,” Rell said in a statement.

Thomas Jones, principal of Suffield High School, said he learned about Bixler’s death from a teacher. He said he announced it to students and asked for a moment of silence.

Bixler, who graduated in 2003, was not like other high school students, he said.

“Stephen was kind of a quiet leader among his peers,” he said. “There was a strength of character about him, and a self-assurance that was unusual for someone his age. He just had focus,” he said. “He knew he wanted to be a Marine. He was proud to serve in Iraq. He was just a solid person all around.”

Bixler had served a tour in Haiti with the Marines before he was assigned to Iraq. He had recently visited the school to talk to students about his experiences in Iraq, Jones said.

A former senior patrol leader in local Boy Scout Troop 260, Bixler worked hard to become an Eagle Scout. He created a concrete fire pit at the Jesse F. Smith Memorial Forest, a map of the park and signs to guide visitors there, said Larry Quinn, scoutmaster of Troop 260. His parents are still active in the troop, he said.

“He was an excellent scout. He was the kind of boy that got along with everyone,” Quinn said. “He was a mentor to all the boys. This is a big loss.”

The Bixler residence shows the family’s pride. Two “mother’s flags,” with their telltale stars, hang by a window. A Marine flag hangs by the door. Yellow ribbons are tied to the seven trees on the front lawn.

Hoffacker said he made plans with Bixler during his recent return home. “I said that when he came back, we would go fishing for bluefish in the Sound.”

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Marine Corporal Jordan C. Pierson

Marine Cpl. Jordan C. Pierson of Milford, 21, died Aug. 25, 2006 from hostile gunfire while on foot patrol in Fallujah, [Iraq]. He was a member of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 25th Marines.

He became the third Marine with ties to the company to be killed in action since the unit was deployed in March [2006].

Pierson joined the U.S. Marine Corps in December 2003. He was wounded in the arms and legs by shrapnel from an insurgent grenade in May [2006]. He was treated at Camp Fallujah and awarded the Purple Heart.

A full-time student at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, Pierson postponed his studies to go to Iraq, military officials said. The unit was scheduled to return to Connecticut in October [2006].

Milford Mayor James L. Richetelli Jr. visited Pierson's family. "I expressed the condolences from the city of Milford," he said. "[T]his city will remember him in a big way. We are known as a small city with a big heart."

A tree in front of Milford City Hall that was lit to honor men and women in service the day the Iraq war started in March 2003 will be darkened until after Pierson's funeral, Richetelli said. Pierson is the only U.S. serviceman from Milford killed in the war, he said.

Flags were lowered to half-staff in Milford and at the state Capitol in Pierson's honor.

Pierson's profile on MySpace.com mentioned the Marine Corps more than once. He said he thought of his staff sergeant as a "hero," and he also wrote "Marines 4 life" at the top of his page.

Pierson was a 2003 graduate of Joseph A. Foran High School in Milford.

He is survived by his father, Eric C. Pierson; his mother, Beverley A. Pierson; and 11-year-old brother Ethan.

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Marine Lance Corporal Philip A. Johnson

Lance Cpl. Philip A. Johnson of Enfield, a member of the Young Marines from the age of 11, was killed Sept. 2, 2006 by a roadside bomb near Ramadi, Iraq. He was 19 years old.

Word of the young Marine's death spread quickly in Enfield, where Johnson, a 2005 Enfield High School graduate, was remembered as a "focused and thoughtful" young man whose dream since childhood was to become a Marine.

"He was hell-bent on being a Marine," said Ron Jackman of Longmeadow, Mass., a family friend who was serving as the Johnson family spokesman. "When he found out he was going to Iraq, he was hell-bent on going. He had no fear whatsoever."

Johnson is the second serviceman from Enfield to die in Iraq.

Johnson served with weapons company, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marines, from Camp Lejeune, N.C. He arrived in Iraq in mid-July [2006].

The Rev. Michael J. Coons, pastor of Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer in Enfield, said he found Johnson to be an impressive young man who was active in church and committed to his faith.

Johnson's other passion was the Marines, and he prepared himself for his service by joining a Young Marines detachment at Westover Air Reserve Base in Massachusetts when he was 11.

The Young Marines, founded in 1958 in Waterbury, is a youth education and service program for boys and girls ages 8 through completion of high school that promotes the mental, moral and physical development of its members.

"This is pretty sad," said Edward C. Mitrook, commanding officer of the Westover Young Marines detachment and a retired Marine Corps sergeant major. "He did touch a lot of people. He probably thought he didn't, but he did."

Johnson attained the rank of staff sergeant in the Young Marines and was a role model to younger members, Mitrook said. Johnson is the first alumnus of the Westover detachment to be lost in combat, he added.

But Johnson understood what he was getting involved in when he joined the Marines, Mitrook said. He knew he'd likely see combat. "He was living his dream," added Patrick Droney, an Enfield police lieutenant and friend of Johnson through church.

Mark Durfee, the head elder at Johnson's church and a retired Army lieutenant colonel, recalled Johnson as a kind and thoughtful young man.

"You'd love to have him as your own such—such a gentleman," said Durfee, who teaches in the Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program at New Britain High School. "Kids today think about themselves first and foremost. He was not like that. He's got to be in the top 1 percent of kids today. He was so focused and thoughtful."

Durfee said he spoke to Johnson's father and he recalled for him a conversation father and son had had.

"He said [Iraq] is where he belonged and he knew where he was supposed to be," Durfee recalled. "I believe it was deep in his faith, in his being. He knew this was something that was important."

Still, Johnson's death has been difficult, Durfee said.

“Our whole church is quite overwhelmed,” he said. “We know he’s in a better place. The sad part is not being around to see him grow up. The sadness is seeing his mom and dad in their situation.”

Jackman said that he saw Johnson when he visited Enfield after completing boot camp at Parris Island, S.C., and his transformation into a Marine.

“You could see it come out in him—the haircut, the pushed-back shoulders, trim and tan,” Jackman said. “And he was proud of it. You could tell.”

Johnson’s next goal was to become an elite Marine Corps scout-sniper, Mitrook said. He hoped to attend sniper school upon his unit’s return from Iraq.

Durfee said it’s important to remember the sacrifice so many young people make.

“I thank God that there are still young people out there willing to do what they do,” Durfee said. “We would not be where we are today as a free country without many Phil Johnsons.”

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Army Private First Class Nicholas A. Madaras

Army Pfc. Nicholas A. Madaras of Wilton, a soldier with the 4th Infantry Division, was killed by a bomb while on foot patrol [during a combat operation] in Baqouba, Iraq, on Sept. 3, 2006. He was 19 years old.

Nicholas A. Madaras had plans for college, but he thought a stint in the Army would be good for him. His hometown remember[s] the young man as a leader on the soccer field, a sharp student and a caring person.

Madaras was scheduled to finish his tour in Iraq on Oct. 24, [2006], three days after his 20th birthday.

“Everybody here is very deeply saddened,” said Bob O’Donnell, associate principal at Wilton High School, from which Madaras graduated in 2005. “He was a good student, a great kid. It’s a really tragic loss.”

Madaras was the son of William J. and Shalini Madaras of Wilton and the older brother of Marie, a senior at Wilton High, and Christopher, a fourth-grader.

First Selectman William F. Brennan said he and his wife expressed their condolences to the Madaras family.

“This is a very sad day for Wilton,” Brennan said. He ordered the town’s flags flown at half-staff “in respect for a beloved son of Wilton.”

[Nicholas Madaras was] the third serviceman from Connecticut to have died in Iraq in a nine-day period.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell ordered U.S. and state flags, already at half-staff, to remain at half-staff for Madaras. This is a tremendously sad day for Connecticut,” Rell said in a statement.

Guidance counselor Dann Pompa worked closely with Madaras the last two years he attended high school. Pompa recalled Madaras as a creative young man.

“He was very genuine, a person who cared a lot about people, who related to both adults and peers,” Pompa said. “He was very introspective. ...There was a lot of depth in him.”

Pompa said he received an e-mail from Madaras at the end of [2005] discussing his plans to attend college and pursue a career in nursing.

Jim Lewicki, Wilton’s head boys’ soccer coach, said Madaras started for the team for three years under former head coach Jim Cook, and he worked as the team manager when he stayed on an extra year at Wilton High.

Madaras “was a quiet but intense” soccer player, Lewicki said. “He was a warrior—he worked his ass off, and he led by example.” He left for basic training soon after graduating, Lewicki said, and was recently home on leave.

[Wilton High School associate principal] O’Donnell said the tight-knit school community was pulling together behind Madaras’ sister and the rest of the family. He remembered Madaras as “a sharp young man who was very caring, who cared for his friends and family.”

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