Medgar Wiley Evers (1925-1963)

Medgar Wiley Evers, known as “The Man in Mississippi,” is a seminal figure in the history of the American Civil Rights Movement. The third of four children, Medgar was born on July 2, 1925 in Decatur, Mississippi to James and Jessie Evers. Evers grew up in a devoutly religious home in segregated Mississippi, where services and accommodations such as schools and public facilities were specified for “Colored” or “White” use. Despite the fact that he could not attend the same theaters or drink from the same fountains as white Mississippians, like many men of his generation, Evers left his home to enlist in the military following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although he was serving his country against its foreign enemies, Evers soon became disillusioned by the fact that while he was supposedly fighting for freedom of people halfway around the world, his own nation was rooted in the unequal segregationist ideology of separation and white supremacy. Evers’ experiences of the racist sentiments of white citizens as an African-American soldier demonstrated to him the need for action.

Emboldened by lessons learned while at war, Evers returned to Mississippi and dedicated himself to academic studies at Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in 1952. Evers was acutely aware of the need to continue the struggle against injustice and soon became an important member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Jackson, Mississippi. From 1954 until his assassination in 1963, Evers traveled throughout Mississippi organizing African-Americans in peaceful protest, economic boycotts, political sit-ins, and voter registration drives to draw national and world attention to unjust practices.

Elected the first Field Secretary of the NAACP, Evers created new strategies to enfranchise and empower African-Americans. As Dr. Patricia Murrain writes, “…articulating the demands of the black masses, Evers was instrumental in welding hosts of fragmented, inarticulate and somewhat ineffective voices into unification.” Evers’ work was instrumental to many political and social victories for African-Americans in Mississippi, most notably the admission of James Meredith to the previously white-only University of Mississippi.

However, on June 12, 1963, “The Man in Mississippi,” who was the voice of so many disenfranchised Americans, was silenced by a shot to the back in the driveway of his home. Following Evers’ assassination, his wife Myrlie continued his legacy by traveling around the world stressing the positive achievements of the Civil Rights Movement and the necessity to continue the struggle until the dream of equality is realized. Myrlie Evers has remained a stalwart figure in the struggle for Civil Rights up to the present, serving as the Chairperson of the NAACP’s Board of Directors from 1995 to 1998.
Medgar Evers College was founded as a senior college of the City University of New York in 1970 through a partnership between the educators and community leaders in Central Brooklyn. More than just college named for a famous person, Medgar Evers College is a family whose members strive to fulfill their namesake’s legacy through a commitment to the educational empowerment of the African Diaspora community. Although Medgar Evers was born into a world where people of different races were not allowed to mix, students and faculty of Medgar Evers College gather each day in the community of harmony, equality and understanding for which he gave his life.

Bruce C. Ratner, Esq.

Bruce C. Ratner was born on January 23, 1945 in Cleveland Ohio. He graduated cum laude from Harvard University in 1967, and earned a Juris Doctor from Columbia University in 1970. From 1970 to 1973 Bruce Ratner worked as a law Professor at the New York University Law School. He was also Director of the Model Cities Program and Head of the Consumer Protection Division in New York City during Mayor John Lindsay’s Administration. From 1978 to 1982, Bruce Ratner served as New York City’s Commissioner of Consumer Affairs in Mayor Ed Koch’s Administration.

Prior to joining Forest City, Ratner held prominent positions in New York City’s political arena as well as the prestigious New York University Law School. From 1978 to 1982, Ratner served as commissioner of consumer affairs during New York City Mayor Ed Koch’s Administration. Before that, he spent four years working as a professor at the New York University Law School. From 1970 to 1973, he was director of the Model Cities Program and head of the Consumer Protection Division in New York City Mayor John Lindsay’s Administration.

Ratner is a board member of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the City Parks Foundation, the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and the Weill Cornell Medical College.

In 1985, Bruce Ratner founded the Forest City Ratner Companies of which he is now Executive Chairman. He developed the $1 billion downtown Metro Tech Complex of nine buildings. He is probably most known for heading the group that bought the New Jersey Nets and moved the NBA basketball team to the Barclays Center as the Brooklyn Nets. The development complex included businesses, residential buildings, and the Barclay Sports Arena in the Prospect Heights neighborhood now called the Pacific Park Brooklyn.
Bruce Ratner serves on the Board of several New York City establishments including, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn Hospital, the Metropolitan Museum of Arts, the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and the Weill Cornell Medical College. Mr. Ratner is being nominated for the Honorary Degree at Medgar Evers College, CUNY on the basis of his contribution to developments in New York City and in particular Downtown Brooklyn, as well as his inspiring individual achievements and attributes.