Drawing from its remarkable archive and additional sources, Syracuse Cultural Workers curated this inspirational and educational exhibit on African American women from the 1800’s to present. While by no means exhaustive, “Sisters of Freedom” provides a dramatic glimpse of the power and passion of women who have transformed their lives, their culture and their country. The intended audience is both college students and schoolchildren/teens. “Sisters of Freedom” consists of eighteen 32x48” panels. Lightweight and portable, it is meant to be displayed on five 6’ tables and can be set up in 30 minutes.

Additional Information

**Americans Who Tell the Truth** is a collection of 150 portraits and quotes by Maine artist Robert Shetterly which demonstrate it has been the courage of dissidents that has won the freedoms Americans cherish. [www.americanswhotellthetruth.org](http://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org)

**Bread and Roses** is a cultural project of the Services Employees International Union, SEIU 1199. Founded in 1979 in NYC by Moe Foner it brings dignity and vitality to working people’s lives.

**SCW** Working with over 1,000 artists since 1982 SyracuseCulturalWorkers.com has published and distributed an array of products that promote human and civil rights, peace, sustainability and economic justice.

**Northland Poster Collective** (1979-2009) was an activist arts organization devoted to the support of organizing, education and movement building. Northland artist Ricardo Levins Morales continues to produce political art. [www.rlmarts.com](http://www.rlmarts.com).

**National Women's History Project (NWHP)**, founded in Santa Rosa, CA in 1980, provides information and training in multicultural women’s history for educators, community organizations, and others. [www.nwhp.org](http://www.nwhp.org)

Exhibit Curated And Produced By Syracuse Cultural Workers Using Archival Posters & Additional Sources SyracuseCulturalWorkers.com
Panel A:

Sojourner Truth, c. 1797-1883
Eloquent preacher, abolitionist and feminist
Born into slavery in New York as Isabella Baumfree (after her father’s owner, Baumfree) she took the name Sojourner Truth after a religious conversion experience which led her to become a traveling preacher (the meaning of her new name). A powerful advocate of abolition, temperance and woman’s rights, from the 1840’s through the late 1870’s Sojourner traveled widely throughout the northern states, her personal magnetism drawing large crowds wherever she appeared.

The National Women’s History Project was founded in 1980 with the goal of “writing women back into history.” www.nwhp.org

Harriet Tubman, c. 1820-1913
Conductor for the Underground Railroad, daring Civil War scout and spy
An escaped slave, Tubman worked as a lumberjack, laundress, nurse, and cook. As an abolitionist, she acted as intelligence gatherer, refugee organizer, raid leader, nurse, and fundraiser, all as part of the struggle for liberation from slavery and racism. Over the course of 10 years, and at great personal risk, she personally led hundreds of slaves to freedom along the Underground Railroad, a secret network of safe houses where runaway slaves could stay on their journey north to freedom. In the nearly half-century she lived after the war ended, Harriet Tubman spoke for the rights of women and African Americans, helped organize the AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Zion Church, and set up a home for indigent, aged African Americans.

About the poster:
This poster, published by SCW in 1987, uses Harriet Tubman's work as inspiration for the sanctuary movement which brought endangered Latin American activists to the US. These activists were opposing murderous regimes supported by the US. The poster was also a playbill for the Underground Railroad Theatre Company based in Boston.

Lucy Parsons, c. 1853-1942
Uncompromising trade unionist, radical organizer and speaker, co-founder IWW
Born in Texas around 1853, it is likely that Parsons’ parents were slaves with African American, Native American, and Mexican ancestry. In 1873 she and her husband Albert settled in Chicago and became integral to the socialist and anarchist movements seeking to improve the condition of the industrial working classes. For almost 70 years, she fought for the rights of the poor and disenfranchised in the face of an increasingly oppressive industrial economic system. Her radical activism challenged racist and sexist conventions in a time when even radical Americans believed that a woman’s place was in the home.

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded in Chicago in June 1905 at a convention of two hundred socialists, anarchists, and radical trade unionists who were opposed to the policies of the American Federation of Labor. The organizers believed that all workers should organize as a class, regardless of the industry in which they worked, and it was the only American union (besides the Knights of Labor) to welcome all workers including women, immigrants, African Americans and Asians into the same organization.
Panel B:

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, 1862-1931
Fearless anti-lynching crusader, suffragist, women's rights advocate and journalist
Born a slave in 1862, Ida Wells became one of our nation’s earliest civil rights leaders. Beginning in 1892 she carried out a national campaign against lynching – the hanging, burning or shooting of a person without trial. By the time of her death, lynching in the US had disappeared almost entirely, due largely to her efforts. A founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), she was among the few Black leaders to publicly oppose Booker T. Washington and his strategies. As a result, she was viewed as one of the most radical of the founders and was marginalized from its leadership positions. The poster element “Signed, Iola,” refers to the pen name she used for her early columns in the Black press.

Sarah Loguen Fraser, 1850-1933
Pioneering physician
Sarah Loguen, MD grew up in Syracuse, NY and became one of the nation’s first African American women physicians. The daughter of abolitionists Caroline Storum and the Reverend Jermain Wesley Loguen, a former slave, Fraser was raised in a family that helped 1,500 African Americans on their dangerous escape from slavery to freedom.

Mary McLeod Bethune, 1875-1955
Visionary educator and leader
In 1904, Mrs. Bethune opened a school for Negro girls in Daytona, FL with just five students. Through her abilities as an organizer, fundraiser and teacher, the school flourished, in 1929 becoming the co-educational Bethune-Cookman College. She founded the National Council of Negro Women in 1935, envisioning an “organization of organizations” that would represent the national and international concerns of Black women. From 1936-1945 she served as an informal special advisor to the Franklin Roosevelt administration and helped create the federal Council on Negro Affairs.

Zora Neale Hurston, 1891-1960
Folklorist and writer of the Harlem Renaissance
Hurston grew up in the culturally affirming setting of Eatonville, FL, a rural community near Orlando that was the nation’s first incorporated Black township. A graduate of Barnard College, she was the most successful and most significant Black woman writer of the first half of the 20th century. Over a career that spanned more than 30 years, she published four novels, two books of folklore, an autobiography, numerous short stories, and several essays, articles and plays.

Pauli Murray, 1910-1985
Feminist, lawyer, teacher and ordained minister
The granddaughter of a slave and great-granddaughter of a slave owner, Murray rebelled against the segregation that was an accepted fact of life growing up in the “colored” section of Durham, NC. In 1944, while at Howard University Law School, she and other women students made one of the earliest uses of Gandhian tactics, successfully staging the first sit-in demonstration resulting in the desegregation of a cafeteria in Washington, DC. Her letter-writing campaign to the White House challenging the Roosevelt administration on domestic policies led to a lasting
friendship and professional relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt. A founding member of the National Organization for Women (1966), she was the first Black woman and one of the first women to be ordained (1978) in the Episcopal Church.
“One person plus one typewriter constitutes a movement.”

Ella J. Baker, 1903-1986
“Spiritual mother” of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)
A lifelong social activist, in 1930 Baker joined the Young Negroes Cooperative League and in 1940 began her involvement with the NAACP. In 1957, she moved to Atlanta to organize with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), running a voter registration campaign called the Crusade for Citizenship. She stayed at SCLC for two years although she disagreed with its policy of strong central leadership over grassroots organization, saying “strong people don't need strong leaders.”

PANEL C
Septima P. Clark, 1898-1987
Founder of “citizenship schools” that created the grassroots base of the Civil Rights movement
Fired from teaching in Charleston, SC in 1947 for being a member of the NAACP, Clark relocated to Monteagle, TN, teaching interracial adult education at the Highlander Folk School. There, Clark devised a curriculum that focused on promoting voter registration and empowering people to solve their issues through social activism. She created her first “Citizenship School” on John’s Island in 1957. With Highlander activities constantly disrupted by the segregationist Tennessee legislature, in 1961 the citizenship program was transferred to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). By 1970, when Septima Clark retired at age 72, some ten thousand citizenship school teachers trained by her and her colleagues had taught more than 100,000 Blacks to read and write and demand their rights as citizens.

Founded in 1932 by activist Myles Horton and others as a racially integrated education and training center, the Highlander Center focused in its early years on labor education and the training of labor organizers. From the 1950s on, its work nurtured the civil rights movement, and today it remains a catalyst for grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South. www.highlandercenter.org

Odetta, 1930-2008
Folksinger, songwriter, activist
Born Odetta Holmes in Birmingham, AL during the Depression, the music of that time and place — particularly prison songs and work songs sung in the fields of the Deep South — shaped her life.
“They were liberation songs,” she said in an interview with The New York Times. She added: “You’re walking down life's road, society's foot is on your throat, every which way you turn you can’t get from under that foot. And you reach a fork in the road and you can either lie down and die or insist upon your life.” In 1953, Odetta was invited to perform at a folk club in NYC where her appearance inspired the help of Harry Belafonte and Pete Seeger. Her political visibility increased in the 60's as a major voice in the Civil Rights Movement, her songs blending the personal and the political, the theatrical and the spiritual.
**Rosa Parks**, 1913-2005
NAACP stalwart, spark of the Montgomery bus boycott, lifelong civil rights advocate
The secretary and a long-time member of the NAACP, Parks was well-known to African American leaders in Montgomery for her opposition to segregation, her leadership abilities and her moral strength. On December 1, 1955, she refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus, sparking the protest boycott which lasted 381 days, eventually succeeding in putting an end to this segregation.

---

**Claudette Colvin**, b.1939
Courageous teen plaintiff in Browder v. Gayle, court decision that desegregated Montgomery, AL buses
In March 1955 when she was a high school junior, Colvin was arrested, dragged backwards off the bus by police, handcuffed and jailed for refusing to surrender her bus seat to a white passenger. A year later, she and three other women sued the city of Montgomery and the state of Alabama, challenging the laws requiring segregated seating on buses. Only after they won their case were the city's buses integrated.

---

**1961 Freedom Riders Portraits**
The Civil Rights Movement, roughly occurring 1954–1968, was one of the most significant and powerful social movements in US history. It didn't end racism or inequality, but it invalidated many of the institutions (segregated schools and housing, for example) that blocked progress towards true social justice. The 1961 Freedom Riders were a pivotal part of the Movement. These African American women, along with African American men and whites, rode vulnerable buses through Alabama and Mississippi challenging the South’s defiance of the 1946 and 1960 Supreme Court rulings which desegregated interstate travel and related facilities.

Determined to not let violence stop the Rides, a group of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) members from Nashville left Birmingham for Montgomery, the state capitol, on May 20. They were savagely beaten by a mob of 200 people at the bus station. But they kept coming. Wave after wave for almost seven months. After a deal brokered by Attorney General Robert Kennedy with Mississippi’s arch-segregationist Senator James Eastland, the Rides focused on Jackson, MS. Riders were immediately arrested and charged with “breach of the peace” when they integrated the white and "colored" waiting rooms, restrooms, and restaurants at the stations on arrival. The tenacity of the Riders pushed the Kennedy administration to enforce Federal desegregation laws in the South. This was a huge victory, and new life was pumped into the Civil Rights Movement by these (in the words of Roger Wilkins) "true American heroes with a passion for a fairer and more democratic nation."

Mississippi’s State Sovereignty Commission was established in 1956, two years after Brown v. Board of Education, to preserve segregation against any outside efforts to change the status quo. Among its tasks was investigation of “integration organizations,” so when the Riders began arriving, the Commission went into action compiling mug shots and arrest data, thus carefully (and unintentionally) preserving this remarkable piece of civil rights history.
In the seven-month protest the Riders “galvanized every branch of the Civil Rights Movement, binding its past to its future, its tactics to its soul.” (Diane McWhorter) The Riders faced the firebombing of their bus, brutal beatings, and imprisonment at Mississippi’s infamous state penitentiary, but still they kept coming.


**Diane Nash, b.1938**
Daring student organizer and strategist
Diane Nash was a leader and strategist of the student wing of the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement. She was bright, focused, utterly fearless, with an unerring instinct for the correct tactical move at each increment of the crisis. As a leader, her instincts were flawless, and she was the kind of person who pushed those around her to be at their best – that, or be gone from the movement. Nash’s campaigns were among the most successful of the era. Her efforts included the first successful civil rights campaign to de-segregate lunch counters (Nashville); the Freedom Riders, who de-segregated interstate travel facilities; founding the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); and the Selma Voting Rights Movement campaign, which resulted in African Americans getting the vote and political power throughout the South.

**PANEL D**

**Fannie Lou Hamer, 1917-1977**
Committed citizen activist
Hamer became involved in the civil rights movement in 1962 when she volunteered to attempt to register to vote. By then 45 years old and a mother, Hamer lost her job and survived a brutal beating as the price of her activism. Despite this, she spoke frequently to raise money for the movement, and helped organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to challenge white domination of the Democratic Party. In 1964, the MFDP challenged the all-white Mississippi delegation to the Democratic Convention, and in 1968, the Convention seated an integrated challenge delegation from Mississippi. She is buried in her home town of Ruleville, MS, where her tombstone reads, “I am sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

**Dorothy Height, 1912-2010**
Iconic leader of the National Council of Negro Women
Originally trained as a social worker, Height was president of the National Council of Negro Women from 1957 to 1997, overseeing a range of programs on issues like voting rights, poverty and in later years AIDS. A longtime executive of the YWCA, she presided over the integration of its facilities nationwide in the 1940s. Her career in civil rights spanned nearly 80 years, from anti-lynching protests in the early 1930s to the inauguration of President Obama in 2009. She was among the few in the modern civil rights era to treat the problems of equality for women and equality for African Americans as a seamless whole, merging concerns that had been largely historically separate.
Dorothy Cotton, b. 1930
Forceful SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) organizer
Dorothy Cotton was Educational Director of the SCLC, recruiting candidates for training as citizenship school teachers, and monitoring the progress of the schools themselves. Cotton helped organize the students during the 1963 Birmingham Movement and its Children's Crusade.

Marian Wright Edelman, b. 1939
Founding member of SNCC, powerful civil rights lawyer, advocate for children
Mrs. Edelman, a graduate of Spelman College and Yale Law School, began her career in the mid-60s when, as the first Black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar, she directed the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund office in Jackson, MS. In 1968, she was counsel for the Poor People’s Campaign that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began organizing before his death. She founded the Washington Research Project, a public interest law firm and the parent body of the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF). For two years she served as the Director of the Center for Law and Education at Harvard University and in 1973 began CDF, the nation’s strongest voice for children and families.

Maya Angelou, b.1928,
Celebrated poet and author
Maya Angelou’s path has taken her from the hardscrabble Depression-era South, through life as a prostitute, Broadway performer, coordinator for the SCLC, journalist in Egypt and Ghana in the heady days of decolonization, and friend and comrade of Malcolm X and James Baldwin. As one of the first African American women to publicly discuss her personal life, she is known particularly for the six volumes of her autobiography, and highly respected as a spokesperson for Black people and women.

Bernice Johnson Reagon, b. 1942,
Composer, musician, songtalker
The daughter of a minister, Bernice Johnson grew up in a strong tradition of singing sacred music. For her first 11 years the church had no piano, and all singing was accompanied only by hands and feet. This grounding in a cappella music and a congregational song style was the bedrock on which she founded Sweet Honey In the Rock, the popular African American women’s ensemble.

She was Secretary of the NAACP at Albany State College in 1959 as the sit-in movement erupted with students sitting-in at lunch counters and other racially segregated establishments. Joining the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), she demonstrated her conviction that song and singing built group cohesiveness helping to make political change. From 1973-2004, she was the guiding hand of Sweet Honey and “her” singing has made a path for many through countless changes in the struggles around ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality.
Nina Simone, 1933-2003
Pianist, composer, singer
Born Eunice Kathleen Waymon in Tryon, NC, Nina Simone was an instinctive musician, an original, versatile singer, pianist, arranger and composer. Her repertoire included jazz standards, gospels and spirituals, classical pieces, folk, blues, pop, African chants, show tunes and her own compositions.
On March 24, 1965 she performed her protest song *Mississippi Goddam* before 40,000 marchers at the conclusion of the third Selma to Montgomery (AL) march. It was one of many songs she either wrote and/or performed that addressed civil rights, and Black liberation and identity.

PANEL E
Vel Phillips, b. 1924
Trailblazing attorney and public servant
Velvalea Rodgers “Vel” Phillips is a Wisconsin attorney who served as a local official and judge in Milwaukee, and as Secretary of State of Wisconsin, often as the first woman and/or African American in her position.
As a Milwaukee alderwoman, she labored for six years for council action to pass the city’s first open-housing ordinance, which was the seminal civil rights issue in Milwaukee in the 1960’s. Eventually passed into law in 1967, the ordinance became the impetus for the federal Open Housing Law of 1968.

Gwen T. Jackson
Civic activist
Gwen T. Jackson has led a life committed to civic involvement, moving effectively between the worlds of business, community and philanthropy. A retired human resources executive, she is equally well-known for her volunteer work on behalf of children, women and underserved populations. She has been honored for 50 years of volunteer leadership at the American Red Cross and recognized for improving child care in the community through an initiative with the Milwaukee Urban League. The United Way of Greater Milwaukee established an annual service award in her name and the YWCA of Greater Milwaukee named a building in her honor, recognizing her tireless advocacy of its core principles of empowering women and eliminating racism. Her willingness to roll up her sleeves and work with people from all walks of life has improved the lives of thousands of people in the Milwaukee area.

Willie Barrow, b. 1924
Organizer and crusader
A field organizer for the SCLC, Barrow organized participants in the movement’s marches and sit-ins, including the historic 1963 March on Washington and the 1965 March on Selma. In 1962, she worked with the Rev. Jesse Jackson to create Operation Breadbasket, and its’ successor Operation PUSH (People United to Serve Humanity) to focus on meeting the needs of underserved Black communities. Barrow replaced Jackson as executive director of Operation PUSH in 1984, and later served the organization in various capacities. She has been an advocate for universal human rights, and crusaded for issues such as AIDS in the Black community, children’s welfare, and domestic violence.
Martha Love
Milwaukee community activist, organizer and labor leader
An AFSCME union representative, Love fought hard to ensure equal treatment of African Americans and other people of color in the workplace. Founder of the African American Woman Fund Project, she is a former Chairwoman of the Democratic Party at both state and county levels.

Coretta Scott King, 1927 – 2006
Activist and civil rights leader
The widow of Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King was an active partner with her husband in the civil rights movement. The Kings traveled and marched together whenever possible and Mrs. King organized and performed in a series of Freedom Concerts to raise funds for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Her most prominent role may have been in the years after her husband’s 1968 assassination, when she took on the leadership of the struggle for racial equality herself. As a lifelong advocate for world peace, Mrs. King was one of the founders of the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy and in 1962 was a delegate at the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, Switzerland.

Angela Davis, b. 1944
Radical, activist scholar
Davis, who was associated with the Black Panther Party, works for racial and gender equity and for prison abolition, and is now a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Although she is no longer a member of the Communist Party, Davis points to Cuba as an example of a country which successfully addresses social and economic problems. In her view, democracy and socialism are more compatible than democracy and capitalism.

Barbara Lee, b. 1946
US Congresswoman (D-CA), forceful progressive voice
First elected in 1998 to represent California’s 9th Congressional District, Lee has established a reputation for principled and independent stands. She cast the lone dissenting vote against George W. Bush’s use-of-force resolution, 9/14/2001, denying him unanimous support to wage war against Afghanistan in retaliation for the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Lee works for social and economic justice, international peace, and civil and human rights.

Lateefah Simon, b. 1977
Advocate for at-risk youth
Quote on poster:
“I live in a country where we put children in shackles and in concrete cells. Working together, with righteousness and hope, we can create a country that is about reverence and reconciliation, not a world of shackles and concrete cells.”
MacArthur Fellow Lateefah Simon is a civil rights and community leader who has advocated on behalf of communities of color, youth and women since her teenage years. At age 16, Simon was recruited to become part of the Huckleberry Youth Program, a group for girls at risk of incarceration. She became an outreach worker for the Center for Young Women’s Development,
a peer-run group helping young women to become self-sufficient and educated about their opportunities. Named executive director of the Center in 1998, she now directs the Lawyer’s Committee for Civil Rights (San Francisco) and is a nationally recognized advocate for juvenile and criminal justice reform.

**Ellen Blalock**
Community artist and storyteller
Ellen Blalock is a Syracuse, NY artist whose art examines and investigates the human experience. **Angel Quilt** by Ellen Blalock
fabric, beads, found objects, 98x82”, 2001
This quilt brings to life a story spanning 3 generations of the artist’s family, honoring family elders and sharing history in the hope that generations to come will also build strong families. Poster published by Syracuse Cultural Workers.

**Cheryl Contee**
Blogger and social media activist
Contee works with non-profit organizations and foundations to use social media to create social good. She is also a co-founder of the blog *Jack and Jill Politics*, writing as “Jill Tubman.”

**Kimberly Freeman Brown**
Labor organizer and strategist
As executive director of American Rights at Work Brown directs a national non-profit educational and outreach organization dedicated to promoting the freedom of workers to form unions and bargain collectively.

**Majora Carter**
Urban visionary, sustainability advocate
Carter is a radical voice in city planning who views urban renewal through an environmental lens. The South Bronx native draws a direct connection between ecological, economic and social degradation. Hence her motto: “Green the ghetto!”
With her inspired ideas and fierce persistence, Carter managed to bring the South Bronx its first open-waterfront park in 60 years, Hunts Point Riverside Park. Carter, who was awarded a 2005 MacArthur “genius” grant, served as executive director of Sustainable South Bronx for 7 years, where she pushed both for eco-friendly practices (such as green and cool roofs) and, equally important, job training and green-related economic development for her neighborhood.

**Imani Perry** b. 1972
Scholar, activist
Imani Perry is a Professor in the Center for African American Studies at Princeton University. She is an interdisciplinary scholar who studies race and African American culture using the tools provided by various disciplines including: law, literary and cultural studies, music, and the social sciences. She is the author of *More Terrible, More Beautiful, The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Inequality in the U.S* as well as 2004’s *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*. Many of her articles in the areas of law, cultural studies, and African American studies are available for download at: imaniperry.typepad.com.