

The Southern Times

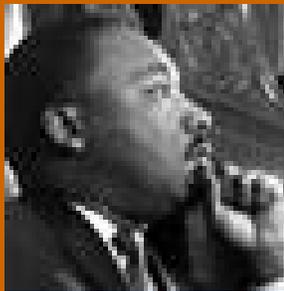
Meet the Watsons

Meet the Watsons of Flint, Michigan. There's Momma, who always covers her mouth when she laughs to hide the gap in her front teeth. Dad is a cut-up and always goofing around and teasing Momma. Byron ("By") is 13 and an "official juvenile delinquent." Joetta is the baby of the family and the only girl. She's the family's favorite child. Kenny is the main character of the story. Kenny is 10 and everyone at school thinks that there is something wrong with him. He's extra smart.

In the story, the Watsons must take a trip from Flint, Michigan, to Birmingham, Alabama, to drop By off at Grandma Sand's house. She is going to work the delinquent right out of him. Little do they

they will drive into the center of a major event in American history.

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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

It would be great if the Watsons (especially By) could have spent time with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King was arrested and held right in the Birmingham jail. He was criticized by the local clergy for coming from the outside and stirring up trouble. He wrote a letter in response that has become very famous.

In it he said, "I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

"Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson etched across the pages of history the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence, we were here. For more than two centuries, our fore parents labored in this country without wages; they made cotton "king," and they built the homes of their masters in the midst of brutal injustice and shameful humiliation—and yet out of a bottomless vitality, they continued to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands."

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Address
Birmingham, Alabama
December 3,

St. George Parish
School

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In Our Inaugural Issue

- Learn about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his part in the civil rights struggle
- Learn the true events of the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church
- Learn about the great book, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, by Christopher Paul Curtis
- Read how the author learned to write
- What were things like in the 1960s in Alabama? Read the *Jim Crow* laws that oppressed people.

Jim Crow Laws: Wouldn't You

These laws were on the books in Alabama in 1963. Other unwritten laws were in effect, too. For instance, no one would ever imagine black and white people marrying each other—they didn't need to put it in writing.

Nurses No person or corporation shall require any white female nurse to nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which Negro men are placed.

Buses All passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket windows for the white and colored races.

Meet the Watsons, cont.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 ends in shock and tragedy. The scariest part is that the tragedy really happened. In the book, Joetta goes to Sunday school at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. At the time, she and her family, the Watsons, are in Birmingham visiting Grandma Sands. The church is down the street from Grandma's house, and Joetta goes by herself. The rest of the family stays home because it is too hot to put on their Sunday best.

On Sunday morning, September 15, 1963, at 10:19, a bomb exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Four girls were killed. One girl was 11 years old and the other three were 14.

In the story, Joetta witnesses it all, and through her eyes, the reader almost experiences the tragedy, too.

Meet the Author: Christopher Paul Curtis

Born in Flint, Michigan, Christopher Paul Curtis spent his first 13 years after high school on the assembly line of Flint's historic Fisher Body Flint Plant 1. It was during this time that he began work on early drafts of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. His job entailed hanging doors, and it left him with an aversion to getting into and out of large automobiles—particularly big Buicks.

Random House Publishers:
www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/curt.html

"I tell them if I can do it, they can do it, too."

Mr. Curtis Talks About Writing

I was always a very good reader and a good writer, but when I was in school there was a different emphasis placed on writing. It wasn't creative writing; it was mostly diagramming sentences, correct grammar, all the structural stuff.

When I was in the factory, I was keeping a journal. Writing took my mind off the line. I hated being in the factory. When I was writing, I forgot I was there.

I'd tried fiction, but I knew it was terrible. When kids say they don't like what they've written, that's what I tell them: "Be patient. Fiction takes a long time."

I didn't really feel comfortable with fiction until my late thirties, early forties. I'd tried it, but I wasn't happy with the results.

I do a lot of school visits. On this tour, I meet with groups of kids, and I tell them about my writing process, how I got started. I do a little reading. I tell them if I can do it, they can do it, too.

Powell's Bookstore Interview, April 15, 2000
www.powells.com/authors/curtis.html

<http://www.msn.encarta.com>



Cleaning up after the bombing.



If I Could Meet the Author...



If I could meet Christopher Paul Curtis, I would ask him how he did research on this book. It is written like he witnessed these events himself! He makes me feel like I was right on hand, and at times I was as scared, worried, and amused as anyone in the book. — Maryella

If I met Mr. Curtis I would want to know how he knew he could be a writer. He never had any training that way, and he was working in an automobile plant all the time. He must have really wanted to write because he taught himself AND wrote while he was still working all day every day. I want to be a writer, too, so I'd like to know how he went about it. —Josh

I just read *Bud, Not Buddy*, and recommend it to everyone. I wonder if the author is writing another good book right now. I bet he is, and I'd like to know when it will be available. —Amy

Jim Crow Laws, cont.

Railroads The conductor of each passenger train is authorized and required to assign each passenger to the car or the division of the car, when it is divided by a partition, designated for the race to which such passenger belongs.

Toilet Facilities, Male Every employer of white or Negro males shall provide for such white or Negro males reasonably accessible and separate toilet facilities.

Restaurants It shall be unlawful to conduct a restaurant or other place for the serving of food in the city, at which white and colored people are served in the same room, unless such white and colored persons are effectively separated by a solid partition extending from the floor upward to a distance of seven feet or higher, and unless a separate entrance from the street is provided for each compartment.

Pool and Billiard Rooms It shall be unlawful for a Negro and a white person to play together or in company with each other at any game of pool or billiards.

The Struggle for Social Justice

African-Americans have overcome many struggles as well as obstacles. African-Americans have fought for freedom from enslavement and the rights to earn a living, have land and a job, have equal justice, get quality education, escape from oppression, maintain self pride, and end stereotyping.

Blacks everywhere got fed up with being treated as if they were inferior and slaves, so they banded together to form a movement. Not just any kind of movement, but a movement that would see victories as well as violence and death. That movement was the civil rights movement. The civil rights movement had a major goal, and that goal was to end discrimination and to put an end to segregation.

Though it is most often attributed to the 1960s, the civil rights movement found its start in the decade before that, the “peaceful 50s.” The civil rights movement actually started with legal battles before moving into the streets of American cities. The Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of schools and overturned its former “separate but equal” policy that had for so long been the law of the land. This led to the realization that there wouldn’t be equal rights gained through the courts alone; they had to take their struggle to the streets.

The NAACP and other organizations continued their struggle with the judicial system, but new organizations formed to help the people in a different way. It was at this time that the SLCC and SNCC were formed to fight for equality. Nonviolence was the core of movement, and it was their main weapon. From the bus boycotts of Montgomery to the lunch counter sit-ins across the nation not a black fist was raised in anger. They were beaten, spat upon, and cursed and still did not fight back physically. This was a brilliant public relations strategy in action, for every time the protestors were shown on the news, it was them acting peacefully and a white mob attacking them. These images alone helped to win over many supporters and force the national government to step in to help the cause of civil rights.

One of the main goals of the passive resisters was to gain public support and force the government to uphold the Supreme Court’s controversial rulings, such as what happened with Central High School when President Kennedy nationalized the Arkansas National Guard and the Interstate Commerce Commission forced the desegregation of the interstate bus lines. Without lifting a finger, they changed the way the nation was run.

As the years went on, African-Americans became even more willing to stand up for their rights, to the point where MLK led a march on Washington, D.C. Slowly but surely the small pocket of “dissidents” turned into a nationwide movement that reshaped the way the constitution was interpreted and tried to help make sure that all men and women really were created equal.

Even the killings of important persons like MLK, Medgar Evars, and Malcolm X couldn’t stop the momentum once it had started. The men became martyrs to the cause and more powerful than they ever were when they were alive. Ultimately, the goals of the civil rights movement were quite simple. They wanted to end discrimination, to become accepted as American citizens with all the rights, duties, and privileges that entails. They wanted the power to become whatever they wanted in life, to not be held back by their skin color, but instead to be accepted everywhere by everyone as a fellow human being, regardless of race.



Images of American Political History



Images of American Political History

Is the Struggle for Civil Rights Over?

The civil rights movement is dead. Slavery is abolished. African-Americans have the right to vote, as do women. Legal segregation is over. There is nothing left to fight over. Right? Wrong!

The civil rights movement is far from dead. In fact, it has hardly begun. Now that all Americans legally have equal rights, the bar should be raised even higher, above simple legal standards. Our toughest challenge is before us. We must set aside centuries of prejudice. We must begin anew.

Today, federal laws provide civil rights for all. The major challenge we face now is changing the way individuals think. Schools should do more to foster tolerance of all groups. Today, just as long ago, the main reason there are problems with civil rights is ignorance and hate. It is important to teach tolerance while people are still young and open-minded. Given the truth, people will learn to allow all groups to be the best that they can be, and we will all benefit from the peace and love it will bring.



Images of American Political History



Where Do We Go From Here?

Throughout history, there have been marches, sit-ins, and violent outbursts to end oppression. There have been many wrongs made so that we could hopefully make it right. So what have we really accomplished through our years of strife? Have we ended segregation, discrimination, and racism? Have we found the secret to killing hate?

The simple answer to each of these questions is no. We have not ended the very things that infringe upon our civil rights. Although we talk about the civil rights struggle as if it were just a thing of the past. Nothing has changed so much that our struggle has really ended. We are still witnesses to the people that are discriminated against everyday. Those that cannot find a job because of their gender or because of the color of their skin. They are still here, everyday, fighting for their rights guaranteed by our laws, but our laws cannot stop personal discrimination.

If anything, our laws are completely useless when it comes to everyday discrimination. Now I am not saying that the situation is completely hopeless. What do we do now? Where do we go from here?

We still have those who are striving. We still have those that dream and those that are listening to the dream. Our future will not be changed overnight, but it seems so far that we are on the right path. The only thing we can possibly do at this point in time would be to keep our hopes high. We may not have met our goal yet, but I believe we are getting closer. The challenge today is to change the minds of those who do not even realize their bigotry. It falls to today's youth to take up this crusade for true equality. Are we up to this monumental task? For everyone's sake, I pray that we are.

Let's Not Forget

Sarah, Addie Mae's sister, remembers Denise asking Addie to tie her belt on her dress just as the bomb exploded.



Denise McNair, 11

Four girls, getting ready for church



Carole Robertson, 14

Addie Mae's sister, Junie, was slightly injured in the bombing. She was asked to identify her sister's body. "I looked at the face, and I couldn't tell who it was," she says of the crumpled form she viewed. "Then I saw this little brown shoe—you know, like a loafer—and I recognized it right away."



Cynthia Wesley, 14

The Carole Robertson Center is a daycare for school-aged kids, named in honor of Carole, who was particularly fond of small children.

A Mystery: In 1994, the cemetery where Addie Mae was laid to rest had fallen into terrible condition, with crumbling gravestones, grass growing waist-high, and even bones from graves poking out of the ground. Addie's sisters decided to have her body moved to another cemetery. When the crew dug up the marked grave, they had terrible news: There was nothing there. Where are Addie's remains? It's still a mystery, and adds more pain to hearts already overflowing with pain. Addie's family remembers her burial, and believes her body is in that cemetery, in an unmarked, or mismarked, grave.



Addie Mae Collins, 14

Convicted: On May 22, 2002, Bobby Frank Cherry was convicted of murder in the case of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing.