

Fred Shuttlesworth: the man behind the icon

—Ashley Rogers—

Staff Writer

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth was undoubtedly the pillar of the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham, Alabama during the 1960's. He withstood constant criticisms and oftentimes, severe beatings while fighting for what he saw as a divine right. During a hopeless and tiresome time for most, he exhibited faith and determination. With his recent passing, Reverend Shuttlesworth leaves a world that he shaped indefinitely to allow equal freedoms to each person in the nation regardless of color or creed. However, he was not simply the Civil Rights Movement icon that most have researched in their textbooks and who is discussed today in many classes throughout the nation. Dr. Wilson Fallin, a history professor at the University of Montevallo, knew Reverend Shuttlesworth in a different, more personal light. He knew Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth as a man.

The University of Montevallo's own Dr. Wilson Fallin, inspired by Reverend Shuttlesworth, played an integral part during the Civil Rights Movement. As a student at Morehouse College he saw the injustices of that day practically in his own backyard. Focused on his college career, but wanting to make a difference in the movement, Dr. Fallin participated in demonstrations such as sit-ins. Long before this took place, Dr. Fallin recalls his first meeting with Fred Shuttlesworth. "My father and Fred Shuttlesworth were students together at Selma University. When the university had Founder's Day in the early 60's, I met him through my father." Dr. Fallin's personal reflection of Reverend Shuttlesworth is centered on the word courage. "His courage had the biggest impact on me. I've read various books and researched Rev. Shuttlesworth. We sat on panels together as well, long after the movement had taken place. The key characteristic of Rev.

Shuttlesworth was his sense of divine compulsion. He felt that God had called him personally to destroy segregation. Through this idea he gained great courage."

Dr. Fallin reflected on one of the demonstrations of which he and Rev. Shuttlesworth were a part. "As a student at Morehouse College I participated in a sit-in that Rev. Shuttlesworth led at New Berry's Convenience Store in downtown Birmingham. We met at 16th Street Baptist Church and marched to the store to take part in the non-violent protest. The police were called and I was arrested along with Rev. Shuttlesworth. I was released an hour later, but he was retained there longer." The non-violent sit-ins were one of the key components of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960's.

Rev. Shuttlesworth was more than a Civil Rights icon who was responsible for bringing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Birmingham to fight civil injustice.

He was also the pastor of Bethel Baptist Church and an African-American citizen. When Dr. Fallin was asked how he would describe Reverend Shuttlesworth as a man, he described him in various ways. "He was determined to succeed, tough, stubborn, and knew that God was with him. He was a leader who felt he had a divine right from God to rehabilitate Birmingham and mend injustices occurring there."

Dr. Fallin believes that the youth of today can learn a great deal from Reverend Shuttlesworth's journey. "Youth should learn that you can put your efforts toward something besides material gain as Rev. Shuttlesworth has done." Dr. Fallin commented on the unmistakable legacy that he left on the world. "Reverend Shuttlesworth left a legacy of courage and service." He will not only be remembered as an influential Civil Rights icon, but also as a great man.