



Inspired to Action

Americans born between 1977 and 1994 represent the largest share of young adults and most racially diverse generation in U.S. history. As they work to change their world, they look to the civil rights heroes who came before them.



Maya Thompson, 22

Fort Washington, Maryland
intern, Library of Congress

I was president of my secondary school's NAACP chapter and focused on Africana studies in college. Now I work on the Voices of Civil Rights collection at the Library of Congress, organizing letters about racial segregation during the civil rights era. The stories of witnesses to history help future generations.

I am inspired by reporter **Simeon Booker** [pictured here with Maya Thompson], whose stories in *Jet* magazine would be lost to history if he had not had the courage to bring them to our attention. He took risks because he knew the weight of the issues at hand. He reported on the murder of a black teenager named Emmett Till, and the story and photos of Till's body made the world wake up to atrocities that were going unnoticed by many.

Recently, I had the honor of meeting Mr. Booker. He talked about dangers he faced decades ago, but I was struck by his saying that he did not always know if he would be able to eat while working because, as a black man, he could not walk into a store or restaurant in many places. We need to remember what we take for granted, and we still need to fight for justice for people who are marginalized.

CONNECTING THE DOTS:
FORT WASHINGTON ●



Dana Bolger, 22
St. Louis, Missouri
student, Amherst College,
Massachusetts

I'm a co-organizer of Know Your IX, a campaign to educate students across the country about their right to go to school free from sexual violence and harassment under a law called Title IX.

Rosa Parks is most remembered for her refusal to give up her bus seat to a white man, but by the time she did that, she had already been engaged for years in anti-sexual violence activism, documenting the testimonies of black women victimized by white men.

Parks was far more radical than the character I read about in secondary school. She dared to critique accepted practices and demand the seemingly impossible. She knew that power concedes nothing without a demand — and all of us trying to make change today have got to remember that.

Raheem Washington, 18
Mansfield, Ohio
student, Ohio State University

In secondary school, I was introduced to the Algebra Project, which teaches math in new ways. (Once, we went downtown, took photos of landmarks and used them to study math concepts.) The teachers helped me realize I could go to college, and I made a hard decision to take a break from playing football to focus on school. For five years I have tutored elementary-school children as part of the Young People's Project.

I respect **Bob Moses**, who started the Algebra Project. During the 1960s, he was a leader with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and helped black people register to vote in the South. Like him, I want to help my community and my nation. Moses brought educational rights into the civil rights movement. All Americans deserve an education, and he deserves a lot of credit.

Hamza Jaka, 21
Fontana, Wisconsin
student, University of
California–Berkeley

I use a wheelchair, and as a person with a disability, I've been able to succeed thanks to my support networks. As co-chair of the nonprofit Kids as Self Advocates, I help younger people with disabilities pursue their goals. I advise the U.S. Business Leadership Network, which pushes for inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace.

My hero is **Ed Roberts**, the first student with severe disabilities to attend the University of California-Berkeley — my school. Roberts fought to make the city of Berkeley, the state of California, America and the world more accessible for all. Known as the father of the disability rights movement, Roberts inspires me because he had a zeal for mentorship, for sharing his experiences with others: the key to changing public policy.

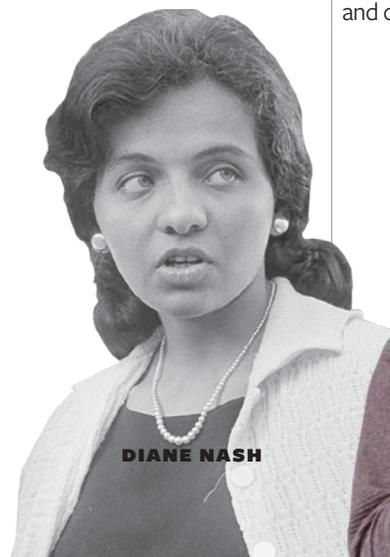
Donnel Baird, 33
New York
founder, BlocPower

BlocPower and its partners promote and finance energy-efficiency projects at small businesses, churches and schools in urban areas. Our nonprofit startup employs local workers to retrofit buildings.

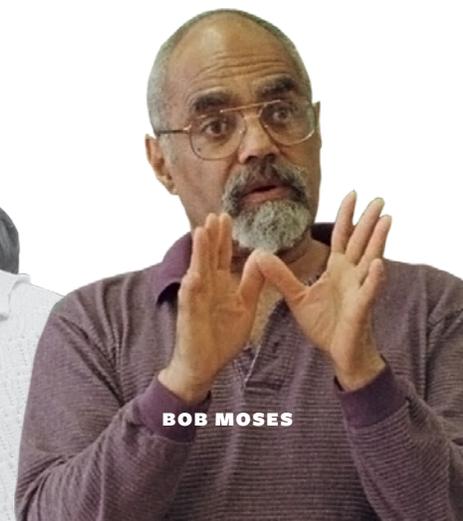
Diane Nash studied Gandhian nonviolence for 18 months with the Reverend James Lawson and other college students in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to learn how nonviolence could dismantle a violent segregationist regime in the American South. She defied local judges and voluntarily went to jail in Alabama while eight months pregnant. She placed her life at risk to act on her principles in a way that would destroy Jim Crow laws that kept races separate.

Our generation can learn from Diane Nash's fearlessness and strategic genius to achieve outsized outcomes. I hope to learn from her life as I help people solve problems of high unemployment and climate change.

“She placed her life at risk to act on her principles.”



DIANE NASH



BOB MOSES



Zim Ugochukwu, 25
San Francisco
founder, Travel Noire

In 2009, as a student at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, I founded Ignite Greensboro to help open Greensboro's International Civil Rights Center & Museum.

I recently started another project called Travel Noire to get more young people of color to travel abroad.

I admire **Charles Neblett**, a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee who sat at "whites-only" lunch counters in Greensboro, where I went to school. He did not wait for anyone's permission to change the world. He stood in the face of injustice, unafraid and unwavering, and in doing that, inspires me to continue to challenge injustices.

Rose Bear Don't Walk, 19
New Haven, Connecticut
Salish tribal member and student, Yale University

I'm working toward incorporating Native American traditional ecological knowledge in solving today's environmental issues. As the secretary of an organization called Native Americans at Yale, I also work toward ending negative preconceptions of Native Americans.

I'm inspired by **Benjamin Chavis**, who coined the term "environmental racism" — a type of racism that targets minority communities by subjecting them to toxic conditions from nearby waste sites and facilities. This term resonates within Indian country because so many tribes have been subject to this kind of discrimination. Now, with movements like Idle No More, Native people are standing up to environmental racism, and I hope to join them. Because we were the original caretakers of this land, we must fight and care for it so we can all live in a more prosperous world.

Joseph Rocha, 27
San Francisco
law student, University of San Francisco

I was kicked out of the Navy for acknowledging I am gay. That led me to add my voice to those fighting the discriminatory "don't ask, don't tell" rule forcing gays and lesbians in the military to hide their sexual orientation. Their stories helped defeat a law at odds with the core values of the military and nation we love.

I take inspiration from **Harvey Milk**, the first openly gay city official in the U.S. He was a military veteran who believed there was no action more powerful than that of sharing your story. His life encouraged me to have hope and to give hope. I am still moved by his words: "Once they realize that we are indeed their children, that we are indeed everywhere, every myth, every lie, every innuendo will be destroyed once and for all."

Erika Duthely, 26
New York
law fellow, Alliance for Justice

Making sure that everyone has equal access to our justice system is absolutely necessary for the protection of our most vulnerable citizens. I help Americans to solve their grievances in a court of law.

I have been inspired by many civil rights figures and activists, but if I have to choose, I choose the late seven-term congresswoman **Shirley Chisholm**. She was smart, passionate and paved the way for black women to play a significant role in politics (in my home state of New York, no less). Chisholm's life inspires me as I strive for personal goals and as I fight for civil rights.

“Milk believed there was no action more powerful than telling your story.”



CHARLES NEBLETT

BENJAMIN CHAVIS

HARVEY MILK

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