

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

February 7, 2017

While I was sitting at my desk pondering various possibilities for this week's *Laptop*, my good friend, Rabbi Bernstein, whose office is next to mine, brought in a gift to our congregation of the book *28 Days: Moments in Black History that Changed the World*.¹ There is much more to the book than I'm about to share, but here are those 28 days:

Day 1: **March 5, 1770 – Crispus Attucks** is shot by a British soldier, beginning the Boston Massacre and, ultimately, the Revolutionary War.

Day 2: **March 6, 1857 – Dred Scott decision**, denying the right of citizenship to black people after slavery ended.

Day 3: **May 13, 1862 – Robert Smalls**, a slave in the Confederate crew on a ship, commandeers it, sails it north, and delivers it to the Union. He was the first Black captain of an American ship and ultimately achieved the rank of Major General.

Day 4: **July 9, 1868 – 14th Amendment** to the Constitution overturns the Dred Scott decision: “*All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.*”

Day 5: **July 9, 1893 – Daniel Hale Williams** successfully performs the first heart operation, before the invention of penicillin, antibiotics, or X-rays.

Day 6: **May 18, 1896 – Plessy v. Ferguson decision**, stating that “separate but equal” facilities were “fair.”

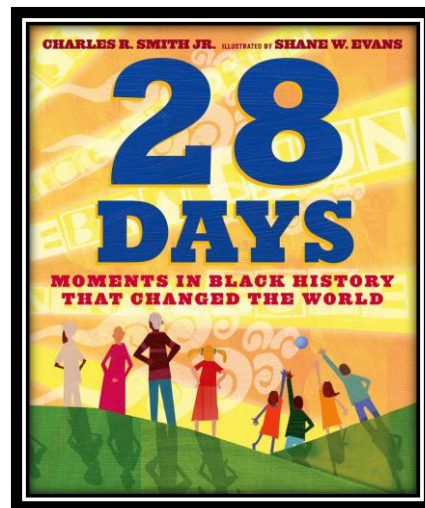
Day 7: **April 6, 1909 – Matthew Henson** and Robert Peary are the first men to reach the North Pole. Henson was overlooked in the honors and medals given and was not recognized until 1944.

Day 8: **March 10, 1913 – Harriet “Araminta” Tubman**, the most famous “conductor” of the “Underground Railroad,” dies of pneumonia. Due to her heroic service as a spy for the Union, she was buried with full military honors in Auburn, New York.

Day 9: **May 15, 1918 – Henry Johnson**, a member of “The Harlem Hellfighters,” single-handedly fights off a platoon of Germans in the Argonne Forest during WWI to keep his friend, Needham Roberts, from being captured. He himself was wounded twenty-one times, and was the first American to receive the *Croix de Guerre*, the highest French military honor. The United States awarded the *Distinguished Cross* nearly seventy-five years after his death. He is buried with other war heroes in Arlington National Cemetery.

Day 10: **May 25, 1919 – Madam C. J. Walker** (née Sarah Breedlove) dies as the richest black woman in America. She was the founder of a hair products company.

Day 11: **June 15, 1921 – Bessie Coleman** receives her international pilot's license in France, since no American flight schools accepted either women or African-Americans.



¹ Charles R. Smith, Jr., *28 Days: Moments in Black History that Changed the World*, illustrated by Shane W. Evans (New York: Roaring Brook Press, 2015).

Day 12: **August 9, 1936 – Jesse Owens**, “the Buckeye Bullet,” wins his fourth Olympic Gold Medal under Hitler’s nose. He was the first American track-and-field athlete to win four Gold Medals in the same Olympics.

Day 13: **April 9, 1939 – Marian Anderson** performs at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday after having been refused permission to sing at the Daughters of the American Revolution. She was invited by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who resigned from the D.A.R. over the insult.

Day 14: **April 15, 1947 – Jackie Robinson**, #42, is the first African-American to play in a Major League Baseball game, for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Day 15: **May 17, 1954 – Brown v. Board of Education decision**, eliminating segregation in public schools.

Day 16: **December 1, 1955 – Rosa Parks** sits down on a Montgomery bus and refuses to get up, and The Civil Rights Movement was born.

Day 17: **May 26, 1956 – Althea Gibson** becomes the first black woman to win a tennis title. **August 25, 1968 – Arthur Ashe** becomes the first black man to win a tennis title. Althea would eventually win the U.S. Open twice and Wimbledon twice. Arthur would become the first black tennis player to be ranked #1 in the world.

Day 18: **September 25, 1957 – The “Little Rock Nine”** attend classes in Little Rock’s Central High School under the protection of the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne Division. The Nine were **Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Jefferson Thomas, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls, Minniejean Brown, Gloria Ray, Thelma Mothershed, and Melba Pattillo.**

Day 19: **September 11, 1960 – Wilma Rudolph** wins a third Olympic Gold Medal in track and field. She was the first American female track athlete to win three Olympic Gold Medals in a single Olympics. She had had polio as a child.

Day 20: **August 28, 1963 – Martin Luther King, Jr.** delivers the “*I Have a Dream*” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. One year later, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ending segregation—at least in the law.

Day 21: **February 21, 1965 – Malcolm X** is assassinated. Where Martin Luther King, Jr. preached nonviolence, Malcolm X (Malcolm Little) focused on standing up to injustice “by any means necessary.”

Day 22: **October 2, 1967 – Thurgood Marshall** is sworn in as the first black Supreme Court Justice. He was the first black admitted to the University of Maryland Law School, successfully argued *Brown v. Board of Education* before the Supreme Court, and won many segregation cases in lower courts before joining the Supreme Court.

Day 23: **January 25, 1972 – Shirley Chisholm** declares herself a Candidate for President of the United States, the first black woman to ever do so. Her campaign slogan was “Unbought and Unbossed.” She was the first African-American woman elected to Congress, where she represented New York’s 12th Congressional district for seven terms. President Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom (posthumously) in 2015.

Day 24: **April 8, 1974 – Hank Aaron** hits his 715th home run, breaking Babe Ruth’s long-standing career home run record. Barry Bonds has since broken Hank’s record for home runs, but Hank still holds the record for the most runs batted in (RBIs).

Day 25: **August 30, 1983 – Guion “Guy” Bluford** becomes the first black astronaut launched into space, aboard the space shuttle *Challenger*.

September 12, 1992 – Mae Jemison becomes the first black female astronaut in space, aboard the space shuttle *Endeavour*.

Day 26: **May 10, 1994 – Nelson Mandela** is inaugurated as the first black President of South Africa after having spent twenty-seven years in prison for his leadership of the African National Congress.

Day 27: **February 27, 2003 – Oprah Winfrey** becomes the first black female billionaire in world history. Like Madam C. J. Walker before her, Oprah works just as hard at giving her money away as she does earning it.

Day 28: **January 20, 2009 – Barack Obama** is inaugurated as the first black President of the United States.

Crispus Attucks sacrificed.
Dred Scott sued.
Robert Smalls stole.
So Barack could be counted.

Daniel Hale healed.
Matthew Henson conquered.
Harriet Tubman led.
Henry Johnson fought.
Madam C. J. Walker built.
So Barack could dream.

Bessie Coleman soared.
Jesse Owens sprinted.
Marian Anderson sang.
Jackie Robinson swung.
Brown sue. And won.
So Barack could stand.

Rosa sat.
Althea and Arthur smashed.
The Little Rock Nine endured.
Wilma roared.
Martin marched.
Malcolm challenged.
Thurgood was sworn in.
Shirley ran.
So Barack could run.

Hank hacked away.
Mae and Guy launched.
Mandela inspired.
Oprah earned.
So Barack could win.

Number forty-four, America's first black President.

Day 29: **TODAY.**
What will YOU do?

Dave

