

## Reverend Louis H. Coleman, Jr. (1943-2008)

Reverend Louis Coleman, Jr., was Louisville's best-known social justice activist for over three decades. Using the form of protest to bring about positive change, he picketed and prayed in front of nearly every major Kentucky institution to advance civil rights and equality. While those protests and demonstrations sometimes led to his arrest, often, they led to success and change for the better. He was a staunch civil rights activist and a dedicated fighter against injustice; many considered him a champion.

Coleman, affectionately called, "Buster," by friends and family, was the founder and Executive Director of the Justice Resource Center, which he began in 1975 to fight injustice and discriminatory treatment for all oppressed peoples throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Coleman's passion for civil rights and equality for all people was awakened at an early age as he witnessed his family endure the injustices of living within a segregated society. His own education began in the historic Smoketown neighborhood of Louisville. "I didn't know that we were poor," Coleman said. His mother Dorothy Figg Coleman and his father Louis Henry Coleman, Sr., along with Jackie Robinson, were his icons. "I looked at their struggles and I made up my mind I was going to work in that arena, and God just placed it on me."

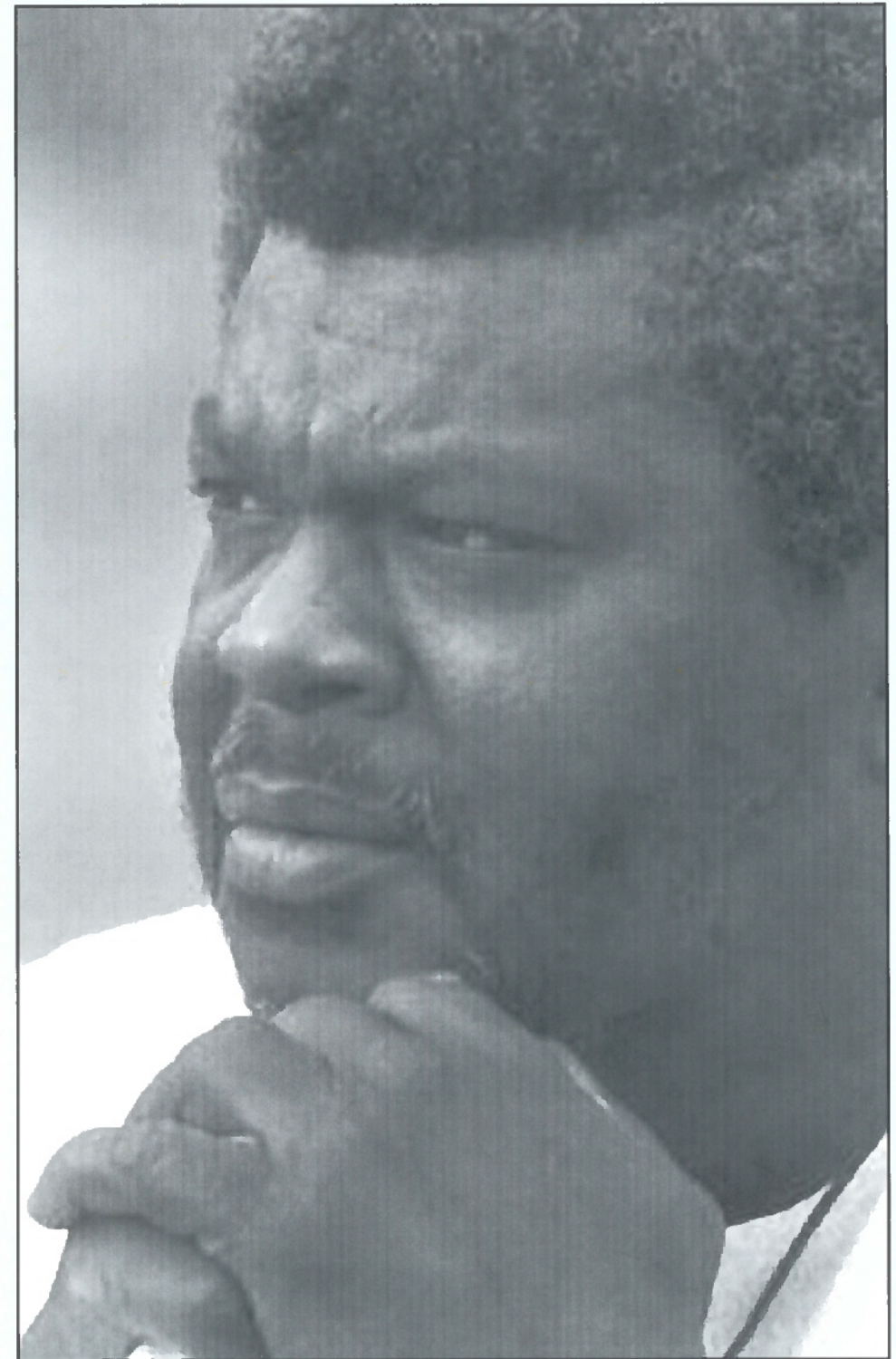
He never gave up being a voice for the people. With bullhorn in hand, chanting 1960s-vintage activist anthems such as, "We Shall Not Be Moved," he, along with a few committed followers, would protest everywhere from the Governor's office to remote construction sites, bringing attention to issues of unfairness that may have otherwise gone unchallenged. On many occasions, he used his well-worn van to haul materials, people and help to disaster sights like those of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005.

His continued pressure on Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville around the PGA Championship of 1996 led the golf organization to take concrete steps to expand the role of minorities in the sport nationwide. His involvement in a discrimination complaint against private country clubs in Kentucky resulted in a law that prevents members from taking tax breaks when clubs do not allow minority members. His focus on the smokestack emissions in the Rubbertown area in Louisville prompted state funding for air monitoring, which revealed excessive levels of chemicals in the air and resulted in a stringent toxic-air control program throughout Jefferson County. As a direct result of his efforts, a large monetary settlement was awarded to 157 African American employees for exclusion and discriminatory practices at E.I. duPont Co. in Louisville. He was instrumental in a \$3.9 million award to 94 Louisville African American police officers. African American managers at the Ford Motor Truck Plant were able to settle with the company because of his intervention. With the use of demonstrations and dialogue, he was instrumental in the increase of minority participation on the United Parcel Service (UPS) Hub 2000 project, bringing 20 percent of the work to minority-owned construction businesses.

His range and daily schedule were astonishing. The Courier-Journal newspaper mentioned him in 1,076 stories and letters in the 1990s alone. "Nobody covers as much territory and spends as much time of his life for the liberation of suffering people," said comedian-activist Dick Gregory.

Coleman served as Pastor of the Shelbyville Congregational Methodist Church for more than 20 years. He held a master's degree in community development from the University of Louisville and a master's of divinity degree from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He received several awards throughout his life, including the 2000 Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame induction, 2003 Urban League Most Influential Citizens in Kentucky, and 2007 Bethune-Cookman College Environmental Award. In 2008, he received a Simmons Bible College Honorary Doctorate degree.

"We going to agitate and agitate and agitate until justice falls down." Reverend Louis H. Coleman, Jr. said in 2000. He died on July 5, 2008.



## Gallery of Great Black Kentuckians #44

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