



Photo by the Alabama Tourism Department

Fred D. Gray Biography

Founding Director, Tuskegee History Center, Tuskegee, AL

Our organization was established with a multicultural Board of Directors, led by **Fred David Gray**, a renowned Alabama civil rights attorney and 2022 Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient. With a legal career that spans nearly seven decades, Gray is still practicing law at the age of 93.

In October of 2021, the City of Montgomery moved to honor its native son, by renaming the street he grew up on. Jeff Davis Avenue, originally named for a Confederate President, is now Fred D Gray Avenue. Gray's most recent civil rights case, filed on behalf of Macon County Alabama, is against the United Daughters of the Confederacy. It is a pending land rights case in which the Confederate organization is attempting to maintain control of a property in the town square of the city of Tuskegee that contains a monument memorializing Confederate soldiers.

Enthusiastic, energetic, and fresh out of law school, Gray began a dynamic civil rights career, launched by his representation of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. during the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. His first civil rights case involved representation of Claudette Colvin, a 15-year-old African American high school student who had also refused to give up her seat on a city bus in Montgomery. Among the charges against Colvin then was assault against a police officer after being dragged off that bus. Gray was with Colvin in 2021 when she successfully petitioned a family court to expunge her juvenile record.

Gray has won a long list of landmark civil rights cases, which can be found in most constitutional law textbooks, including *Browder v Gayle*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court integrated the buses in Montgomery in 1956; the *Gomillion v Lightfoot* voting rights case, which he argued before the U. S. Supreme Court; and *Williams v Wallace*, which resulted in an order of police protection for voting rights marchers walking from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.

Notably, Gray also filed lawsuits that integrated all state institutions of higher learning in the state of Alabama, and 104 of the then 121 elementary and second school systems in the state, *Lee v Macon*. He represented and secured a settlement for the victims of the notorious Tuskegee Syphilis Study (and helped convince President Bill Clinton to make a public apology for the shameful role of the federal government in withholding treatment from them).

Fred David Gray was born in Montgomery in 1930 to a mother who worked as a domestic and raised five children after her husband died during the Great Depression. Despite the obvious obstacles presented by a life of poverty in the Jim Crow South, he graduated from Western Reserve University's law school in Cleveland Ohio. True to a secret promise he made to himself as a young man, he returned to Alabama to destroy everything segregated he could find.

Last updated Jan. 2024