

For My People: The Life and Writing of Margaret Walker

Video montage of MWA - diff. ages, poses



Margaret Walker OC

Montage of Margaret images

Margaret Walker OC

Montage of images

MUSIC :15 up "Margaret's Theme"

JERRY WARD VO: Margaret Walker

Alexander is a national treasure. Margaret is an intellectual, a poet, an essayists, a fiction writer. a person who has an extraordinary sense of history.

MARGARET WALKER OC: FOR MY PEOPLE EVERYWHERE SINGING THEIR SLAVE SONGS REPEATEDLY THEIR DIRGES AND THEIR DITTIES (Fade under)

JOANNE GABBIN VO: When we hear Margaret Walker read For My People, you hear in those poems a resonance of the folk tradition. And its a poetry rooted in the African American experience.

MARGARET WALKER OC:(fade up) AND THEIR BLUES AND JUBILEES PRAYING THEIR PRAYERS NIGHTLY TO AN UNKNOWN GOD BENDING THEIR KNEES HUMBLY TO AN UNSEEN POWER

MARYEMMA GRAHAM VO: The very fact that there was a voice like Margaret Walker out there for black writers to listen to, but especially black women writers to listen to was extremely important. People used the term foremother, literary foremother, black foremother because it was as if somebody was blazing the trail.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: FOR ALL MY
PEOPLE LENDING THEIR STRENGTH TO
THE YEARS TO THE GONE YEARS AND
THE NOW YEARS AND THE MAYBE YEARS
WASHING, IRONING, COOKING.
SCRUBBING
SEWING, MENDING, HOEING. PLOWING
DIGGING, PLANTING, PRUNING, PATCHING
DRAGGING ALONG, NEVER GAINING
NEVER REACHING, NEVER KNOWING.
AND NEVER UNDERSTANDING
MUSIC UP

Freeze image: Key title -
For My People: The Life and
Writing of Margaret Walker

DIP TO BLACK

Key: IMAGES

MARGARET WALKER VO I never think that I have written a poem if I don't see the images and find the meaning and have the rhythm.

MUSIC UP AND UNDER: R & B

Montage: kids playing, school footage

JERRY WARD VO: FOR THE CRAMPED
BEWILDERED YEARS WE WENT TO
SCHOOL TO LEARN TO KNOW THE
REASONS WHY AND THE ANSWERS TO
AND THE PEOPLE WHO AND THE PLACES
WHERE AND THE DAYS WHEN, IN
MEMORY OF THE BITTER HOURS WHEN
WE DISCOVERED WE WERE BLACK &
POOR & SMALL & DIFFERENT & NOBODY
CARED & NOBODY WONDERED &
NOBODY UNDERSTOOD

Jerry Ward OC
Literature Professor, Tougaloo College
(lower third key)

JERRY WARD OC: It's marvelous that Margaret Walker, for example, does not write in the same way as some of the more radical African American writers do; that she uses traditional forms.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: I grew up feeling that writing poetry was the greatest thing in the world. And as I got older, I decided you didn't have to be special or made different to learn to write poetry. Because by the time I was eleven or twelve, I was writing poetry.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER 2A OC: I grew up feeling that writing poetry was the greatest thing in the world. And as I got older, I decided you didn't have to be special or made different to learn to write poetry. Because by the time I was eleven or twelve, I was writing poetry.

Photos: family home, father, mother

NARR 1: MARGARET WALKER WAS BORN JULY 7, 1915 IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA. THE DAUGHTER OF A METHODIST MINISTER AND A MUSIC TEACHER, SHE WAS ENCOURAGED TO DEVELOP HER TALENT FOR WRITING.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER 1A OC: I was inspired all my life by my own family. My mother and my father inspired me at first. My mother's music was the first thing I remember hearing and my father's books and his sermons were my next connection that I remember ever as a child.

Photo: Margaret as child

NARR 2: YOUNG MARGARET WAS ENCOURAGED TO READ AND UNDERSTAND THE BLACK LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL SCHOLARS OF THE 1920S AND 1930S. SHE EVEN MET ONE OF THE GIANTS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE.

Photo Langston Hughes

MARGARET WALKER 2D VO: I met Langston Hughes when I was 16 years old. And he said he thought I could write poetry. (X) He said but you've got to get her out of the south. You've got to take her where she can get a good education and make a real poet out of her.

Margaret Walker OC

Joanne Gabbin OC
English Professor, James Madison
University (lower third key)

Northwestern U. gate (Bailey/Harris)

Northwestern building (Bailey/Harris)

Photo: W.E.B Dubois (MWA, JSU)

Margaret Walker OC

Photo: Crisis cover/ "Daydream"
(Harsh)

Photo. Walker as young woman

Key: "I Want to Write"

Montage: Jackson State students
footage (MSA 11/12)

Joanne Gabbin OC: So she got right into the movement as a young woman and so by the time she started to write poetry when she was about fifteen years old, she had already absorbed many of those attitudes from the New Negro Renaissance.

NARR 3: WALKER'S FATHER TOOK LANGSTON HUGHES ADVICE.. IN 1932, HE ENROLLED 17 YEAR OLD MARGARET IN NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY. JUST NORTH OF CHICAGO. THERE SHE ATTENDED A LECTURE GIVEN BY W.E.B. DUBOIS, AUTHOR AND EDITOR OF THE LEADING AFRICAN AMERICAN MAGAZINE, CRISIS.

MARGARET WALKER 2E OC: And I went up to him and I told him I had read some, some of his work and I knew that he wrote poetry. I said I write poetry too. He said oh, you do? I was, I had nerve enough to tell him that. He said send me some. I said where shall I send it? He said send it to Crisis. So I sent him "I want to write" was eighteen when he published it the next year, my first national publication.

WALKER VO READING: I WANT TO WRITE:
I want to write. I want to write the songs of my people. I want to hear them singing melodies in the dark. I want to catch the last floating strains from their sob-torn throats. I want to frame their dreams into words: their souls into notes.

Photos: 2 Black kids, Black baby
1930's Chi. (Chicago Hist. Society)

Footage: Black woman filing card (:08)
(WPA Film Library)

Footage: Pres. Roosevelt & asst. (:04)
(WPA Film Library)

Footage: Black men & women writing
(:04) (WPA Film Library)

Photo: Studs Terkel (Chi. Hist. Soc):
Arna Bontemps (Harsh),
Richard Wright (Natl. Archives)

Margaret Walker OC

Photo: Young Walker (MWA, JSU)

Photo: Horace Clayton & Arna
Bontemps (Harsh)

Photo: Richard Wright (Natl.
Archives)

Photo: Richard Wright (Beinecke)

RUBY DEE : WALKER'S COMMITMENT TO
WRITE THE SONGS OF HER PEOPLE
INTENSIFIED DURING HER SEVEN YEARS
IN CHICAGO. SHE GRADUATED FROM
NORTHWESTERN AND FOUND WORK AS A
WRITER FROM 1936 TO 1939 ON THE
ILLINOIS WRITERS PROJECT CREATED
UNDER PRESIDENT FRANKLIN
ROOSEVELT'S WORKS PROGRESS
ADMINISTRATION. THE WRITERS PROJECT
PROVIDED PAID WORK FOR ARTISTS AND
INTELLECTUALS. INCLUDING STUDS
TERKEL , ARNA BONTEMPS (BON-TAHH)
AND RICHARD WRIGHT.
MARGARET WALKER OC: When I went to
work at the WPA and met Richard Wright, I began
to become much, much more self-conscious, more
socially conscious than I had been before.
RUBY DEE : THESE THREE YEARS WERE A
TIME OF AWAKENING AND DISCOVERY
FOR WALKER. SHE HONED HER LITERARY
SKILLS WORKING WITH HER WPA
COLLEAGUES AND THE SOUTH SIDE
WRITERS GROUP. FORMED BY RICHARD
WRIGHT. WRIGHT SOON BECAME HER
FRIEND AND MENTOR.

Footage: Unemployed black men and black men laboring ('06)
(WPA Film Library)

Margaret Walker OC

Photo: Richard Wright (Natl. Archives)

Photo: Unemployed crowd (Chi. Hist. Soc.)

Margaret Walker OC

Joanne Gabbin OC

Margaret Walker OC

Photos: Unemployed slept under Michigan Ave.; Unemployment line (Chi. Hist. Soc.)

MARGARET WALKER VO : Wright had a concept of the problems of being a black person in this country. He could tell you and show you.. what we did not have. We don't own the means of production.(X) I had not had any sociology and economics in college. so I was quick to listen to whatever he had to say.

RUBY DEE : WRIGHT'S FRIENDSHIP AND MARXIST PHILOSOPHY HAD A PROFOUND IMPACT ON WALKER. SHE LOOKED AT RACISM AND RACE RELATIONS THROUGH A NEW LENS.

MARGARET WALKER OC: In fact, it was one way of moving toward an understanding of the problems of Negro people. It was just to understand that our problems were basically economic and political. And I had not felt that way before.

JOANNE GABBIN OC: She does this wonderful poetry in the late 1930's that responds to a social and economic revolution in this country where this country is moving more towards the left.

MARGARET WALKER OC: I changed from the very romantic and sentimental type of poetry to very realistic and factual type of poetry. And I was very conscious of making that change.

RUBY DEE : WALKER'S WRITING SHARPENED AS SHE EXPLORED THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL OPPRESSION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: But I did not become a Communist as many people said at the time I was writing Red, but I was never a communist. I could not accept dialectical materialism. I had grown up with a father who was a minister and preached an idealistic philosophy.

Photo: For My People title page
(Harsh)

(MUSIC IN AND UNDER)

RUBY DEE : IT WAS HER OWN PRACTICAL IDEALISM THAT LED HER TO CREATE HER SIGNATURE POEM, FOR MY PEOPLE. WITH VERY LITTLE EFFORT.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: I was 22 and I sat down and wrote that poem in fifteen minutes on a typewriter. (MUSIC OUT)

That's exactly how quick it was for me to write it.

Key: MEANINGS

Montage: Chicago footage

street scenes (ABC).

poor people (MSA 11)

Maryemma Graham OC
Margaret Walker biographer (lower
third key)

Photo: Margaret as young woman
(MWA,JSU)

Photo: Stephen Vincent Benet
(Beinecke)

Margaret Walker OC

MUSIC UP AND UNDER: GOSPEL

MARYEMMA GRAHAM VO: FOR MY
PEOPLE THROINGING 47TH ST. IN CHICAGO.
AND LENOX AVE. IN NEW YORK. AND
RAMPART ST. IN NEW ORLEANS, LOST
DISINHERITED DISPOSSESSED AND HAPPY
PEOPLE FILLING THE CABARETS AND
TAVERNS AND OTHER PEOPLE'S POCKETS
NEEDING BREAD AND SHOES AND MILK
AND LAND AND MONEY AND SOMETHING -
SOMETHING ALL OUR OWN

MARYEMMA GRAHAM OC: Meaning for her
has always been a driving force. And so when the
poet, when the poem has meaning, when Walker
talks about a poem having meaning, ah it is the
search that she's always been on.

RUBY DEE : WALKER'S VISION
INCLUDED REACHING FOR THE COVETED
YALE SERIES OF YOUNGER POETS
AWARD. USING "FOR MY PEOPLE" AS
THE TITLE POEM, SHE SUBMITTED A
MANUSCRIPT OF HER POETRY IN 1940.
THAT SUMMER, SHE RECEIVED A
PERSONAL LETTER FROM EDITOR
STEPHEN VINCENT BENET.

MARGARET WALKER OC: I was impressed with
the letter he wrote that he thought I could do
some things that Countee Cullen and Langston
Hughes had never done. And he said you could do
some things that have never been done .

Photo: Stephen V. Benet (Beinecke)
Footage: Black men working on street crew, black woman sweeping stoop (:04) (WPA Film Library)

Photo: "Dark Blood" poem (Harsh)

Margaret Walker OC

Yale letter of rejection (Bailey/Harris)

Photo: Walker's father

Margaret Walker OC

Photo: Walker wins Yale award (MWA,JSU)

Photo: For My People ms (Walker)

Footage: Black woman combing girl's hair, man chopping ice (:05) (WPA)

Photo: Lynching scene (Archive Photos)

Photos: U of Iowa 1940s, Paul Engle (Iowa)

Photo: Paul Engle teaching class (Iowa)

RUBY DEE : BENET REALIZED THAT WALKER'S WORK PORTRAYED A TONE AND RANGE OF BLACK EXPERIENCES ABSENT IN THE WORK OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE WRITERS. HER POEMS VOICED THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS, UNIQUE IN THEIR INTIMACY AND AUTHENTICITY.

MARGARET WALKER OC: He told me if I hadn't published the next year to send it back and he would consider it, which I did the second year

RUBY DEE : REJECTED AFTER THE SECOND SUBMISSION, WALKER DECIDED NOT TO RE-ENTER THE CONTEST FOR THE THIRD TIME. THEN SHE RECEIVED A TELEGRAM FROM HER FATHER .

MARGARET WALKER VO: He said you won the Yale award. (X) That was the beginning of my career such as I couldn't conceive of a better way to begin my career.

RUBY DEE : WALKER RECEIVED THE YALE YOUNGER POETS AWARD IN 1942. THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN TO DO SO. SHE GAINED NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR HER USE OF TRADITIONAL FORMS TO EXPRESS THE RANGE AND RICHNESS OF THE BLACK EXPERIENCE. SHE WAS FIERCELY DETERMINED TO COMBAT RACISM. WHILE A GRADUATE STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, SHE HOTLY DEBATED RACIST STEREOTYPES WITH HER CREATIVE WRITING PROF., PAUL ENGLE.

MARGARET WALKER VO: I had some ballads that Engle had asked me to write. He had made me very angry. He said your stuff is bitter. You're just too bitter. You need to write some funny ballads about a good old negro preacher. He shouldn't have said that.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: I said I, I don't think that would be funny. My father is a preacher and my grandfather was a preacher and I don't think they were funny.

Maryemma Graham OC

MARYEMMA GRAHAM OC: In her mind, these were not the images of people around her. Those were not the pictures that she, that she knew black people to live. Those are not the stories that she heard being told. And so in her mind it was necessary to refute those stories, to refute those images, to put something else out there. So there's always this grounding in a different reality, in correcting the distortions of the past.

Mississippi River (MSA)

WALKER VO READING: DELTA:

Key: "Delta"

I am a child of the valley. Mud and muck and misery of lowlands are on thin tracks of my feet.

Moss on tree (MSA)

Damp draughts of mist and fog hovering over

Fog aerial (MSA)

valleys are on my feverish breath. Red clay from

Footage: Black people in rural setting (:07) (WPA Film Library)

feet of beasts colors my mouth and there is blood on my tongue.

Joanne Gabbin OC

JOANNE GABBIN OC: Probably her poetry about the south is so poignant and so moving because there, there's this love/hate relationships that she has with the south.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: Everything I write relates to the south - its history, its meaning, its purpose. And the meaning comes out of that. What is, what does the south mean to a black person?

Maryemma Graham OC

MARYEMMA GRAHAM OC: Margaret Walker made it. made it absolutely essential that you tell the truth of history. Each poem is a statement of the coming together of imagination and, and social vision.

Klan footage
(MS Dept. of Archives)

WALKER VO READING: SORROW HOME
(last stanza):

Key: "Sorrow Home"

O Southland, sorrow home, melody beating in my bone and blood! How long will the Klan of hate, the hounds and the chain gangs keep me from my own?

Jackson Capitol, MS flag (MSA 12)

RUBY DEE : IN SPITE OF THE SOUTH'S HISTORY OF SEGREGATION AND RACISM, WALKER CHOSE TO LIVE AND WORK IN THE SOUTH HER ENTIRE CAREER.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: This is home for me and I, I feel emotionally more satisfied here than I do anywhere else in this country

Photo: Walker & Firmist (Walker)

RUBY DEE : IN 1942, SHE MET AND MARRIED FIRNIST JAMES ALEXANDER WHILE SHE WAS TEACHING IN NORTH CAROLINA. SEVEN YEARS LATER THEY MOVED TO JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI, WHERE SHE CONTINUED TO TEACH, MANAGE THE HOME, AND RAISE FOUR CHILDREN. HER HUSBAND SUPPORTED AND ENCOURAGED HER WRITING CAREER THROUGH THEIR 37 YEARS OF MARRIAGE. UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1979.

Photo: Walker's four children
(Walker)

Photo: Firmist Alexander (Walker)

Photo: Walker & Firmist (Walker)

Photo: Walker & Firmist (Walker)

MARGARET WALKER VO: Everything I wanted to do, he wanted me to do it. He wanted me to go back to school. He went out with every teaching job I had. He was in favor of everything that I wanted to do.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: As long as I kept a home going, I could do whatever I wanted to do. You see I have kept a home going. I kept the house for 37 years.

Joanne Gabbin OC

JOANNE GABBIN D OC: He was devoted to her. And ah he, she would say that had driven her all around the country so that she could read poetry.(X) She was devoted to him. She ah called him her sweet patuti

Photo: Wedding photo (Walker)

WALKER VO READING: LOVE SONG FOR ALEX

Photos: Firmist, different ages (Walker)

My monkey-wrench man is my sweet patootie; the lover of my life, my youth and age. My heart belongs to him and to him only; the children of my flesh are his and bear his rage

Key: "Love Song for Alex"

Photo: Walker and babies (Walker)

RUBY DEE : BETWEEN JUGGLING A FAMILY AND FULLTIME TEACHING. WALKER'S SEMINAL PURSUIT WAS HER NOVEL, JUBILEE. INSPIRED BY STORIES TOLD BY HER GRANDMOTHER, JUBILEE IS BASED ON THE TRUE STORY OF HER GREAT GRANDMOTHER, VYRY.

Walker at typewriter (Bailey/Harris)

Cover of Jubilee (Bailey/Harris)

Photos: grandmother, great grandmother (Walker)

MARGARET WALKER OC: I started when I was nineteen years old at Northwestern and I wrote three hundred pages typewritten and realized that it didn't sound right.

Margaret Walker OC

Photo: U of I Union ext. (Iowa)

MARGARET WALKER VO: I went back to Iowa and studied under Verlin Cassill and he knew what to do and he told me what to do. He said you need to go read some Chekhov and see how Chekhov puts things together.

Photo: U of I Union int. (Iowa)

Margaret Walker OC

Photo: Walker at typewriter (Jackson Clarion Ledger)

Cover of Jubilee

Photo: U of Iowa Union ext. (Iowa)

Photo: Book signing (MWA, JSU)

Pan of covers of Jubilee in different languages

Joyce Pettis OC
English Professor, North Carolina State U. (lower third key)

Photo: Walker at desk writing (Walker)

Photo: CU Walker signing book (MWA, JSU)

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: Then when I gave him another piece, the first chapter revised, he said now you've got it. This is right.

RUBY DEE : WALKER CONTINUED CRAFTING JUBILEE SLOWLY AND METICULOUSLY. SPENDING TEN YEARS ALONE ON RESEARCH. THE NOVEL DEPICTS BLACK LIFE IN GEORGIA AND ALABAMA BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE CIVIL WAR. SHE COMPLETED IT AS HER DOCTORAL DISSERTATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA AND IT WAS PUBLISHED IN 1966. IT HAS BEEN PRINTED OVER THIRTY TIMES IN THE U.S., AND TRANSLATED INTO SIX LANGUAGES

JOYCE PETTIS OC: Continued ab appreciation of Jubilee is this picture that she offers us of a family living in slavery who survives that institution with a tremendous measure of wholeness of person. Family members who are not broken and defeated to the extent that they cannot survive after that institution is be, behind them at least in a physical sense. So that, that I think its, its the perennial hope that we have that somehow, as human beings, we can take horrible experiences and we can find a resilience and the human spirit and we can rise above those experiences.

MARGARET WALKER VO: I started Jubilee when I was nineteen. I finished it at Iowa just before I was fifty years old. I know that I took thirty full years..(X) Thirty years, thirty years, an honest to God thirty years.

Key: RHYTHMS

Montage: social protest scenes
(Racism open); Wall of unity (MSA
11)

MUSIC UP AND UNDER: JAZZ

GABBIN VO: FOR MY PEOPLE
STANDING STARING TRYING TO
FASHION A BETTER WAY FROM
CONFUSION, FROM HYPOCRISY &
MISUNDERSTANDING, TRYING TO
FASHION A WORLD THAT WILL
HOLD ALL THE PEOPLE, ALL THE
FACES, ALL THE ADAMS & EVES &
THEIR COUNTLESS GENERATIONS

Joanne Gabbin OC

JOANNE GABBIN OC: It never fails to amaze me
when people read For My People that they read it
just right because it's almost as though they've
internalized the rhythm of the poem.

Yusef Komunyakaa OC
Poet (lower third key)

YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA OC: There's that close
attention to structure in her work that sort of at least
is influenced by the ballad tradition.

Jerry Ward OC

JERRY WARD OC : What I think happens with
the rhythms that Margaret Walker uses is they do
indeed have a very special impact on our attention.

Yusef Komunyakaa OC

YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA OC: It's the music, it's
the music of the telling that there is a kind of
traditional blues element to the work.

Maryemma Graham OC

MARYEMMA GRAHAM OC: I think there has been a certain rhythm to her life, ah a very self-conscious rhythm. She was aware of what it meant to develop, to grow, to, to learn the craft of writing.

Photo: Walker and assistant (MWA, JSU)

RUBY DEE: A RHYTHM SHE CONSCIOUSLY CARRIED AS A TEACHER AND MENTOR.

Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: My mother and father were both teachers and I grew up thinking teaching was wonderful. My father and mother let me believe that to be a teacher was like being a preacher. And my father was A preacher and my grandfather was a preacher. So I thought this was the greatest, greatest calling you could have.

Jerry Ward OC

JERRY WARD OC: What she was able to impart to her students was a thirst for knowledge, a true desire to know more and to know how to put it all together

Walker teaching at blackboard (3/4")

Jackson State sign (MSA 12)

Walker at podium (MWA, JSU)

Jackson State students/campus

RUBY DEE: WALKER BEGAN TEACHING IN 1942 AFTER RECEIVING THE YALE YOUNGER POETS AWARD. SHE JOINED THE FACULTY AT JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY IN MISSISSIPPI IN 1949, TEACHING WRITING AND LITERATURE FOR THIRTY YEARS. HER PASSION FOR WRITING LEFT A LASTING IMPRINT ON MANY OF HER FORMER STUDENTS.

Maryemma Graham OC.
key: Former student and biographer

MARYEMMA GRAHAM K OC: She also exuded this energy and this love for writing, for art, and for making art a part of your life. It wasn't something you did as a job. It wasn't something that you, like so you want to be a writer? Well, this is what you have to do. It was never any of that. It was what else is there? This is a life. This is who you are. And that probably shaped, I think, my own commitment to do work in African American literature, African American studies.

Photo: Walker at Jackson State

Photo: Institute certificate (MWA, JSU)

Jackson State campus

Photo: Anti-war student protest (KU)

Photo: Black students protest (KU)

Photo: Interracial student council meeting (KU)

Walker testifying (.21)
(MSDAH :24 total usage of archives-
t.c : 00:02:11:23 - 00:02:23:04;
00:06:21:12 - 00:06:24:11 (cutaway
shot); 00:02:43:10 - 00:02:53:09)

Key: Testimony at Mississippi
Commission on Campus Unrest, 1970

RUBY DEE : WALKER'S COMMITMENT TO THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE INCLUDED DEVELOPING THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF BLACK LIFE AND CULTURE AT JACKSON STATE IN 1968, ONE OF THE FIRST BLACK STUDIES PROGRAMS IN THE NATION, AS THE LATE 1960s AND 1970s ERUPTED WITH ANTI-WAR AND BLACK POWER PROTESTS. WALKER WAS A VOCAL ACTIVIST AND CRITIC OF DISCRIMINATORY POLICIES IN MISSISSIPPI AND THE U.S.

WALKER TESTIFIES AT 1970 MISS.

COMMISSION SOT: "It does not appear that there's a real desire on the part of government anywhere to alleviate the social ills of this country. Well, an education bill is vetoed, the housing bill is vetoed, how would, why would we believe that something is going to be done."

Photo: Walker CU speaking (Jackson Advocate)

Joanne Gabbin OC

JOANNE GABBIN VO: Her activism was always sure. She battled the Jackson radio station (x)She fought to get the staff to have at least fifty-one percent black. She, she was the first witness in the Ayers case that dealt with ah desegregation of higher education in Mississippi.. So she battled a lot.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: I was trained to do that. My father and my mother trained me to do that. They. they. the, their attitude was if you believe a certain thing, you're supposed to do that sort of thing. That was part of my home training.

Joanne Gabbin OC

JOANNE GABBIN OC: She also wrote about the violence that was in the south and she protested against that violence in her own poetry.

Maryemma Graham OC

MARYEMMA GRAHAM OC: So Walker's role in that way, I think, is as important as people who organize demonstrations ah and protests and sit ins and ah, and the marches because she was constantly reminding us that writers always had vision.

Photo: Walker & Sonia Sanchez (MWA, JSU) Key: Sonia Sanchez

Photos: Walker & young women poets, 1973

RUBY DEE: A VISION THAT EXTENDED TO BEING A ROLE MODEL FOR YOUNG BLACK WOMEN WRITERS IN THE 1960S AND 1970S. WALKER'S PASSION FOR PORTRAYING A WIDE RANGE OF BLACK EXPERIENCES DREW SCORES OF YOUNG WOMEN POETS COMING OF AGE IN THE BLACK ARTS AND BLACK NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS.

Joyce Pettis OC

JOYCE PETTIS OC: She has been a tremendous mentor to Alice Walker, Sonia Sanchez and Nikki Giovanni. And, in fact, they have given her accolades in print because she was a poet who was writing in a time when it was not as popular for her as it became. has become for contemporary poets.

Joanne Gabbin OC

JOANNE GABBIN OC: She put together one of the most fantastic conferences in 1973 ah to commemorate Phyllis Wheatley and her birthday. And at this conference, you, you had more (X)then twenty, maybe thirty outstanding poets and writers- all, all of them came to this particular conference to talk about the work of Phyllis Wheatly and to also ah honor Margaret Walker.

Photo: 1973 Phylis Wheatley conference group photo - pan of writers (MWA, JSU) Key: Alice Walker, Mari Evans, June Jordan, Audre Lorde

Photo: Walker CU (Jackson Clarion Ledger)

Photo: Walker and kids (Jackson Clarion Ledger)

Shots of books covers: For My People, This is My Century, Jubilee, Daemonic Genius, A Poetic Equation, How I Wrote Jubilee, On Being Female.

RUBY DEE : WALKER'S CONTRIBUTIONS EXTEND ACROSS THREE GENERATIONS SHE HAS PUBLISHED FIVE BOOKS OF POETRY: INCLUDING "FOR MY PEOPLE" AND "THIS IS MY CENTURY"; THE NOVEL, "JUBILEE"; A BIOGRAPHY ON RICHARD WRIGHT, "DAEMONIC GENIUS"; AND THREE COLLECTIONS OF ESSAYS. "A POETIC EQUATION: CONVERSATIONS WITH NIKKI GIOVANNI." "HOW I WROTE JUBILEE," AND "ON BEING FEMALE, BLACK AND FREE."

Dip to black

(MUSIC IN AND UNDER)

Joanne Gabbin OC

JOANNE GABBIN OC: Margaret Walker has said 'if I had to write my own epitaph, I'd want it to read here lies Margaret Walker: she tried to make her life a poem'.

Montage: Walker and fans at Barnes
& Noble reading

JOANNE GABBIN VO: And I think she succeeded in that because her life is not only a poem of her contribution to the arts, to poetry, to literature, it is also a poem for her people.

Maryemma Graham OC

MARYEMMA GRAHAM VO: I think what Margaret grasped early on was a sense of poetry as a very powerful force in her own life. I think her desire was to transmit that in her writing to others, that is the power of poetry, the power of the written word, of the images of black life and instilling hope for the future. (X) That we have the responsibility to make change and that we must, we, we can be, we will be successful, but that it is the hopefulness that we must carry with us if we are going to be successful in making change. Ah, and so her, her words, her, her poetry is always full of this hope.

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: LET A NEW EARTH RISE., LET ANOTHER WORLD BE BORN. LET A BLOODY PEACE BE WRITTEN IN THE SKY LET A SECOND GENERATION FULL OF COURAGE ISSUE FORTH LET A PEOPLE LOVING FREEDOM COME TO GROW LET A BEAUTY FULL OF HEALING AND A STRENGTH OF SILENT CLENCHING BE THE PULSING IN OUR SPIRITS AND OUR BLOOD LET THE MARSHALL SONGS BE WRITTEN

Margaret Walker OC

MARGARET WALKER OC: LET THE DIRGES
DISAPPEAR LET A RACE OF MEN NOW RISE
AND TAKE CONTROL.

CREDIT ROLL

MUSIC UP :30 AND OUT

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