



Roscoe Russa Nix

Montgomery County Civil Rights Leader Served in WWII

Roscoe Russa Nix served in the U.S. Army in Europe during World War II. He was born June 22, 1921, in Greenville, Alabama, the second of nine children. His father was the only black postman in town. Nix attended Alabama A&M University. After serving in the military he settled in the Washington area and graduated from Howard University. He moved to Montgomery County in 1968. Growing up in segregated Alabama, Nix had firsthand experience with Jim Crow laws and the injustice of institutionalized racism. After moving to the Washington, DC area, he observed that northern states were more likely to have simply overlooked their own records of discrimination. He recalled being refused service at a Silver Spring, Maryland restaurant in 1962 and the demonstration he staged in response. Moments like this defined his career and inspired him to work for change.

While working in various federal government jobs, Nix won a seat on the Montgomery County Board of Education in 1974 and railed against de facto school segregation. The second African American elected to the board, he served four years. He sought improved educational opportunities and early childhood initiatives to support increased local resources for Head Start, Title I and lower class size in the elementary grades.

Nix retired in 1986 from the Justice Department's Community Relations Service, which focused on conflict resolution in cities experiencing civil unrest. As executive secretary for the Maryland Human Rights Commission in the late 1960's, he promoted minority hiring by state agencies and large companies.

He remained deeply committed to education while serving as President of Montgomery County's Chapter of the NAACP from 1980 to 1990, a period when the organization was struggling to stay relevant to an increasingly successful black middle-class community. The County's annual African American Festival of Academic Excellence celebrating the academic achievements of African American students is amongst his proudest accomplishments.

Nix was regarded as an elder statesman and a confidant to many Montgomery County leaders. In 2001, he was inducted into the Montgomery County Human Rights Hall of Fame. Roscoe R. Nix Elementary School in Silver Spring was named for him in 2006.

Nix died at the age of 90 on January 4, 2012. At his memorial service on January 12, 2012, then County Executive Ike Leggett announced that he would establish an award in Mr. Nix's name and presented the first of these awards to Nix posthumously for his service to Montgomery County. The award, The County's equivalent of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, is presented by the County Executive each year to honor an individual or individuals who over the course of their distinguished lives of community service have made extraordinary contributions to the quality of our community at the very highest levels of excellence.