



The Journey to Freedom

– A MURAL IN EIGHT PARTS –

A Visual Interpretation of African-Americans' Struggle for Recognition as Human Beings and First-Class Citizens

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Robert O. Shealey
Cleve Webber
Mural Designers



Commissioned by The National Center for the Study of
Civil Rights and African-American Culture at Alabama State University



Mural Overview

African-Americans' journey to freedom has been a long and difficult one, fraught with many dangers. It began when Africans were snatched from their homeland in four centuries of the Atlantic Slave Trade. The journey continued during more than 300 years of enslavement, Jim Crowism, disfranchisement and anti-black violence. Nevertheless, African-Americans' innate resolve to survive, deep religious faith and courage amid their tragic circumstances ensured that the journey would end in victory for the forces of justice and equality.

The National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture at Alabama State University is pleased to present "The Journey to Freedom" — a visual interpretation of African-Americans' struggle for recognition as human beings and as first-class citizens. This mural is the third in a series of murals produced by the National Center as a part of its mission to use art and other forms of blacks' cultural life to teach and inspire.

The first five murals in the "The Journey to Freedom" series were introduced to the public at the inaugural mural dedication program on Sept. 17, 2006, during the administration of ASU President Dr. Joe A. Lee. Subsequent installations of "The Journey to Freedom" mural include:

Mural Eight: "The Price of Freedom"

by Ricky Calloway
November 14, 2010

Mural Six: "Over My Head, I Hear Freedom in the Air"

by Vincent Morgan
October 21, 2012

Mural Seven: "We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest"

by Vincent Morgan
January 26, 2014

The National Center staff and Steering Committee extend thanks to John W. Feagin, the conceptualizer and designer of "The Journey to Freedom" mural series, and mural designers Vincent Morgan, Robert Shealey, Lee Ransaw, Cleve Webber and Ricky Calloway for their work on this project. Appreciation also is extended to the historians, researchers, staff members and all others who assisted with this project.

Cover: Mural One: "And Before I Be A Slave..." by Vincent Morgan

Left: Mural Four: "How Long?" by Dr. Lee A. Ransaw



“I am fascinated by the orderly tranquility of realism, portraiture, landscape and still life. There are other times when I am enraptured by the rhythmic provocative probing of art elements.”

John W. Feagin

Mural Series Designer and National Center Steering Committee Member

A Birmingham native, John Feagin retired after 32 years as an art instructor at George Washington Carver High School. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Alabama State University. Feagin's works have been exhibited at many venues throughout the Southeast, including the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture at Alabama State University.

In reference to his artistic philosophy, Feagin states, “I am still searching for that creative expression that will satisfy my intrinsic perception of what art is all about. I am fascinated by the orderly tranquility of realism, portraiture, landscape and still life. There are other times when I am

enraptured by the rhythmic provocative probing of art elements. This type of expression is nothing spiritual or mystifying; it's just a joy having fun with art.”

Feagin notes that he was influenced by Hayward L. Oubre. According to the National Center's director of mural projects, Oubre “is more than a master of the visual arts and a premier professor; he is an inspiration and motivator to all who love art. To me and many other former Alabama State students, he taught art, discipline, morality, dignity, respect for womanhood, love of family, physical fitness and the fact that nothing supersedes hard work.”



MURAL ONE

And Before I Be A Slave...

Vincent Morgan, Mural Designer

Mural One depicts the first period of African-Americans' struggle for liberation — from enslavement in the 17th century, to emancipation from human bondage at the end of the Civil War in 1865. The central theme of the mural is resistance to unjust and inhumane treatment.



MURAL TWO

How Far the Promised Land?

Vincent Morgan, Mural Designer

Mural Two draws attention to African-Americans' journey to freedom during the years before the Civil War, their involvement in the war and their participation in the U.S. military after this conflict. The mural projects black slaves, most notably, Frederick Douglass and Civil War black infantrymen, as agents in the struggle to end slavery. Images on the mural, including that of Henry "Box" Brown (a slave who shipped himself to freedom in a box), represent black bondspersons' willingness to risk even death to escape the evils of their horrid situation. The mural's depiction of the Buffalo Soldiers reflects African Americans' devotion to their country after the Civil War, despite their nation's failure to fulfill its promise of freedom and justice to all citizens.



Vincent Morgan

One of the most realistic muralists in the nation, Vincent Morgan is a native of Tuskegee, Ala. He received his formal training from Memphis College of Art where he was the first African-American to receive a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Morgan's exceptional abilities as an artist are evident in the many murals he has created, including artistic productions for leading business corporations. Morgan is the artist for two of the National Center's previous murals: "Montgomery's Legacy to the Modern Civil Rights Movement" and "The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It."

MURAL THREE

A Taste of Freedom

Robert O. Shealey, Mural Designer

Mural Three represents African-Americans' efforts to live out the benefits of emancipation from slavery. It portrays Alabama blacks' struggle to achieve political rights through voting and participation in local, state and national government during the era of Reconstruction to 1900. The mural also points to blacks' efforts to form community organizations, churches, honorary military units and schools during the postbellum decades.

Since Alabama State University was established during this era, Mural Three notes the formation of ASU in Marion, Ala., in 1867 as the Lincoln School. It portrays racial incidents in Marion between a Lincoln School black student and a Howard College white student.

The incidents forced the college component of Lincoln to relocate to Montgomery in 1887. Highlighted in Mural Three are early leaders of the institution, including William Burns Paterson, the president during the time of the school's relocation.

In addition, Mural Three highlights the black churches—Beulah and Dexter Avenue Baptist churches, as well as Old Ship A.M.E. Zion Church—which served as meeting places for ASU during its early years in Montgomery.



Robert O. Shealey

Robert O'Neal Shealey, the eldest of seven children, is from Alexander City, Ala. Shealey received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Alabama State University in 2006, after serving in the U.S. Navy from 1985 to 1991. Shealey uses his training and orientation to mold young students at the Montgomery Job Corps Center. He is one of the area's gifted young African-American artists.





MURAL FOUR

How Long?

Dr. Lee A. Ransaw, Mural Designer

The period of 1900 to 1955 was a daunting one in African-Americans' long and difficult journey to freedom. Mural Four depicts the realities of Jim Crowism and violence against blacks in Montgomery during the first half of the 20th century. The Alabama state capitol symbolizes state-sanctioned, race-based discrimination. The day-to-day face of Jim Crowism is represented in the scenes of the segregated streetcar and negro and white water fountains. A key aspect

of blacks' powerlessness and their position as second-class citizens during this time is revealed in scenes of bus segregation and violence against those opposing it, including the arrests and murders of persons violating bus segregation ordinances. The mural points out African-Americans' continual loyalty to the nation in scenes portraying blacks' military service in World War I and II, and the Korean and Vietnam wars.



Dr. Lee A. Ransaw

Before heading to Atlanta's Spelman College as a professor of art in 2006, Lee Ransaw served as chair of the Art Department at Morris Brown College in Atlanta for 20 years. Ransaw received his undergraduate and graduate degrees in art from Indiana University and Illinois State University, respectively. He received additional training in art from Pratt Institute in New York and John Herran Art School in Indiana. Ransaw's exceptional skills place his works in the ranks of avant-garde portrayals of African-American art.



MURAL FIVE

We Shall Not Be Moved

Cleve Webber, Mural Designer

Mural Five is a projection of a crucial step in African-Americans' journey to freedom. It highlights the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Alabama State University's role in this important racial protest. Mural Five points the viewer to E. D. Nixon, the longtime black labor and civil rights activist whose courageous and forthright defiance of racial discrimination in Montgomery, decades prior to the bus protest, planted the seeds for revolutionary change. In the 1940s and 1950s, Nixon served as president of several black civil rights organizations, most notably,

the NAACP. On the night of Rosa Parks' arrest, Dec. 1, 1955, Nixon bailed her out of jail and initiated meetings of local leaders for a proposed bus boycott. The mural also highlights Parks, a 1933 graduate of Alabama State University's Laboratory High School, and the person whose refusal to surrender her bus seat to a white man triggered the 382-day strike against the Jim Crow carriers. Most notably, Mural Five projects ASU as "the university at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement."

Cleve Webber

Cleve Webber is an associate professor of art at Alabama State University. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Jamaica School of Visual Arts, Kingston, Jamaica West Indies, and Master's and Master of Fine Arts degrees from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York. He has exhibited his works at various solo and group exhibitions internationally since 1973 and has received numerous major awards and commissions in recognition of his work.





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MURAL SIX

Over My Head, I Hear Freedom in the Air

Vincent Morgan, Mural Designer

Mural Six is the second of two pictorial depictions of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the “Journey to Freedom” mural series. This mural offers insight into the events which inaugurated the modern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and the 1960s. Most importantly, it projects the bus protest of Dec. 5, 1955 to Dec. 20, 1956, as the key event in a new era of freedom for African-Americans.

The mural digs deep into the heart and soul of black Montgomerians’ 12-month long efforts to destroy segregation on city buses and its attendant evils. It points to Jim Crow seating on municipal buses and the arrests of Claudette Colvin (an African-American high school student) and Rosa Parks as the impetus for blacks’ decision to boycott the segregated vehicles. The viewer is made aware of the actions of Jo Ann Robinson (an Alabama State University English professor and the president of the ASU-based Women’s Political Council) in duplicating thousands of flyers on the night of Parks’ arrest, igniting a one-year bus strike. Mural Six highlights the role of black pastors and churches in hosting biweekly Mass Meetings which provided the strategy for sustaining the bus protest, while offering spiritual reinforcement for the foot-weary boycotters. A major section of Mural Six draws the viewer’s attention to key leaders of the boycott, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Revs. Ralph Abernathy and Robert Graetz, and E. D. Nixon.

Most notably, Mural Six depicts Montgomery’s blacks as a determined people who had heard the music of “freedom in the air” and refused to surrender to forces of white supremacy. They not only launched a crusade for freedom against injustice which forced the nation to live up to its founding principles, but Montgomery’s 50,000 bus protestors also infused a new vein of courage onto the pages of human history.



MURAL SEVEN

Theme: We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest

Vincent Morgan, Mural Designer

Mural Seven depicts a pivotal era in African-Americans' journey to freedom—the period of protests by students against racial injustice. The student protest period of 1960 to 1965 saw young people assume unprecedented roles in the modern Civil Rights Movement, helping to eliminate discrimination in public accommodations, public facilities, and in the right of African-Americans to vote.

The fact that young people had begun to take hold of the freedom plow was evident in Birmingham, Ala., in 1963. African-American elementary and high school students, marching in columns behind veteran civil rights leaders, faced barking dogs and high-powered water hoses in their effort to desegregate downtown restaurants and force local stores to hire African-American salespersons.

But, increasingly, during the 1960 to 1965 period, black college students, at times joined by like-minded white comrades in the freedom struggle, proved themselves no longer willing to play secondary roles to achieve first-class citizenship. A new generation of college-age youths, energized by models of courage and determination exhibited by their elders in the freedom movement, but also driven by their own sense of urgency, took to the forefront of the civil rights crusade. They founded new organizations, established new goals and initiated new forms of attack against racial inequality.

Alabama State University students were on the frontlines of the fight for constitutional rights in the 1960 to 1965 period. A major portion of Mural Seven centers the viewer's attention on ASU students' participation in the sit-in

movement. Motivated by a sit-in at a Jim Crow restaurant by students at North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro, N.C., on Feb. 1, 1960, freedom-driven ASU students attempted a sit-in at the Montgomery County Courthouse restaurant less than a month later, on Feb. 25. The mural highlights the flurry of demonstrations by ASU students in reaction to Gov. John Patterson's expulsion of the so-called ASU Nine, leaders of the protest.

For several weeks, on and off campus, students protested the expulsion, risking the takeover of the institution by state officials. But they appeared confident that if freedom was to come, they had to be a part of the movement to bring it to fruition.

Mural Seven also brings attention to a second area of activity by freedom-motivated college students in the 1960 to 1965 period—the Freedom Rides of 1961. Although ASU students did not play a direct role in the Freedom Rides carried out by activists in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to integrate interstate bus terminals, restaurants and restrooms, they later were involved through the works of graduates such as Rev. Ralph Abernathy, who gave the Freedom Riders

sanctuary at the historic church he pastored, First Baptist Church. Abernathy also was among local civil rights leaders who worked to ensure the riders' safe journey to Mississippi, their next destination.

A final section of Mural Seven highlights ASU students' involvement in the Selma-to-Montgomery Voting Rights Movement. By 1965, when the Dallas County voting rights protests took place, ASU students had become fully involved in the freedom crusade and were prepared to take on the forces of racial injustice, despite the risk of personal harm. After Bloody Sunday on March 7, 1965, ASU students, joined by students from other colleges, participated in continuous protest marches against voting rights discriminations. The mural depicts a violent confrontation in Montgomery on the corner of High and South Jackson streets between local law enforcement officials, ASU students and students from universities throughout the nation who were supporting the demonstrations. No amount of violence, however, proved strong enough to stem the tide of resistance among this generation of freedom-loving activists.

ASU student unrest continued into the decade of the 1970s. Those who believed in freedom could not rest.

Vincent Morgan

Tuskegee, Ala., native and one of the most gifted graphic designers in the nation, Vincent Morgan has played a critical part in "The Journey to Freedom" project. He helped to launch the series with Mural One, "And before I Be a Slave . . .," and Mural Two, "How Far the Promised Land?" He also produced Mural Six, "Over My Head, I Hear Freedom in the Air." Morgan's talents for realistic portrayals, use of eye-catching colors and insightful interpretation of historic events are as fully evident in these earlier murals as they are in Mural Seven, the final installment of "The Journey to Freedom" mural series. The National Center is grateful for this artist's contributions to its visual examination of African-Americans' struggle for emancipation and equality as American citizens.



MURAL EIGHT

The Price of Freedom

Ricky Calloway, Mural Designer

Mural Eight marks the conclusion of the “Journey to Freedom” mural series. It provides an overview of the modern Civil Rights Movement from the mid-1950s and the start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott to 1965 and the Selma-to-Montgomery Voting Rights March. It includes scenes from the 1957 desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Ark., the 1961 Freedom Rides and the 1963 March on Washington. It also references the murder of four young African-American girls at Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in 1963. The mural’s most notable portrayal is that of African-Americans’ assault against discriminatory voting practices in the 1965 Voting Rights struggle. The March from Selma to Montgomery in 1965, in many ways, marked a major intersection on the hard road to freedom. Denial of the franchise represented one of the remaining vestiges of racial inequality. The 25,000 protestors who descended on the state capitol during The March

realized that the “price of freedom” had been high. African-Americans had not reached “the Promised Land,” but King’s “How Long? Not Long” speech on that occasion at the steps of Alabama’s capitol gave them hope that the darkest days of racial oppression lay behind them and that a new day of liberation had begun.



Ricky Calloway

Ricky Calloway is an assistant professor of art at Fort Valley State University. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in art from Alabama State University in 1984. In 1989, Calloway was awarded the Master of Fine Arts from Florida State University. After graduating from Florida State University, this artist briefly operated a studio in Washington, D.C., and was later employed as an assistant professor of art at Grambling State University. Calloway has exhibited at major art galleries across the nation, including galleries in Georgia, North Carolina, Louisiana, Florida, Maryland and Alabama. His work also has appeared in art exhibitions at the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African-American Culture at Alabama State University.



Mural Two: "How Far the Promised Land" by Vincent Morgan



**ALABAMA STATE
UNIVERSITY**



Mural Five: "We Shall Not Be Moved" by Cleve Webber

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