

U.S. civil rights activist Robert Moses dies at age 86

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US civil rights activist Robert Moses' wife, Dr Janet Moses, said her husband had passed away on Sunday morning in Hollywood, Florida, but no information about a cause of death was given [File: Rogelio V. Solis/AP Photo]

Miami, July 26 (RHC)-- Robert Parris Moses, a U.S. civil rights activist who endured beatings and jail while leading Black voter registration drives in the U.S. South during the 1960s and later helped improve minority education in mathematics, has died at the age of 86.

Moses worked to dismantle segregation as the Mississippi field director of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) during the civil rights movement and was central to the 1964 “Freedom Summer” in which hundreds of students went to the South to register voters.

Moses started his “second chapter in civil rights work” by founding in 1982 the Algebra Project, which included a curriculum Moses developed to help poor students succeed in maths.

Ben Moynihan, the director of operations for the Algebra Project, said he had talked with Moses’ wife, Dr Janet Moses, and she said her husband had passed away on Sunday morning in Hollywood, Florida. Information was not given as to the cause of death.

Moses was born in Harlem, New York, on January 23, 1935, two months after a race riot left three dead and injured 60 in the neighborhood. His grandfather, William Henry Moses, has been a prominent Southern Baptist preacher and a supporter of Marcus Garvey, a Black nationalist leader at the turn of the century.

But like many Black families, the Moses family moved north from the South during the Great Migration. Once in Harlem, his family sold milk from a Black-owned cooperative to help supplement the household income, according to the book "Robert Parris Moses: A Life in Civil Rights and Leadership at the Grassroots," by Laura Visser-Maessen.

Moses did not spend much time in the Deep South until he went on a recruiting trip in 1960 to “see the movement for myself.” He sought out the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta but found little activity in the office and soon turned his attention to SNCC.

The young civil rights advocate tried to register Black people to vote in Mississippi’s rural Amite County where he was beaten and arrested. When he tried to file charges against a white assailant, an all-white jury acquitted the man and a judge provided protection to Moses to the county line so he could leave town.

He later helped organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which sought to challenge the all-white Democratic delegation from Mississippi.

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