



► Muhammad Ali's visit to South Shields in July, 1977

# North and South injustice

**M**EMORABLE visits to the North East by two Kings will be recalled in a major civil rights exhibition making its national debut in Newcastle.

Fascinating archive footage and photographs of Martin Luther King and the so-called "King of South Shields" Muhammad Ali, will form part of a local story to run alongside America's fight for civil rights in Journey to Justice.

Spanning the region's own fight for social justice and the turbulent history of the US, will be black-and-white images, recorded words and stirring music of the civil rights era.

It promises to be a spectacular show and as far as launch parties go, we can expect something spectacular at the weekend as Journey to Justice

Barbara Hodgson hears how an idea born in the Deep South of America has taken root in Newcastle, where it results, this week, in the inspiring new exhibition Journey to Justice

makes its national debut with music, performance, speakers and high-profile guests at Discovery Museum where it's to have a month-long run ahead of a national tour.

It's a mark of the exhibition's significance that former American civil rights worker Marcia Heinemann, who helped African-Americans in Tennessee to register their vote, is coming over to cut the ribbon at the Saturday's launch - the anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination.

Former ANC freedom fighter

Archie Sibeko, who now lives in the region, will be there, too, and is to give one of the upcoming programme of talks linked to the exhibition.

It will be an extra-special day for its director Carrie Supple, who has been working flat-out to bring together the many strands of an idea she came up with on a trip to America.

"I went to America in 2012; I was born there and always wanted to visit," said the former teacher. "I visited the civil rights museums in Atlanta, Birmingham Alabama, and Mem-

phis and I was inspired.

"I thought it would be great telling the story in the UK when I came back."

While Carrie, 56, lives in London, her mother was born into the well-known Tyneside Callers family and she had a 10-year spell teaching history at schools in Newcastle.

She saw the city as the perfect place to host the premiere, with its links to civil rights leader King and its own struggles for social justice.

But she was taken aback by the

extent of support across the region.

The idea caught the local imagination and it flourished. During Carrie's three years of hard work and fund-raising - "for the past year and a half it's been a full-time job," she said - she met with enthusiasm across the board.

Local musician Bethany Elen Coyoe signed up as exhibition co-ordinator and about 30 different organisations were involved by the final meetings stage late last year.

Among them were universities (Newcastle University also contributed to funding), Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, youth and community groups, trade unions, the Show Racism The Red Card cam-



## From Page 15

paign, artists and Gateshead school-children who have all helped shape an extensive programme of Journey to Justice linked events.

More than 100 volunteers have been involved and there's always room for more, said Carrie.

Many are students who have been recording memories of the older generation for a special section devoted to Tyneside history.

The oral histories feature alongside accounts of The Jarrow March and local campaigns for better health care, housing, mining conditions, pay and trade union rights.

"There are people who recall being in the room with Martin Luther King in 1967," said Carrie.

This visit for the civil rights leader to receive an honorary degree from Newcastle University – the only university in the UK to honour him this way during his lifetime – had been shoe-horned into a UK stay of just 24 hours due to the constraints of his hectic campaigning schedule.

The Duke of Northumberland, then the university's chancellor, presented King with the honour and he followed up with a powerful and moving acceptance speech.

Just five months later, on April 4, 1968, he was dead.

His visit was covered in recent BBC documentary *A King's Speech – Martin Luther King on Tyneside* – and will be the subject of one of the talks, as will the 1977 visit by world champion boxer Muhammad Ali as told by Newcastle filmmaker Tina Gharavi in her film *King Of South Shields*.

While many people know King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, not many know what he was doing there, said Carrie, and it's here that the exhibition shines as its focus is very much on the lesser-known or seldom-heard side of events as told by the people who were actually there, such as Marcia Heinemann.

King was in Tennessee to support a strike by sanitation workers, which is captured in photographs on show.

Visitors to the exhibition will hear about the ordinary people caught up in America's violent segregated sixties world and about the impact the civil rights movement had on the UK.

As King himself said in 1963: "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

"Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

As a teacher, Carrie hopes Journey to Justice will challenge young people in particular and the idea is to immerse them in personal stories with the help of music from the civil rights era, which played such a role in rallying the spirits of the oppressed, and the recreation of the counter of the infamous Greensboro sit-in. This happened when students were refused service at a "whites only" counter in a Woolworth store in North Carolina in 1960, and visitors to the exhibition will be able to take a seat at a similar counter to discover how the situation played out.

Lord Herman Ouseley, patron of Journey to Justice and founder of the anti-racism in football campaign Kick It Out, said: "The North of England has a proud history of its people showing the rest of the UK how to stand together for those who are vulnerable.

"Journey to Justice will be striving, with everyone's help and support, to make a significant contribution to struggles for equality, inclusion and diversity today."



► Dr Martin Luther King, the American civil rights leader, pictured at Newcastle University to receive an honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law.



► Memphis' Sanitation Workers' Strike 1968. Part of Journey to Justice exhibition at Discovery Museum in Newcastle

## AN AMERICAN TRAILBLAZER

One of the striking images on show in Journey to Justice captures the famous story of Ruby Bridges, the six-year-old from Mississippi who became the first African American pupil allowed to attend an all-white school.

This decision, part of efforts to desegregate the southern states, made history in 1960 but ignited a racist backlash so intense Ruby had to be taken to and from the elementary school under armed guard.

The photograph shows her being escorted down steps from the school premises by federal marshals.

At the time a young teacher newly arrived from Boston was the only member of staff

willing to teach her but by the end of Ruby's first week, she was the only child remaining in class as the white families removed their children from the school.

But both she and her teacher persevered with neither missing a day of school during that groundbreaking year.

A second photograph in the exhibition shows a grown-up Ruby and her supporter Barbara Henry in happier times.

► Barbara Henry, a former teacher in New Orleans, with her 1960 first grade student Ruby Bridges-Hall in Boston in 1998



## JOURNEY FOR JUSTICE

Journey for Justice runs from April 4 until May 4 and here are some of the highlights of its city centre events programme

- International Human Rights evening at Northern Stage at 8pm on April 9
  - Music of the North East's Heritage at the Mining Institute at 7.30pm on April 11
  - Free Southern Theatre, part of the civil rights movement, at Space Six from 1pm-2pm on April 17
  - A walking tour of Newcastle's human rights history at 11am on April 18
  - King of South Shields, a film about Muhammad Ali's visit to South Shields, at the Lit & Phil at 7pm on April 21
  - A King's Speech on Tyneside – Remembering Martin Luther King's visit to Newcastle, at Great North Museum on at 7pm on April 24
  - Brother Outsider - The Life of Bayard Rustin, at a venue yet to be confirmed at 7.30pm on April 30
- For the full programme visit [journeytojustice.org.uk/projects/footsteps-to-freedom](http://journeytojustice.org.uk/projects/footsteps-to-freedom)