

Richmond Memorials Mark Diversity Milestones

Richmond is the place where, in 1956, Massive Resistance was conceived as a challenge to court-ordered desegregation.

Forty years later, Richmonders engaged in an emotional debate over whether Monument Avenue was the right place for a statue of tennis champion and humanitarian Arthur Ashe. The sculpture of a black man in a warm-up suit holding aloft a tennis racquet and a book doesn't match his uniformed neighbors, who were Southern leaders of the Civil War.

But in the past three years, new Richmond memorials have been dedicated that mark society's progress in achieving diversity. Among them:

- The old Finance Building on the Capitol grounds was renovated and rededicated in 2005 as the Oliver White Hill Sr. Building. When it was erected in 1895, the building housed the State Library and the Supreme Court of Virginia. By some accounts, it was in that building that state leaders concocted Massive Resistance.
- The Virginia Civil Rights Memorial was dedicated on July 21, also on the Capitol grounds. The four-panel memorial depicts the student walk-out from Moton High School in Farmville that led to the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*; Oliver Hill and Spottswood W. Robinson III — the lawyers who crafted the Virginia challenge to separate-but-equal schooling; the Rev. L. Francis Griffin — the Moton Parent Teacher Association chair who asked Hill and Robinson to take the case; and six persons of different races striding toward the future (see cover).
- The new Richmond federal courthouse that opened last month at 701 East Broad Street is named for judges Spottswood W. Robinson III and Robert R. Merhige Jr. In addition to being a leader of Virginia civil rights litigation, Robinson was the first African American appointed to judgeships in the District of Columbia's U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia and U.S. Court of Appeals. He eventually became chief judge of the appeals court. Merhige, who was white, served thirty years as a U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Virginia. He presided over many civil rights cases that opened schools to women and people of color. "His courage in the face of significant opposition is testament to his dedication to the rule of law," according to a press release from U.S. Sen. John W. Warner of Virginia.