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The National Portrait Gallery Presents “The Struggle for Justice”

A Permanent Exhibition of Influential Civil Rights Figures in 20th-Century America

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery opens “The Struggle for Justice,” an exhibition that showcases individuals from the museum’s permanent collection who played significant roles in advancing civil rights and justice in American history. The installation includes a range of people—from key 19th-century figures such as Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony to 20th-century leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., and César Chávez—who struggled on behalf of the disenfranchised and the marginalized in America.

“The Struggle for Justice” opens Feb. 12 and will be on view permanently in the museum.

“At the National Portrait Gallery we tell the nation’s story through the art of portrayal,” said Brandon Fortune, acting director and curator of painting and sculpture. “One such story is that of civil rights in the 20th century, which is told through the people featured in this installation.”

Represented through photographs, paintings, sculptures, posters and campaign buttons, “The Struggle for Justice” includes portraits of civil rights leaders Frederick Douglass, Thurgood Marshall and Martin Luther King Jr.; women’s rights advocates Susan B. Anthony and Betty Friedan; Native American activist Leonard Crow Dog; cultural icons Jackie Robinson and singer Marian Anderson; United Farm Workers organizers César Chávez and Dolores Huerta; gay rights leader Larry Kramer; and Special Olympics founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver.

This exhibition demonstrates—by telling the stories of these fearless figures—the struggles and achievements that challenged injustice and discrimination in America. The result is a series of historic changes concerning the status of women, African Americans, Native Americans and other ethnic groups, gays and lesbians and those who have intellectual and physical disabilities. “The Struggle for Justice” documents triumphant moments as well as setbacks that changed American society.

Selections of newsreel footage addressing the topics of women’s rights, civil rights, the rise of unions, the treatment of Native Americans, the rights of the disabled and gay rights have been collected for the exhibition. The footage is narrated by Soledad O’Brien.

“The Struggle for Justice” curators are Frank Goodyear, associate curator of photographs; Sidney Hart, senior historian; Rebecca Kasemeyer, director of education; and Ann Shumard, curator of photographs.

The installation will be located on the second floor of the museum near the permanent installation “America’s Presidents.” The museum’s 20th-century galleries on the third floor will be reinstalled in May.

This exhibition was made possible by Ford Motor Company Fund.

The National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery tells the history of America through individuals who have shaped its culture. Through the visual arts, performing arts and new media, the Portrait Gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists whose lives tell the American story.

The National Portrait Gallery is part of the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture at Eighth and F streets N.W., Washington, D.C. It is open every day, except Dec. 25, from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: npg.si.edu.

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