



National Press Photographers Association

Life magazine's Charles Moore, 79

WEST PALM BEACH, FL (March 15, 2010) – Life magazine's Charles Moore, 79, whose unforgettable photographs helped change public opinion about the civil rights movement in America, has died at his home near West Palm Beach.

Moore died last Thursday, according to his daughter, Michelle Moore Peel.

The photographer's coverage of the Civil Rights movement in the South, which started by happenstance when he was the only witness to the arrest of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in September 1958, making a picture of Dr. King being roughed up while being booked by Montgomery, Alabama, police, created a body of work that became iconic of the era. His photographs have been credited by many for changing the mood of the nation regarding civil rights and helping to speed up passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Moore received the Kodak Crystal Eagle Award from the National Press Photographers Association and Kodak in 1989 for his civil rights photographs and his book, "Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore" (University of Alabama Press, 2002). He had been an NPPA member since 1995.

Moore's photograph of King's arrest moved on the Associated Press wire and was picked up by Life magazine, transforming what had been a regional story into a national debate. On the pages of Life, Moore's photographs of the civil rights struggle appeared alongside those of Flip Schulke, Moneta Sleet, and Gordon Parks.

Through 1965, Moore continued to document the movement up through James Meredith's admission to the University of Mississippi, and police dogs being unleashed against protesters in Birmingham, and fire hoses being used on marchers in Selma.



Charles Moore's pictures of Dr. King being roughed up during an arrest (above) to marchers being subjected to high-pressure fire hoses defined America's Civil Rights movement to the world's viewers and put the cause on the world's front pages.



Photographs © Charles Moore-Black Star

According to University of Florida journalism professor John Kaplan, who researched Moore's career and photographs for his masters at Ohio University, Moore "grew weary of years of violence, of hatred, street battles, and the searing taste of tear gas, having witnessed many of the most significant events of the era." In 1965 Moore booked an around-the-world ticket on Pan Am, Kaplan said, and would not return to the States for eight months.

Like Dr. King, Moore was the son of a Baptist minister, and the photographer grew up Tusculumbia, Alabama, where he went with his father on occasion to black Baptist churches. He served in the United States Marine Corps and trained in fashion photography at the Brooks Institute for Photography in Santa Barbara, California. In 1957 he worked in a portrait studio in Alabama, and then went to work for the Montgomery newspaper in 1957.

In 1962 Moore left the newspaper and moved to New York to pursue a freelance career. After a few months in the city, he met Howard Chapnick of the Black Star picture agency and Chapnick gave Moore "a small weekly guarantee" of money, Kaplan says, for the photographer to return to cover the Civil Rights movement that was unfolding in the South.

Moore continued to work as a freelancer after the Civil Rights movement and was represented for his career by Black Star. During his career he also covered a civil war in the Dominican Republic, violence in Venezuela and Haiti, and the air war in Vietnam.

In 1989, Chapnick entered Moore's photographs into competition for the inaugural Crystal Eagle Award for Impact in Photojournalism, and when Moore won that award there was a renewed interest in his pictures.

In the foreword to Moore's book "Powerful Days," civil rights leader and former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young wrote, "The photographs of Charles Moore presented in this brilliant chronicle offer more than simple, visual accounts of the civil rights years. ... For those of us who remember the pictured events from personal experience, this book is a means by which to sharpen memories, to relive and revisit some of the most meaningful, terrifying and rewarding moments of our lives."

Some biographical information for this story was provided by University of Florida journalism professor John Kaplan, based on his research at Ohio University's School of Visual Communication