



## Civil Rights Photographer Charles Moore Remembered

by Claire O'Neill March 16, 2010



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There are common names associated with the civil rights movement, like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. And there are lesser-known names like Charles Moore. His photos, which often appeared in *Life* magazine in the 1960s, are the ones that put faces to a movement for most Americans. He died last week at age 79.

Charles Moore had been in the military, he'd been a boxer, but, as he said in a 2005 documentary, his weapon of choice in the 1960s had a flash and a shutter. "I don't wanna fight with my fists," he said. "I wanna fight with my camera."

As a white, Southern journalist, born and raised in Alabama, he was fighting against Jim Crow discrimination the only way he knew how: by taking pictures. When Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested in Alabama in 1958, Moore was there. When police dogs attacked anti-segregation demonstrators in 1963, Moore was there. When a march for voting rights culminated in tear gas and police clubs in 1965, Moore was there.

At his side for many stories was Michael Durham, staff writer for *Life* magazine at the time. He was the reporter, but he let Moore do most of the talking — for a reason. "He had the Southern gift of gab," Durham said on the phone.

The two sneaked into churches and around police lines to get their stories. Moore somehow knew where to be, and when. His photographs are often credited with spurring the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In the 1950s and '60s, he may not have realized the impact that his work would have. In a sense, he was just photographing events as they unfolded in his own backyard.

Fortunately, Moore lived long enough to see the result of his work — and the collective struggle of so many others. "I have now been back and have seen the growth from the seeds that were sown through a lot of terrible violence," Moore said in his 2005 documentary with "And my camera is my tool and I would rather have that be my weapon than my fists any day."