



Clara Luper: The Mother of Oklahoma's Civil Rights Movement

Stan Paregien Sr

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Clark Luper: the Mother of Oklahoma's Civil Rights Movement is a book about a woman, recently deceased, who grew up being stifled and restricted by Oklahoma's "Jim Crow" (anti-Black) laws and social customs.

By profession a teacher and motivator of students, in 1958 she led a group of Black students into the Katz Drug Store in downtown Oklahoma City. The store would had a food counter but would not serve Blacks. So these young people sat down on the counter stools and asked to be served, then when refused they just sat there--peacefully and pacifly--making their point and preventing other customers from being served. That led some White customers to curse at the kids, to spit on them, to hit them, and to pour sugar and ketchup on their heads. After a sufficient time, the young people left.

They went home and were debriefed by Clara Luper and instructed to do the same thing the next day. That did so. And, behold, on the third day . . . the store management gave in. They not only integrated the fountain counter at that locations but also in Missouri and Iowa.

Luper and her followers had a short celebration of that victory, then started protesting segregation policies at first one restaurant and then another. And they did it with great success for six years.

But Clara Luper's influence went further than the Oklahoma City community. She and her children were among the multiplied thousands of civil rights supporters who participated in the 1963 "March on Washington" and watched and listened as Dr. Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have A Dream Speech."

Then she marched with Dr. King in that 1965 march on Selma, Alabama. Many of the peaceful marchers were attacked and beaten by both the police and by other Whites. This time, though, the national media was there with TV cameras and the nation was horrified by what was going on.

And so went the action-filled life of a little ol' Oklahoma school teacher named Clara Luper. It has her faith and courage that kept the civil rights lamp burning brightly for more than 40 years in Oklahoma.

Stan Paregien is a former newspaper reporter and editor, as well as a freelance writer and author. He currently has four other Kindle e-books for sale on Amazon.com.

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