

Remarks by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus  
Medgar Evers Wreath Laying Ceremony  
Washington, D.C.  
Wednesday, 5 June 2013

Fifty years ago Medgar Evers was shot in his driveway, in front of his family, after returning home from a meeting of civil rights leaders. Two decades before he had fought to free Europe in World War II and came home to fight for the inalienable rights of equality for everyone here at home. He gave his life for the ideals upon which this country is founded. We remember him for his belief, as in the words of President John Kennedy, "this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be truly free until all its citizens are free."

When Sergeant Medgar Evers returned home from war he didn't forget the oath he took to protect the United States against all enemies. He continued his service by taking on the wrongs of the "Jim Crow South," and the chains of racism which for so long bound up our country. His was a principled and non-violent fight. He registered people to vote, he organized community groups, he set up boycotts, and he investigated unspeakable acts like the murder of Emmett Till. Then, at the height of his work, at the peak of his effectiveness, he was taken from his family and from us.

Medgar Evers, a century after the Civil War, died fighting that same battle, died to make men free. While African Americans were the obvious beneficiaries of his life's work, in a real sense, he set us all free. I was born a generation and sixty miles from where Medgar Evers was in Mississippi. I never knew him, but my life and so many others, was unalterably changed by him and his work. The Mississippi that my children grew up in is a far more just, far better place

than the Mississippi in which I was raised, because of the work of Medgar Evers and Merlie Evers and so many others like them. In one small way, I've tried to repay that debt. The first ship that I named for the United States Navy, I named in honor of Medgar Evers. That ship will sail for decades supporting Sailors and Marines who represent the same things that he did: equality, freedom, opportunity. That ship will ensure that not just America remembers, but the world remembers what Medgar Evers did for all of us, men and women, black and white and brown, did for us all by his work and his sacrifice. His memory will live on in that ship and it lives on in the amazing and inspiring work of Merlie Evers-Williams and their entire family.

So on the fiftieth anniversary of the murder of their husband, their father, our hero and friend, my eloquence and the eloquence here today can never match the eloquence of his deeds. I will rely on our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln, for his words to Mrs. Bixby who had lost five sons in the Civil War, "I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."

Thank You.