

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Clara Shepard Luper

teacher, organizer, activist

"If you can love, you can live."¹

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Background Information

Born: May 3, 1923; died: June 8, 2011

Luper was born in Okfuskee County, Oklahoma. She was raised in the all-Black town of Hoffman. She lived with her father who was a veteran and a laborer, and her mother who was a laundress.

Luper went to college at Langston University where she studied math and history. After that, she became the first African American student in the graduate history program at the University of Oklahoma in 1950, where she studied history education. She went on to become a high school history teacher for 41 years.

Luper's Resistance

While working as a history teacher, Luper also became an advisor for the NAACP Youth Council. She used that role to teach students how to fight for equality. She was inspired by people like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and by her own experiences with racism in her life.

Luper peacefully fought for change and helped her students do the same. Specifically, she organized sit-ins, protests, and boycotts to make their voices heard. Her first sit-in, the Katz Drugstore sit-in, was the first and longest sit-in of the Civil Rights Movement. The idea was actually given to her by her eight-year-old daughter. It consisted of her and her class requesting service at the drug store, but when they were told no because of their race, they peacefully refused to leave. Instead of leaving, they got out their books to study for the rest of the day in the store. Although this sit-in remained peaceful, Luper participated in many other protests that were met with cruelty and violence. She never stopped standing up for freedom.²

Achievements

The Katz Drugstore sit-in eventually led to the desegregation of all of its 38 stores across four states. This protest led to similar sit-ins in the city and across the south. She mentored and inspired many students in her classroom, members of the NAACP, and beyond. Luper received many awards and she was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame, the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame, and the Oklahoma Afro-American Hall of Fame.

¹ Stories in America: Oklahoma Sit-Ins: A Conversation with Clara Luper. (n.d.). Retrieved October 28, 2019, from <http://storiesinamerica.blogspot.com/2005/07/oklahoma-sit-ins-conversation-with.html>

² BlackPast, B. (2007, January 17) Clara Luper (1923-2011). Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/luper-clara-1923/>

