



Student Name:  
Class Period:  
Date:

## Meet the Originals

*Texas Originals* is a radio series about people who made an impact on Texas. You can hear it online and on radio stations around the state. Read or listen to the episode on James L. Farmer, Jr. Then, answer questions about it.

### James L. Farmer, Jr. 1920–1999

Civil rights leader James Farmer was born in Marshall, Texas, in 1920. He spent his childhood in Austin but returned to Marshall to attend Wiley College, where he joined the team of "great debaters" coached by legendary teacher Melvin Tolson. Though Farmer had intended to become a Methodist minister, Tolson's influence—and segregation within the church—led him to activism.

In 1942, Farmer organized the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Chicago. A decade before the civil rights movement made headlines, CORE followed Gandhian principles of nonviolent direct action to fight racial discrimination. In 1961, CORE organized the Freedom Rides to desegregate bus travel. Farmer and twelve other activists, both Black and white, faced violence and jail time as they rode from Washington, DC, to New Orleans.

The Freedom Rides and the violence that erupted in response captured national attention. Black citizens across the nation joined the civil rights struggle, as did white activists in America and abroad. Within months, Attorney General Robert Kennedy issued an order banning segregation in interstate travel. Farmer later described the Freedom Rides as his "proudest achievement." CORE had pioneered the tactics that eventually dismantled segregation in the South.

Farmer retired from CORE in 1966 and turned to government service and teaching. In 1998, the year before his death, he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

**Check for Understanding:** Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on James L. Farmer, Jr. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. Why did James L. Farmer, Jr. become an activist?
2. What principles shaped how CORE challenged racial discrimination?

**Going Further:** Write or discuss your answer to the question below, supporting your answer with evidence from the episode or additional information you have learned in class.

3. **Taking a Position.** Why do you think Farmer called the Freedom Rides his proudest achievement?