

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

April 26, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to respectfully request that you consider the women of the 1963 Leesburg Stockade for the 2016 Presidential Medal of Freedom.

On July 15, 1963, fifteen outstanding and brave adolescent girls took a stand for their rights and were imprisoned for it, enduring terrible conditions and circumstances while confined within an abandoned stockade located deep in the backwoods of Leesburg, Georgia. The women, then ages 12-15, ended up in the stockade after their participation in a 200-strong peaceful march from Friendship Baptist Church to the Martin Theater in Americus, Georgia to purchase tickets at the theater's white entrance in protest of its segregationist practices. The girls had been inspired by the efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to use nonviolent methods to advocate for civil rights.

The police were called in, and the protesters were incarcerated in Dawson, Georgia overnight before being taken to the stockade the next day without the knowledge of their parents. While in custody, the girls were deprived of clean water, adequate nutrition, proper hygiene, and contact with their families for two months. These innocent girls, who were arrested yet never charged with any illegal or criminal acts, suffered acute physical and psychological turmoil as a result of their struggle for equality and justice.

Their plight came to light when Danny Lyon, a white Jewish photographer from New York, was sent by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to photograph the Civil Rights Movement in Georgia. He was sent to Leesburg to photograph the imprisoned girls and his pictures highlighted the deplorable living conditions and the denial of human and civil rights. After the momentum of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington in August 1963, and the release of the Mr. Lyon's photos, the Movement grew and so did public outcry for the girls to be released. The Leesburg Stockade girls were eventually released in September 1963.


Although the girls had been "freed," the memories of the horrors they endured stayed with them. Yet, their story remained hidden and untold until just recently. Today, the nine living Leesburg Stockade girls are speaking out as one to bring to light the sacrifices made by children


and young adults throughout the nation during this major turning point in our nation's history. Although six of the women have since passed away, it is our duty to honor the Leesburg Stockade women for their silent and noble sacrifice.

We hope you agree that these courageous African-American women of Americus, Georgia, who have given so much to our nation and continue to fight for equality, are deserving of your consideration for the Presidential Medal of Freedom. We respectfully urge you to consider our request and bestow this well-deserved honor upon the six women that have passed on and the nine living women of Leesburg Stockade. If they were to be selected, we believe it would send a powerful message about our nation's fight for equality and justice that continues to this day.

Mr. President, thank you for considering this request.

Very Respectfully,

  
SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR.  
Member of Congress

  
JOHN LEWIS  
Member of Congress

  
HANK JOHNSON, JR.  
Member of Congress