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**John Mitchell, Jr.: The Hero of
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JOHN MITCHELL, JR: THE HERO OF RICHMOND JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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“That fucking n***” said the Imperial Wizard as he crumpled up a copy of the Richmond Planet that lay in front of him (Federal, 1936).

‘Lynch Laws Must Go’, by John Mitchell, Jr., read the first page of the now crinkled newspaper. Adjacent to the headline appeared a provocative cartoon depicting how mob rule and lynchings have plagued Black communities. This was the era when White supremacists were wreaking deadly havoc on Black communities.

“What are we gonna do boss?” uttered one of the many White-cloaked henchmen that surrounded the Imperial Wizard. “He’s causing a lot of ruckus out there, I tell ya we needs’ta puta stop to them there acts of audacitaay”.

The last syllable of the sentence dragged out of the clan member’s mouth and hung heavy in the airy silence throughout the shack in which the bigots gathered. The silence grew as eyes blinked through the various tiny cut-out holes of the masks of hate that donned each member's head. A few coughs

broke the silence. The Imperial Wizard bent over and sighed as he rubbed his brow in frustration.

“Wuss’gon hap’n to us? Is he gon’ fin’ out who we are?” muffled another clansman from the back, as chewing tobacco saliva spewed from the hole that was cut out in the mask for his mouth.

“Aint nothang gon’ happen t’us. We doin’ what’s right for this country and the American people will see that and so will the freedom fightin’ followers of that here vigilante negro,” responded the Imperial Wizard as he pointed to the front page of *The Richmond Planet* (Federal, 1936).

“Ya see, us clansmen is fightin’ to restore order to America and to make things the way they ought to be. The confederate states will rise agenn and we’ll be the pioneers that gon’ lead them into supreme order where us White folk regain our deserved power and justice,” ranted the Imperial Wizard.

The Imperial Wizard continued: “We ain’t gon’ let this nation fall to negro rule and we must not subject ourselves to subservience to the negro race” (Kneebone, 2015). The Imperial Wizard grew angry and it became obvious that he was overcompensating for the great fear he felt toward John Mitchell. His fear was stoked by the growing movement that sought to bring equality to African Americans, one that strived to end the lynchings and mistreatment of Black people throughout the United States.

“Now, I don’t know about y’all, but we aints gon’ take this lying down. We are the Ku Klux Klan for hell’s sake and we is Whites as well. We is fighters and we are the righteous ones amongst this weak negro-loving country,” professed the Imperial Wizard (Federal, 1936).

“We gotta respond to this unorderly negro and make him learn his place... nothing scares a negro more than the threat of a hangin’ n’ I assure ya, that after we respond to him, this pest shall no longer run rampant,” persisted the Imperial Wizard.

“We scared sir...I mean we really are, and I don’t think I stand alone in this way of thankin’. I thinks most of us all are pretty gosh darn scared that this negro gon’ take down our establishment,” responded the clansman that had asked the previous question.

A lump swelled in his throat and his words began to quiver as they leaked from his mouth. “Th...th...th...The oth...other negroes seem to be gettin’ pretty riled up and inspired by these ‘articles’ and ruma’ has it that even some of them confused White folks is supporting the negro,” the clansman expressed fearfully (Federal, 1936).

“Just let me handle this one brother and believe in whats we is doin’,” retorted the Imperial Wizard.

“B...b...b...but this John Mitchell negro don’t seem to be deterred or scared by nothang.

“Other White folks have threatened him and he only seems t’ get mo’ mad and stronga,” remarked the clansman again as he revealed a moment of vulnerability. “It’s just that...what if yo’ plan don’t do nothing,” yelled the Clansman. A giant cross could be seen outside the window of the shack, erupting in a great fireball.

A pile of all the copies of *The Richmond Planet* that the group could find throughout the area wilted and scalded. The Imperial Wizard adjourned the meeting knowing that his nights with adequate sleep from this point forward would be few.

The above KKK conversation is based on real events, derived from known transcripts of dialogue among Virginia Ku Klux Klan members and between those members and slaves (Federal, 1936). The conversation above captures the venomous hatred that the Ku Klux Klan directed toward African Americans and toward any Whites who fought for racial equality. This dialogue is used

to depict the sinister circumstances and adversity that John Mitchell, Jr. confronted. In facing these trying circumstances, Mitchell truly achieved heroic status.

PURPOSE OF THE CHAPTER

John Mitchell, Jr. was an ambitious and undeterred man who sought to eradicate all forms of racism following the Civil War and until his death on December 3, 1929. Mitchell's life was devoted to achieving this mission and he never wavered from his noble intentions. He was born and raised in Richmond and did almost all of his inspiring and courageous work in the city of Richmond.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer an analysis of the events and encounters that led to John Mitchell, Jr.'s ascendance to heroism. This chapter will detail the tumultuous times and challenging contexts that led to Mitchell's heroism. My goal is to illuminate Mitchell's heroic journey, during which he demonstrated each of Allison and Goethals' (2011) *great eight character traits* of heroism. I will also describe the heroic transformative processes that drove Mitchell's desire to change himself and the society around him (Allison & Goethals, 2017). In addition, this chapter will explore Mitchell's career development and his steadfast sense of calling that shaped his career trajectory (Dik et al., 2017). Finally, the components of the hero functions framework will be described and will reveal the lasting impact of Mitchell's heroic actions (Kinsella et al., 2017).

This chapter not only seeks to recognize Mitchell for his remarkable life and actions; it also desires to inspire others who may read this chapter into acting and leading their life in a similar noble manner. My aim is to summarize and encourage the adoption of the ideals that Mitchell preached, namely, a willingness to fight for what is right no matter how much adversity and challenges one may face during one's journey. The life of John Mitchell, Jr. represents a perfect example of a man who would do anything and everything to reach his goal. Furthermore, the lessons that one can learn from his life are timeless and invaluable, as demonstrated by his heroic actions.

Born a Slave

The Confederate and Union armies had just engaged in the joint slaughter of over 8,000 soldiers in the Battle of Gettysburg, the most casualties of any single battle during the Civil War. Over 3,000 Union soldiers were killed, 14,259 wounded, 5,365 missing or captured, while 4,427 Confederate soldiers were killed, 12,179 wounded, and another 5,592 missing or captured (White, 2012). The casualties for both sides totaled 51,112. The Battle of Gettysburg would be forever engrained in the minds of the American public and would be studied in schools all over the nation as one of the ugliest and tragic moments during the Civil War.

The date was July 11, 1863. In a time of extreme tension and abuse of African American people, and amidst the terrors of the institution of slavery, John Mitchell, Jr. was born. The Civil War rolled on and the nation was greatly divided. Who would have thought that from this dreadful time Mitchell would emerge, soar from the great sufferings he faced, accomplish groundbreaking feats, and become the subject of this college freshman's chapter for this book nearly 90 years after his death?

Mitchell's parents, John Sr. and Rebecca, were both victimized by the tyranny of slavery (Lucey, 2010). Their owner was James Lyons, a prominent lawyer in the south and a very outspoken opponent of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (Lucey, 2010). As a member of the Confederate Congress, Lyons vigorously opposed the equal rights movement for African Americans. Furthermore, Lyons was quoted on record as saying that the Emancipation Proclamation was "inhuman and atrocious" and an act that would "incite servile insurrection against us" (Lucey, 2010). John Mitchell, Jr. and his parents were subservient to such a backward and cruel man.

Only a handful of years into his meager life, was John Mitchell, Jr. already being held back by just few of the many tribulations he would confront and eventually conquer. Lyons had frequently entertained the President of the Confederate States of America and other notable figures in the Confederacy, and Mitchell never forgot these encounters (Lucey, 2010). These interactions

and observations that Mitchell experienced only fueled a fiery rage within him to end the slavery and racism gripping the United States.

One morning, Mitchell answered the door of Lyon's Grace Street mansion to observe that a Black man was standing in the doorway. The man asked if he could speak with Lyons, so the young Mitchell went to seek his employer. Mitchell found Lyons and told him that there was a 'colored gentleman' who desired to speak with him. Lyons became unequivocally angry as he explained to Mitchell that the phrase "colored gentleman" did not exist and the term "gentleman" was explicitly only acceptable to use when referring to a White man. Years later, as the editor of *The Richmond Planet*, Mitchell remembered this impactful exchange with Lyons. He stated that his reasoning for referring to the visitor as a "colored gentleman" was because his mother had taught him that "he himself would grow up to be a gentleman" (Alexander, 2002).

MITCHELL'S SELF-TRANSFORMATION

Mitchell described these encounters with racism as defining moments in his life, reminding him of what really matters and reinforcing his purpose for living (Alexander, 2002). These interactions were central to John Mitchell, Jr.'s personal transformation toward heroic status. Allison and Goethals (2017) have described five types of heroic transformations: spiritual, physical, emotional, mental, and moral. Mitchell's life situations caused a fire to grow deep within him as he fought back against the shackles of racism and prejudice. In the context of Allison and Goethals' (2017) model, Mitchell engaged in a deep, internal, sociocentric transformation that manifested itself in greater moral, spiritual, mental, and emotional changes (see also Allison & Smith, 2015).

Thriving in School and Defying the Odds

At the age of ten, Mitchell was designated as Lyons carriage boy, and he tended to similar chores and tasks. To the dismay of Lyons, Mitchell's slave-mother insisted on teaching her young son how to read and write. Mitchell's

mother persisted in her desires to create a strong educational foundation on which her son could build his life. At the age of thirteen, Mitchell was accepted into the Richmond Normal and High School (Lucey, 2010). He displayed exceptional talents and skills in oratory and art courses, and he truly excelled in his studies (Lucey, 2010).

In 1881, Mitchell graduated first in his class and received abundant praise from his peers and teachers alike. Despite the racism that had festered in the south, Mitchell excelled and flourished in his academics and graduated as valedictorian. Following his schooling, Mitchell decided to enter the profession of teaching in order to inspire others and to provide Black youths with a similar schooling experience to his. His teaching career was truncated greatly, as in 1884 the school board had cleared out the schools of all Black teachers, including Mitchell himself (Lucey, 2010).

Early in his life, John Mitchell, Jr. demonstrated most of the great eight characteristics of heroes (Allison & Goethals, 2011). These traits include: smart, strong, resilient, selfless, caring, charismatic, reliable, and inspiring. As a young adult, the heroic trait that Mitchell most exemplified was intelligence. He had a prodigious intellectual capacity and would later be able to apply his intellect and knowledge toward the accomplishment of his goal of achieving racial equality. The great eight will continue to be referenced throughout this chapter and will serve as a foundation for Mitchell's growth and the construction of his heroic status.

Youngest Editor of The Richmond Planet

Mitchell's newspaper career actually began many years before the unjust purging of Black teachers from Virginia Public Schools. As a young man, he sold copies of the State Journal on streets throughout Richmond. While this was a means to make money to support his family in any way he could, his newspaper career would develop into much more of a calling than a mere job. His newspaper would become a vehicle to promote social justice for Blacks and marginalized people alike (Dik et. al, 2017).

In 1883, shortly after he began writing for the *Globe*, Mitchell caught wind of a group of Black Richmonders who were planning to publish a weekly newspaper. He was immediately intrigued by the idea of an all-Black newspaper (Alexander, 2002). Yale educated politician Edmund A. Randolph was the original founder of *The Richmond Planet*, along with many other Black teachers and activists (Alexander, 2002). *The Planet* sprouted from the seeds of resentment and scorn toward the Virginia Public Schools because of the rules that forbade Blacks from teaching throughout the school system.

The Planet faced great challenges and began to struggle very early on from its inception within the Black community and outside of it. One of the more formidable challenges that the newspaper faced was the extremely high illiteracy rates that ran rampant throughout Black communities. Reaching these people was essential to the paper's survival. It was at this time when Edmund Randolph decided to hire the young, ambitious, and outspoken Mitchell. At the age of twenty-one, John Mitchell, Jr. took over as the editor of *The Richmond Planet*. Mitchell's impact was immediately felt as he "transformed it with his boundless energy, and his talent as both a writer and a cartoonist" (Lucey, 2010).

Mitchell infused the paper with an aggressively creative style in addition to incorporating a new masthead for the paper. His design -- a clenched fist and a flex bicep with radiating shockwaves -- would prove to be an accurate representation of the beast that Mitchell transformed *The Planet* into, as well as the powerful life that Mitchell would go on to live. This symbol became one of great recognition as *The Richmond Planet* became one of the leading papers reporting Black news on both a local and nation scale.

Circulation of the paper rose to great heights, and by 1896 over 6,400 copies were in circulation throughout the United States. Many more than the 6,400 actually read the articles and editorials due to the paper's reputation as being one that was widely shared among its readers. This passage from person to person throughout the nation even led Mitchell to mockingly write atop the most recent issue at the time, "Do you subscribe to the PLANET or do you borrow it?" (Lucey, 2010). The paper even had impact on countries across the Atlantic Ocean. In 1891, Albion W. Tourgee, a White novelist and civil

rights attorney, contacted Mitchell from New York and wrote that his friends in London were readers of *The Planet*. Furthermore, Edward W. Blyden of Liberia wrote that he occasionally saw *The Planet* in Africa and that it even had significance throughout the African continent (Alexander, 2002).

The influence of the paper on Black culture was monumental, and Mitchell took steps to ensure that the paper did not solely target Black communities. He understood that in order to fight the evils of racism, the White world needed be informed of African-American news. Mitchell had the foresight to understand that Whites not only deserved, but needed to hear a Black point of view among the many news publications at the time (Lucey, 2010). His hopes were that *The Planet* would spark a greater enlightenment among Whites about issues facing the Black world. Mitchell knew that the White world had the power, and although Mitchell despised this reality, he recognized that the world needed to see that the Black race is one of deep honor and not inherently evil. Each edition of *The Richmond Planet* was sent to the many homes of White newspaper editors throughout Richmond, and even to the Virginia governor's mansion in downtown Richmond (Lucey, 2010).

No topic was too touchy or too risky for Mitchell to investigate, as without hesitation he willingly took great risks by digging into issues that would undoubtedly threaten the established racist order. Furthermore, Mitchell was fearless in how he wrote and in what he wrote; he became known for making controversial statements to promote his cause. "We regret the necessity," he wrote, "but if the government will not stop the killing of Black men, we must stop it ourselves." He added, "The best remedy for a lyncher or a cursed midnight rider is a 16-shot Winchester rifle in the hands of a dead-shot Negro who has nerve enough to pull the trigger" (Lucey, 2010).

Mitchell, a master of rhetoric, ran a provocative ad that read:

"Do you want to see what the Colored People are doing? Read the Planet. Do you want to know what Colored People think? Read the Planet. Do you want to know how many Colored People are hung to trees without due process of law? Read the Planet. Do you want to know how Colored People are progressing? Read the Planet. Do you want to know what Colored People are demanding? Read

the Planet. . . . Do you want to know how to get the paper? Send \$1.50 to JOHN MITCHELL, JR., 814 E. Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia” (Mitchell, 1902).

Although just an ad for the paper, these words were a microcosm of the feverous, incisive rhetoric that Mitchell produced, all intended to address the heartwrenching, systemic lynchings that ravaged Black people in the South. With Mitchell’s ascension to chief editor of *The Richmond Planet*, we can see the major components of his heroism. As the editor of *The Planet*, Mitchell developed his calling and sense of purpose in the world (Dik et al., 2017). Mitchell’s mission in life focused on achieving equality for the marginalized people in society. He first made it his priority to show the world the bleakness of the quality of life for marginalized communities of African Americans. He knew that his use of information to sway public opinion was only a first step, yet a vital step, toward achieving the ultimate goal of equality among the races. Mitchell had an intrinsic motivation to benefit to the community around him. He was attracted to a career in journalism because it allowed him to flourish and accomplish his larger societal goals most effectively.

Of the great eight traits of heroes, Mitchell displayed resilience, strength, selflessness, and charisma. Mitchell’s embodiment of resilience and strength can be seen in his undeterred mental fortitude as a journalist to report the truth about race relations, regardless of the cost to himself. Mitchell’s provocative and influential rhetoric led to the paper’s prominence and widespread distribution. Through his words and conduct, John Mitchell, Jr. exhibited charisma. People responded to him personally, and they responded to his persuasive writing. Moreover, because all of his actions and goals were accomplished in an effort to help those around him, not just himself, Mitchell demonstrated the great eight characteristic of selflessness.

Exposing Lynch-Culture and Racism

During the time of Mitchell’s young adulthood, the Ku Klux Klan violently terrorized communities in Virginia, and not just Black communities. A teacher at a school outside of Williamsburg, Virginia recalled the devastation that the KKK inflicted and detailed the magnitude of the Ku Klux Klan’s violence: “We have received notice that [the Ku Klux Klan] intend giving us

a call ... Their outrages and murders have become matters of history; one of the missionaries in this part of Virginia -- a New England man, a cripple, was dragged from his bed and over the ground to the woods and terribly beaten. The poor wife never left him, and took him back nearly dead” (Kneebone, 2015).

It is important to remember that in 1874, the attention given to civil rights was not a priority in American politics, as reconstruction efforts were wracked by dysfunction. While the federal government turned a blind eye, Southern state and local governments “were free to begin disenfranchising African Americans through the passage of state and local segregation legislation, called Jim Crow laws, and to enforce such a process with outright violence and lynching” (Kneebone, 2015).

These discriminatory events outraged Mitchell, and he realized that action needed to be taken. Mitchell used *The Richmond Planet* as his platform for reaching out to the American public and to galvanize Black communities. He personally led an aggressive anti-lynching and anti-racism campaign. At this point in Mitchell’s career, he begins to cultivate a deep sense of meaning and purpose with the goal of advancing society toward racial equality. As befitting a hero, Mitchell displayed great selflessness, placing others’ welfare before his own. He also displayed a deep courage in standing up to the KKK and other Whites who resisted any deviation from the oppressive racial status quo.

Justice to Richard Walker

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, Jim Crow laws and White supremacists were poisoning the social and racial landscape of the South. There were furious movements in motion to reestablish a sense of White supremacy in an effort to restore the racial hierarchies in place prior to the Civil War. In May of 1886, news broke to Mitchell that a man by the name of Richard Walker had been lynched for what the White mob described as an “attempted rape” (Alexander, 2002). The jail that was holding Richard Walker prior to his trial was stormed by a White mob and Walker was lynched on a tree in Charlotte County, Virginia.

John Mitchell, Jr. was outraged by the crime, and also outraged by the lack of media coverage and attention that was paid to it. In his eyes, the injustice done to Richard Walker was a horrific crime against humanity, not just the African American race. The White media completely ignored the incident. Armed with *The Richmond Planet* as his pulpit, Mitchell put the mob, the people, and the system that allowed these crimes to occur on full blast, in a scathing editorial. The White community responded to Mitchell's editorial with sharp criticism and even death threats. One of the threats that Mitchell received was in an envelope that was delivered to him. Outside the envelope appeared the menacing mark of a skull and crossbones. The letter inside read: "If you poke that infernal head of yours in this county long enough for us to do it we will hang you higher than [Richard Walker] was hung."

This threatening letter only stoked the fiery passion within Mitchell to pursue his calling to achieve racial justice in America. Mitchell turned the aggressive letter into an opportunity to reveal to the world the ugliness of racism and how White supremacy had cursed Black communities. The very next day, the front page of *The Planet* displayed the letter and below it appeared Mitchell's riposte that cited a Shakespearean quote: "There are no terrors, Cassius, in your threats, for I am armed so strong in honesty that they pass me by like the idle winds, which I respect not."

Mitchell knew he could not succumb to the fear tactics of the Ku Klux Klan and White supremacists. He felt the need to make a statement. In addition to exposing blatant examples of racism in his paper, John Mitchell, Jr. decided to travel to the intimidating Charlotte County, the place where Richard Walker was lynched and where White supremacy flourished. When Mitchell arrived, he did not see a mob waiting for him, nor did he see police waiting to arrest him. He walked five miles from the train station to the exact location of Richard Walker's lynching. Mitchell further went on to tour the neighborhood and even visited the jail cell from which Walker was kidnapped. Mitchell noted that "the cowardly letter writer was nowhere in evidence" (Alexander, 2002). Mitchell wanted to prove that racists and the Klan were cowards.

After the story of Walker's murder was published in *The Planet*, the Black community and much of the journalism community commended Mitchell's

resolve and bravery to report on such an important – and dangerous -- story. Mitchell received significant attention, and thus brought attention to the issues he cared about. Mitchell held true to his statements and protests in addition to showing little fear in assuming leadership for Black activism at the tender age of twenty-five.

John Mitchell, Jr. powerfully demonstrated important elements of the great eight traits of heroism throughout his investigation and reporting of Richard Walker's death. The heroic characteristics that can be gleaned from Mitchell's actions are the traits caring, charisma, strength, selflessness, and inspiration. The act of potentially facing a mob ready to kill him shows his strength as well as the lengths he was willing to go to promote his causes. When faced with ugly death threats, Mitchell's resolve and maturity allowed him to respond in a civil way, showcasing his charisma and larger-than-life heroic courage. Furthermore, as the story of Mitchell's daring adventure spread around the nation, he set an inspirational precedent and example that encouraged others to act fearlessly in their fight for civil rights.

A Young Boy's Life is Saved

Twelve-year-old Mary Ann Quill, a white girl, was walking home after selling eggs at a local market in Chesterfield County, Virginia. She decided to take a shortcut through the woods adjacent to a public Black college. Mary Ann Quill was deviating from the road that ran adjacent to the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute. According to her testimony given later, at the moment when she lost sight of her bearings, a Black man jumped out from the brush and pushed her down to the ground, proceeding to rape her at knifepoint. Quill ran home and immediately told her family. Her parents saw the ripped clothing that was left on her body and they grew angry, calling for the accoster to be lynched. They became bloodthirsty and wanted to see someone die for this event (Petersburg, 1889).

Just two days later, the local authorities arrested a young Black man whom they believed to be the perpetrator. This Black youth was fifteen-year-old Simon S. Walker. Walker had no connection to the college whatsoever, but due to the racism and imbalance within the justice system, Walker was

accused and indicted. He was taken to a jail in Petersburg, Virginia. Within the next few days Walker's "trial" was scheduled.

Walker was very confused by the situation. "The child was not aware of the events that were taking place and did not even testify on his own behalf," noted a witness (Alexander, 2002). Walker was found guilty of rape and the verdict stipulated that he be "hanged from the neck until he be dead" (Commonwealth, 1889). White newspapers all over the nation paid no attention to the story of Walker and barely acknowledged the trial. News of what had happened did not spread fast as these occurrences were almost routine for the Black communities in southern states. One week before the execution, John Mitchell, Jr. caught wind of the story. Mitchell felt that regardless of the crime or race of the accused, it was still unjust to execute a child such as Walker. Mitchell stated that the case "was one of humanity" and that it would be a blemish on the state of Virginia for allowing the execution to proceed as planned (Alexander, 2002).

Mitchell became obsessed over the Simon S. Walker case and could not rest without fighting against a situation that he felt was wildly unjust. Mitchell knew the only way to stop the execution was to talk to the Governor, Fitzhugh Lee. Soon thereafter, Mitchell found out that Lee was actually vacationing in the mountains of Virginia. John Mitchell, Jr. would not let this setback stop him and he decided to immediately embark on the 250-mile train ride to find the governor. After a long journey, Mitchell was able to track down the governor and convince him to delay the execution for thirty days. The hanging was subsequently rescheduled for September 27th.

As the new execution date rolled around, Mitchell became uneasy and decided to once again meet with Fitzhugh Lee. Mitchell travelled to the governor's mansion and conversed with Lee. After pleading to the governor, it became clear to Mitchell that Lee found Mitchell's appeals as intrusive and unruly. Mitchell grew anxious and uneasy realizing that the unfair murder of a fifteen-year-old child loomed. Mitchell decided to take matters into his own hands using the tool he knew best, *The Richmond Planet*. Lee again went on a trip and did not return until the night before the rescheduled execution.

With the help of two prominent black lawyers, James H. Hayes and Giles B. Jackson, Mitchell appealed to the governor.

Just twelve hours before Simon Walker was to be hanged by his neck, Mitchell and his associates received official papers, signed by Fitzhugh, that allowed for the delay of the execution for two more weeks. Mitchell needed a way to get the papers to the sheriff before Walker's execution, but the last train going in the direction of Chesterfield County, Virginia had already departed. Undeterred and undaunted, John Mitchell, Jr. borrowed a friend's horse and rode through rain and deep mud in order to reach the courthouse just after dawn. The jail was heavily guarded as rumors were circulating that a group of Black protesters was to try to free Walker on their own. After examining the papers, the Sheriff agreed to delay the execution. Mitchell was then taken to the boy's cell to meet him for the very first time.

Mitchell recalls that Walker's face was, "the picture of sadness" (Alexander, 2002). In talking with the boy, Mitchell reinforced that he would fight for Walker's right to live. Mitchell told Walker: "I'll go to Richmond and fight for you until the last moment. If I win you will see me again. If I lose, you will see me no more" (Alexander, 2002). In his write-up of the story in *The Planet*, Mitchell noted that both the jailer and the sheriff became overcome with emotion while listening to the exchange between Walker and Mitchell.

Once back in Richmond, Mitchell rallied for the boy as he spoke at churches, circulated petitions, and conversed with ministers in order to provide finances and support for Walker's case. The Black community became entirely united and mobilized in the cause. In his efforts, Mitchell was eventually able to convince the jury to change Walker's death sentence to a prison sentence instead. On the petition to do so were names of Mary Ann Quill's mother, grandparents, and relatives. Mitchell had been able to successfully sway and influence public opinion.

The judge and jury eventually ruled to give Walker twenty years in jail, but considering the oppressive era in which the incident took place, this turn of events represented an overwhelming victory. Once again, Mitchell was berated with insults and threats from White supremacists, which included

the phrases ‘charcoal monster’ and ‘[exciter] of the negroes to an alarming degree’, among others (Alexander, 2002).

These truly selfless and heroic acts on behalf of Walker exemplified Mitchell’s continued inspiring nature, selflessness, and charisma. They also revealed two additional traits of the great eight: resilient and reliable. The tremendous caring for Simon Walker that Mitchell showed is stirring indeed. Mitchell once again demonstrated his charismatic nature as he was able to sway the governor time and time again. Mitchell contained a great ability to persuade others to believe in what he was fighting for. This skill set proved to be crucial for his crusades.

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes with an emphasis on the impact that John Mitchell, Jr. exerted on future generations of civil rights activists. He was a groundbreaking pioneer of the fight for racial equality across America. He was the proverbial rock that was dropped into a pond, initiating positive ripple effects that extended throughout the nation and the world. Mitchell provided a strong foundation on which the civil rights movement would later build.

Mitchell’s work inspired the likes of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Jesse Jackson. Mitchell was a man ahead of his time, a forefather of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. The transformative effect that Mitchell had on society can be best explained by invoking Kinsella et al.’s (2017) theory of the enhancing, modeling, and protecting functions of heroes. The enhancing function of Mitchell’s heroism can be seen in the ways in which he enhanced the lives of people nationwide, especially Black citizens, as a result of his contributions as a journalist. The modeling function of Mitchell’s heroism is revealed in the many ways that his courageous acts provided a model for how people can and should conduct themselves. The protecting function of his heroism is seen in the ways in which Mitchell worked tirelessly to protect Blacks from the harmful effects of White supremacists. John Mitchell, Jr. truly lived his life in accordance with his edict, “Don’t cringe and cower. Demand your rights with dignity, and all will be well.”

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