



Mildred Taylor



It is my hope that to the children who read my books, the Logans will provide those heroes missing from the schoolbooks of my childhood, Black men, women, and children of whom they can be proud.

— 1997 ALAN Award acceptance speech National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Convention



Quick Facts

- * Born in 1943
- * African-American young adult novelist and children's book writer
- * Author of *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*

Biography

Mildred Delois Taylor was born in 1943 in Jackson, Mississippi, to Wilbert Lee and Deletha M. Taylor. Although she was born in the South, her father moved the family to the North, settling in Toledo, Ohio, three weeks after she was born. The Taylors' migration to the North was because her father did not want to raise his daughters in the segregated, racist land of the South.

However, the move to the North did not keep the family from frequenting the South often to visit family members. During these visits, the family would gather together and share family stories, which captivated Taylor tremendously. These family stories were centered on the values her family instilled in her, such as courage, dignity, and self-respect. Over time, Taylor realized the differences that existed between these inspiring stories and those she read about African Americans in the history books. "By the time I entered high school, I had a driving compulsion to paint a truer picture of Black people," she said.

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Biography continued

Taylor graduated from the University of Toledo in 1965 with a bachelor's degree in education. From there she accepted a Peace Corps assignment in Ethiopia, where she taught English and history to Ethiopian students. Upon returning to the United States, she enrolled at the University of Colorado where she achieved a master's degree through the School of Journalism.

Throughout her time abroad and in school, Taylor discovered that she kept "turning again and again to the stories I heard in my childhood. I was deeply drawn to the roots of that inner world which I knew so well, yet I could never capture in writing the warmth of it, the deep emotions and strength of those people who were so vivid in my mind." Though she had written stories for several years, her first success was winning a contest sponsored by the Council on Interracial Books for Children in the African-American category. Her story, *Song of the Trees*, was an old manuscript centered on the Logan family, which inspired her to continue writing Logan family stories for years to come.

In the book, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, the second novel in the Logan series, Taylor included the teachings of her childhood; the values and principles passed on from her family. Her work is a combination of biographical reflection and history. "I wanted to show a family united in love and self-respect, and parents, strong and sensitive, attempting to guide their children successfully, without harming their spirits, through the hazardous maze of living in a discriminatory society." For these reasons critics of Taylor consider her to be a key player in African American children's and young adult literature. She is praised for her writing style and the ability to convey the united African American family in her novels.

In *Let the Circle be Unbroken*, Taylor presents a historical perspective on racial issues and states the only successful resolution is to recognize the fundamental equality of all human beings and to tolerate their differences. While the story is compelling in its exploration of southern black experiences in the 1930s, critics say technical problems limit the book's total effect. For example, the narrator — eleven year old Cassie — is written to sound so intelligent for her age that this contradicts the storyline. Another flaw is the way historical information is poorly integrated into the novel. However, the depth of characters and dramatic events allow for *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* to be a worthy sequel to *Roll of Thunder Hear my Cry* (CLR vol. 59).



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Biography continued

The Logan series books present family connected through love, self-respect, and strong, sensitive parents. This series attempts to lead children successfully through a discriminatory society without losing their spirit. “If they can identify with the Logans, who are representative not only of my family but of the many black families who faced adversity and survived and understand the principles by they lived, then perhaps they can better understand and respect themselves and others.” (CLR vol. 21).

Taylor has received a number of awards and honors for her writing, including several “Outstanding Book of the Year” citations from *The New York Times*, the Newberry Medal, and the Coretta Scott King Award.

Selected Bibliography

Works by the author

The Well: David's Story (1995).

Mississippi Bridge (1990).

The Road to Memphis (1990).

The Gold Cadillac (1987).

The Friendship (1987).

Let the Circle Be Unbroken (1981).

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (1976).

Song of the Trees (1975).