



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 Thomas Freeman. Then, answer questions about it.

### Thomas Freeman 1919–2020

Debate coach Thomas Freeman's motto was "what we do, we do well; what we don't do well, we don't do at all." Freeman mentored well, nurturing generations of Texas Southern University students and some of America's most notable leaders.

Born in 1919, Freeman first tried public speaking in the church. He pursued studies in divinity, and while lecturing at Morehouse College in 1947, he left a distinct impression on the then eighteen-year-old Martin Luther King Jr.

After graduating from the University of Chicago, Freeman moved to Houston in 1949 to teach at Texas Southern. He expected this to be a minor detour, but after the university asked him to coach the debate team, he would build a career there over six decades while also serving as pastor at Mount Horem Baptist Church.

In 1956, Freeman's debate team defeated Harvard in competition, bringing Texas Southern national acclaim. Among Freeman's debaters was future congresswoman Barbara Jordan, whose measured, authoritative style owed much to Freeman. And, while the 2007 film *The Great Debaters* was based on another storied Texas university debate team, its star Denzel Washington trained with Freeman for the role.

In 2019, Freeman celebrated his hundredth birthday at TSU with generations of his students. He passed away shortly thereafter. The TSU Debate Team continues to thrive, its debates a popular showcase for the school.

**Check for Understanding:** Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on Thomas Freeman. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. What future leader of the civil rights movement did Thomas Freeman make an impression on at a young age?
2. What did Freeman spend six decades doing at Texas Southern University?

**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. **Making Inferences.** Why might good skills in debate be helpful for a politician like Freeman's mentee Barbara Jordan?