Glossary

bill (n): a proposed law; if legislators vote to pass a bill then it becomes a law

civil rights (n): rights or privileges that all citizens of a country have according to law

discrimination (n): different treatment of people because of their race, religion, gender, etc.

election (n): the act of choosing someone by voting

elope (v): to secretly get married

equal rights (n): the same treatment for all people

Fair Housing Law (n): a law that makes it illegal to prevent people from living where they choose because of their race

governor (n): the top executive official of a state in the United States

march (n): a rally; a group of people walking together in support of a cause

social justice (n): all people having the same advantages and disadvantages

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Glossary . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 12
Jean Nicolet was the first European to explore Wisconsin. Electa Quinney became Wisconsin’s first public school teacher. Both of these people are known for doing something first. Their firsts made history.

Vel Phillips made history with her many firsts. For example, she was the first woman judge in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Vel’s actions helped shape the United States (U.S.) into the country it is today.

Vel continued to help her community until her death on April 17, 2018. She often gave speeches at schools and churches. She was a member of a singing group called The Raging Grannies. They sang for peace and equal rights.

Vel Phillips helped give people in the city of Milwaukee the right to live where they wanted. She worked for equal rights for both women and African Americans. Vel’s firsts made history, and they made life better for people in Wisconsin and across the U.S.
CONCLUSION

Vel’s husband Dale died from a heart attack on April 14, 1988. His death made Vel sad, but she carried on. Vel helped build a statue in Milwaukee of an escaped slave named Joshua Glover. She began the Vel Phillips Foundation in 2006. This foundation helps people who work for social justice.

EARLY LIFE

Velvalea Hortense Rodgers was born on February 18, 1924. She lived with her parents and two sisters. The family lived on the south side of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Vel’s mother told her daughters to follow their dreams. Vel’s dream was to become a lawyer.

Vel earned an honorary degree from Marquette University on May 20, 2007. This map shows how the population of African Americans living in Milwaukee changed over time.
Vel’s mother made the house rules. The children could not smoke or swear. School was very important in the Rodgers family.

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This was just the beginning for Vel. She wanted to do even more to help people. She left the Milwaukee Common Council in 1971. The governor then made her the Milwaukee Children’s Court judge. This made her the first woman judge in Milwaukee and the first African American judge in Wisconsin.

Vel later became the first woman and first African American elected secretary of state in Wisconsin in 1978. She got to be the governor when other government officials left the state.
Vel would not take no for an answer. So she walked in a peaceful march across Milwaukee’s 16th Street Bridge in 1967. Vel and 137 other people were arrested. She and a priest named Father James Groppi kept marching and giving speeches. The Common Council finally passed her Fair Housing Law on April 30, 1968.

### LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

#### Federal Government
- **Executive Branch:**
  - President
  - Vice President
- **Judiciary Branch:**
  - Supreme Court Justices
- **Legislative Branch:**
  - House of Representatives
  - Senate

#### Wisconsin State Government
- **Executive Branch:**
  - Governor
  - Lieutenant Governor
  - Attorney General
  - Secretary of State
  - State Treasurer
  - Superintendent of Public Instruction
- **Judiciary Branch:**
  - Supreme Court Justices
- **Legislative Branch:**
  - Assembly
  - Senate

#### Wisconsin Local Government
- **County:**
  - Board of Supervisors
  - County Executive or County Administrator
  - County Supervisors
- **City or Village:**
  - Mayor
  - Common Council
  - Alders
- **Town:**
  - Town Board
  - Town Chairperson
  - Supervisors

----KEY----
- Government
- Organization
- Titles

BECOMING A LAWYER

Vel went to Howard University in Washington, D.C. She graduated in 1946. Then she went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School. While there, Vel met Dale Phillips at a party, and fell in love with him. They secretly eloped in November 1947. Vel and Dale later got married in a church on September 12, 1948. They had two sons named Michael and Dale.

Vel teamed with political activists such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) members.
Vel became the first African American woman to graduate from the law school in 1951. She saw that African American teachers and students did not have **equal rights** in Milwaukee schools. So she ran for the Milwaukee School Board. She lost the **election**, but this did not stop her. She kept speaking out at School Board meetings, and looked for other ways to fight for equal rights.

### Milwaukee Common Council

Vel became the first woman and the first African American elected to Milwaukee’s Common Council in 1956. Vel worked hard to pass laws that treated all people fairly. She became a leader in the **civil rights** movement.

In those days, people of color could not buy or rent houses in some parts of the city. Vel thought that was not fair. She introduced a **bill** to make housing **discrimination** illegal in Milwaukee in 1962. But the rest of the Common Council voted it down. She tried to get them to pass the bill three more times between 1963 and 1967. The bill failed to pass each time.

### Civil Rights Era (1954 - 1972)

- **1954**
  
  In a case called *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, the US Supreme Court rules that it is illegal to have segregation in schools.

- **1955**
  
  Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the white section of a bus.

- **1956**
  
  The U.S. Supreme Court rules that segregation on buses is illegal.

- **1962**
  
  Malcolm X becomes a civil rights leader. He encourages people to gain equal rights by any means possible, including violence.

- **1963**
  
  Martin Luther King, Jr. gives a speech called *“I Have a Dream.”* and more than 200,000 people march on Washington, D.C. in support of civil rights.

- **1964**
  
  President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act, preventing discrimination in employment, voting, and education.

- **1966**
  
  Kwanzaa becomes a holiday. It is a week-long celebration that honors African heritage in African American culture.

- **1967**
  
  Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African American Supreme Court Justice.

- **1968**
  
  Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated.

- **1972**
  
  Shirley Chisholm becomes the first African American and first Democratic woman to run for President of the United States.