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**African American Women in the Struggle of the Civil Rights  
Movement (1950-1960)**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of  
Master's in  
Literature and Civilization**

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**Academic Year: 2019-2020**

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents who have truly been an inspiration in my life, whose prayers and aid gave this work more personal meaning.

A special dedication to my future life partner “**K**” who was always beside me.

To all members of my family and friends

## **Acknowledgments**

Firstly, I gratefully thank my supervisor, *Mrs. GHERNOUT Soumia* for her well-guidance, assistance and suggestions. . Without her help and patience this work would not have been carried out.

All my thanks go also to the members of the broad for devoting much of their precious time to examine the present work.

Last but not least, I would like to express my most sincere thanks to my dearly loved patents for their encouragement and support. No emotions and words can express my love for you.

## **Abstract**

Many black women have played a great role in the Civil Rights Movement in America, from working as house servants to leading local civil rights organizations. This research sheds light on the sacrifices of the African American women, and their participation in the Civil Rights Movement and their success against white people who were the reason behind race discrimination. Historically, African Americans suffered horribly from poor conditions, racism, and injustice. These kinds of dilemmas contributed for the rise of Civil Rights Movement during the late 1950s and early 1960s. This movement liberated blacks and ensured total rights, equality between the two races. Within it, African American men and women worked hard to make people understand that America could be a state of harmony where no white superiority or black inferiority would exist. Indeed, black male leaders were mentioned as the ones who battled against Jim Crow Laws, while most of the African Americans Women remained anonymous, unsung heroes'. Even though, they participated on all levels of the Black Freedom Movement. These Women were fighting to achieve liberty from slavery, racism, and especially sexism.

**Keywords:** Civil Rights Movement, African American women, Slavery, Discrimination, Injustice, Liberty.

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## List of Abbreviations

- **NAACP:** The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- **SNCC:** Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
- **CORE:** The Congress of Racial Equality
- **SCLC:** Christian Leadership Conference
- **WPC:** Women's Political Council
- **MIA:** The Montgomery Improvement Association
- **ICC:** The Interstate Commerce Commission
- **MDP:** The Mississippi Democratic Party
- **MIA:** The Montgomery Improvement Association
- **US:** United States
- **kkk:** Ku Klux K

## **General Introduction**

From the start of civilization, women were held so long under different oppressions. They were seen as a lower group that their role in society is no more than being housewives. In particular, African American women experienced extra difficulties in America because of the institutions of slavery and segregation. They fought more than one battle; black men and white society who played a role to oppress them. However, from their arrival to America as slaves approximately in 1619, black females stood at the forefront for equal treatment; for freedom from slavery, for appreciation of women as a citizen and partners with men in every life effort.

During the twentieth century, black women were still deprived from the right of voting. Furthermore, they endured from discrimination in public facilities like restaurants, parks, hospitals, as well as theaters, even schools were segregated. Black people could not have the right of entry to white schools. As a result, they questioned for Civil Rights Movement to exchange racism and discrimination by equality between the two races.

In the light of what has been mentioned, the following research questions have been raised:

**1-** How did the Civil Rights Movement trigger?

**2-** What was the role of African American women in the Movement?

**3-** What were the reasons behind the invisibility of African American women in the Civil Rights Movement?



In the light of these questions, it is hypothesized that:

**1-**The Civil Rights Movement started to end racial segregation and discrimination against black Americans through political and legislative means.

**2-**They were at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, organizing communities and holding a leadership position in civil rights organizations.

**3-**Black women were confronted by both a gender and a race problem in American society that kept them unsung to the public.

The research will comprise three chapters. The first chapter at hand deals with the historical background of the Civil Rights Movement. It examines the African Americans position in society under Jim Crow Laws, and introduces the means that the movement applied such as; Montgomery Bus Boycott, Sit-ins, the Birmingham Campaign, and the March on Washington.

The second chapter in the other hand, the focus will be on the role of African American women in the Civil Rights Movement, their struggle for equality, and justice. In addition, it contains five studied cases as well as Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Septima Clark, Jo Ann Robinson, and Fannie Lou Hamer. The objective of the studied cases is to establish how crucial female civil rights activism was for the achievement of the Civil Rights Movement.

The last chapter is dedicated to have an overview of the factors behind African American women's unseen in the struggle for Civil Rights, and the way it influence the black women life .

# **Chapter one: Historical Background of the Civil Rights Movement**

## **Introduction**

The Civil Rights Movement was a decade of long battle against segregation that mobilizing millions and won the support of the whole society all over the country. Africans always thought that they were inferior and the whites were superior, but all this changed when the Civil Rights Movement began. Its leaders stepped up to educate and inspire the African Americans to fight for their rights and battle of freedom. However, the battle for freedom caused many changes that were needed to make Black and white equal to each other.

## **1. Origin of the Civil Rights Movement**

The African American's Civil Rights Movement was a series of reform movements, in the mid 1950s until the late 1960s which aimed at protesting against treating people based on their skin color. The Movement united all the blacks across cities, towns and villages to tackle and counter racism as the blacks lived in hardship and had a poor lifestyle due to lack of opportunity, a deficient economy, and political oppression.

The Civil Rights Movement did not immediately come from somewhere in the twentieth century. Efforts to improve the quality of life for Blacks were as old as the United States. At the end of the eighteenth century during the American Revolution, abolitionists worked to eliminate racial injustice and put an end to the institution of slavery. Even in a nation that valued personal freedom and believed "all men are created equal", unfortunately, they were not equal at all. Indeed, African Americans struggled for their rights since the Civil War but they didn't achieve it until the 1960s thanks to the Civil Rights Movement.

As well during the Second World War, African Americans had faced all the types of discrimination in the military services despite their contribution in it. One million men and women served in the U.S armed forces, they expected to get better treatment from society after the war but it was the same situation their civil rights still denied.

African Americans had everything against them during the 1950s from not having the rights to vote, fair trial, government services, public education, and equality as well. The right to vote was inaccessible for all the blacks. If an African American tried to subscribe in voting, he would lose his job, shrift from his land, and violently treated or even killed. Black Americans still did not have equality with the white Americans. They were kept separated from white people's public buildings, such as; schools, hospitals, buses, workplaces. This separation of racial groups into different areas is called segregation, particularly in the Southern states of America where they were treated harshly and obliged to accept the laws made by the white over them .Mainly these laws was known as Jim Crow Laws which separated them from the white and delete the advancement they had made in the midst of reconstruction (Dingemans 45).

Although, African American wanted to be recognized as citizens, it was a struggle for them to earn their place in society as human beings much less citizens. They assembled and began battle together unusual battle for correspondences that spread over the tow decades, the Civil Rights Movement was appeared as an answer to decades of white domination on all realms.

The aim of the Modern Civil Rights Movement was to remove racial barriers that confined degraded and marginalized racial minorities. It challenged the white supremacy by a variety of activities, including protest, marches, boycotts and refusals to abide by segregation laws. For the purpose of requiring social justice equality, and change the attitudes of many white Americans.

## **2. The Goals of the Civil Rights Movement**

The Civil Rights Movement was led by African Americans in search to obtain rights that they believed they deserved as citizens of the United States. They fought to improve the African Americans economic situation, the rights to vote, and so many other rights.

### **2.1. Economic Conditions**

Regardless of how many African Americans conditions changed during the post-war II period, black communities were still constantly at low wages in the middle of the twentieth century, with high charges of poverty. Leaders and individuals their aim was to improve black's economic conditions for the purpose to move forward their race to equal treatment in society. "There is nothing new about poverty. What is new is that we now have the techniques, and the resources to get rid of poverty. The real question is whether we have the will "(Martin Luther King).

As a result of discrimination and segregation both before and throughout the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans were subjected to high unemployment rates. The few Africans who were able to hold jobs in the Deep South were provided with no power, and in dirty and hazardous positions (Jones 20). Especially in a leading white society; whites had a superior jobs condition with better paying jobs, whereas the blacks joblessness was higher than the whites." We think there ought to be equal opportunity in unemployment as well as in employment that we resent very much" (qtd. in Tyler 18).

Blacks also suffered from poor housing conditions, while many white people lived in good neighborhoods and had all the opportunities to exceed, blacks lived in a very hard life with no opportunities but only hardships. Housing segregation was a result of the lack of government enforcement and racial discrimination against them. The planned of the movement was to help Blacks gained jobs in a fair process, rise out of poverty, receive equal wages to their white counterparts, and most importantly produce a stable household income

with better housing environment. The Civil Rights Revolution of 1960s was indeed an economic as well as a political and Cultural Revolution (Tyler 16).

## **2.2. The Right to Vote**

The right to vote is a human right of each citizen. The right to vote was the most vital goal of the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans experienced a lot of difficulties that stopped them from participating in their constitutional right to vote as citizens of America. With the presence of the KKK which led the attacks against the black voters, the enforcement of poll taxes, literacy tests, and grandfather clause all this blocked African Americans from voting. Despite the fact that the fifteenth amendment states "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" (Teacher's Guide 1). But as a result of disenfranchisement, this right was essentially taken off from many of them.

To truly change the status of blacks in America, the ability to freely vote was greatly desired by African Americans throughout the movement. The ability to vote would allow them to change the system that for years had oppressed them with his oppressive laws. It would provide an effective, legal and potent opportunity for blacks all across the nation to vote for individuals who would benefit their cause (Tyler 22).

Black leaders struggled to secure their right to register to vote, which the United States Constitution applied to all the citizens. They were harshly and illegally subjected to ways that would prevent them from voting. All types of conniving methods are still being used to prevent the Afro-Americans from becoming registered voters (qtd.in Tyler 23). The results of the long struggles of the blacks were accomplished until the passage of the two historical acts. The Civil Rights Movement was crucial in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 voting rights act. Those acts drastically changed African Americans ability to vote (Tyler 53).

### **3. Jim Crow Law**

The term, Jim Crow refers to a set of laws and ordinances passed by Southern states municipalities between 1877, and 1965 legalizing segregation (the physical separation of individuals based on race, gender, religion, and class) within their boundaries.

Jim Crow Laws refers to entire way of life in which whites and blacks lived in two vastly unequal communities in the South; one of them had all the power, wealth and privileges while the other the black faced daily, seemingly unending incidents of terror, humiliation, with hardly any freedom with very little wealth, and absolutely no justice.

In spite the fact that the passage of the thirteen, fourteen, fifteen Amendments to the Constitution had granted blacks the same legal protections as whites. Yet During the period of Jim Crow Laws the black community was separated from the rest of the Americans society in twenty-six states. In most American cities, towns, states, North, and South, they lived in segregated neighborhoods. They were forced to attend different schools that were all black, hospitals, churches, cemeteries, restrooms, and prisons. "The very fact there were separate facilities was to inform the black people that they were so subhuman, so inferior that they could not even use the public facilities that white people used." (Nash)

The Racial segregation played a crucial role in Jim Crow Laws as it separated the blacks from the other races and relegated them to the status of second class citizens. Therefore, in the case of Plessey v. Ferguson 1896 it was the point of departure, provoked a huge outpouring of public reaction. The laws made people of color "separate, but equal" to white people, but in reality, they were not equal at all.

From the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement there were certain actions that promoted to end segregation in all around America like the March on Washington in 1963's, Rosa Parks and Brown vs. Board of Education.

As the result of laws passed in the 1950s and 1960s which greatly reduced segregation in the US society with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the voting act of 1965, the Jim Crow Laws were finally abolished.

### **3.1. African Americans under Jim Crows Law**

More than a series of strict anti-black laws was Jim Crow. It was a way of life, under it; African Americans were given the position of second-class citizens. Jim Crow helped to make anti-black racism appear right. “Many Christian ministers, theologians thought that whites were the chosen people, blacks were cursed to be servants, and that God supported racial segregation” (pilgrim 227).

The affects of the Jim Crow Laws guaranteed segregation and facilitate to dehumanize blacks in day to day life, in every aspect from riding public transport to personal relationships. Black communities were denied their rights as citizens. Moreover, they were separated in all public facilities. The African Americans schools were extremely poor; Students were tough from second –hand books that were handed down by the superior white schools. It was common to have books that lacked several chapters or even at least half of it. Within the belief that if you keep the African Americans ill-educated they would hold their lower place in society. Actually, none of the Black women or men would have any eye contact with a white person, nor would they begin to speak first; the black boys were though not to touch a white woman.

White supremacy can also be seen in the fact that black people would never be served first in a shop. They humiliated Blacks in whom they would never address them with Mister, Misses or Miss; White used the word “Nigger” when they spoke to a black person. Blacks had little legal recourse against these assaults because the Jim Crow criminal justice system was all whites: police, prosecutors, judges, juries, and prison officials. Violence was instrumental for Jim Crow; it was a method of social control.

As result of the white dominance and the terrible conditions that Africans had faced, led to the establishment of blacks ghettos. If they had not been wanted in the white world, they created their communities were they could express their black freedom and resistance from the Jim Crow. The churches, religion, songs brought African Americans together, they provided them with hope, an escape, provided gratitude, and gave strength.

#### **4. The Rise of the Civil Rights Movement and its Realization by protesting**

The Modern Civil Rights Movement grew out of a long experience of societal protest. In the South, down there the protesters were faced with no peace but only violence can be shown. Though, during 1900 to 1950, community leaders in many Southern cities protested segregation .With the assistance of NAACP as the leading of Civil Rights organization of this era combated racism by lobbying for federal anti-lynching legislation, and challenging segregation laws in court.

##### **4.1. Brown vs. Broad of Education (1951-1954)**

During the twentieths the American education system faced with the question of separation, resulting in many students being denied the possibility to attend schools of their choice. This was based on the race, the skin color of the students. That happened whit the case of Brown vs. Broad of Education determination, this ultimately impacted public schools across the United States.

In the middle of the case was a little girl within the beginning of 1951 .Linda Brown eight years old, every day she had to travel through dangerous railroad for more than an hour to attend her local public school only for black students. At that time, public schools lawfully separate black from the white skin based on a Supreme Court decision from 1896 which stated that to separate people based on their race was legal. However, Linda's father



Oliver did not agree upon the idea of separated schools, he desired his daughter to go near school even though it was only for white children's. After he tried to register her into Topeka Kansas School, they refused to accept the black girl.

Oliver with many other parents challenged Kansas's school segregation laws in the Supreme Court. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Thurgood Marshall (served as lead counsel) took up their case along with similar ones in South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware, as *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The case led to a decision of the US Supreme Court in 1954 that made segregation in public schools illegal. The decision ended the idea of separate but equal schools for whites and African Americans, and encouraged the Civil Rights Movement (Hall 25).

#### **4.2. The Murder of Emmett Till (1955)**

Emmett was born in 1941 in Chicago, and the facts of what happened against him began, after he went to Mississippi with his mother during the month of August, 1955 to visit some relatives. Moreover, his mother warned him not to speak with white people, but he was a boy who was only fourteen years old. Emmett went to the grocery store to bring some requirements. Since at the store was a twenty-six-year-old lady called Caroline, who claimed that Emmett had whistled in the store, the next day, Caroline complained against the child, to her husband who had returned from travel. He with two other men tried to torture him and pulled out his eye from her quarry while he was still alive (Hall27).

After he died they dumped his body into the Tallahatchie River. The case remained in the corridors of the court, ended without a condemnation of criminals. After they all confessed to their act. The murder of Emmett encouraged blacks, whites, and causing many people to join the Civil Rights Movement (Jim 12).

### **4.3. Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956)**

Regardless of some victories over discrimination Jim Crow Law still dominated in the 1950s. Montgomery, Alabama, was among the hundreds of Southern communities where segregation was normal process .One form of discrimination in Montgomery involved the city's buses.

The front seats on the buses were reserved for white people. Blacks were obliged to sit in the back seats, even if a bus contained no white passengers; blacks were not allowed to sit in the white section. Inhabitants challenged segregation first on March, 2, 1955, when fifteen years old Claudette Colvin was sitting in the 'Black section 'of a Montgomery bus. She refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, so she pulled and screaming off the bus. A couple of months later and exactly on October, 21, eighteen years old Mary Louise Smith refused to give up her seat, therefore ,she was arrested too.

The event that bring about a change took place on December 1, 1955, when a black woman named Rosa Parks was riding the bus, the bus got packed, and the driver told her to get out of her seat, and let a white person sit there; Rosa did not think this was fair as she was tired after working, and she was tired of having to do things that she did not think were rights. She decided that she was not going to move from her seat; Rosa was arrested and taken to the jail (Dierenfield 43).

In interview, Parks clarified her actions;

I was arrested on December 1st, 1955 for refusing to stand up on the orders of the bus driver, after the white seats had been occupied in the front. And of course, I was not in the front of the bus as many people have written and spoken that I was – that I got on the bus and took the front seat ,but I did not . I took a seat that was just back of where the white people were sitting , in fact, the last seat ... we went on undisturbed until about the second or the third stop

when some white people boarded the bus and left one man standing. And when the driver noticed him standing, he told us to stand up and let him have those seats. He referred to them as front seats. And when the other three people – after some hesitancy – stood up, he wanted to know if I was going to stand up, and I was not. And he told me he would have me arrested. And I told him he may do that. And of course, he did. (Parks)

Rosa arrested was the final thatched for many blacks who lived in Montgomery, Alabama. They incorporated numerous of Women’s Political Council ( WPC ), A civil rights organization for black women founded in 1941, led by Jo Ann Robinson to get better circumstances of black on buses; They planned a one-day to protest against degradation of African Americans on the Montgomery buses .

On December 5, several African Americans rejected to travel by the buses. Instead, they walked or took taxis as it has requested by Mrs. Robinson; thanks to theme the bus boycott was ongoing.

The achievement of one –day boycott motivated black leaders to arrange a long-standing boycott. They required ending segregation on the city’s buses. Until this demand was met, blacks would refuse to ride Montgomery’s buses. A young well-known leader named Martin Luther King Jr directed it; he was the president of the new organization ‘The Montgomery Improvement Association’ (MIA) which led the boycott.

The Montgomery buses to boycott lasted 382 days. It ended when the US Support represented not only her desires, but stood also for those of the community” (Bell 66).

#### **4.4. Sit – ins (1960)**

The sit-ins brought a younger age group of African American women and men into the movement, which stimulated efforts to challenge all forms of segregation head on. These students are not struggling for themselves alone. They are seeking to save the soul of America (Schmidt 12).

In February 1960, four black college freshmen sat down at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and courteously asked to be served. They were neglected but remained seated until the counter closed. The next day, they returned, but at that time with more students, who follow the same rules; sat quietly at the counter waiting to be served. They were like the protesters in Montgomery practicing non-violent civil disobedience.

The Greensboro lunch demonstrations were called 'sit – ins', as the word spread other students in the cities throughout the South started a performance sit – ins. By April 1960, more than 50,000 students had joined in it. Furthermore, the plan called for well-dressed and perfectly behaved students to enter a lunch counter and ask for services. They would not move until they were served, if they were arrested other students would take their place.

The case attracted national attention especially when the media started reported about the event; the attention from the media assisted people all over the country hear about the injustice that was happening in the South. The black community supported the students by not doing their shopping in stores where they were refused to be served which resulted in profits dropping. After the sales dropped 1/3<sup>rd</sup>, Woolworth's agreed to integrate their lunch. Six months later, blacks in Greensboro could order their cups of coffee at whatever lunch counter they wished (Arsenault 64). As a result of the achievements of the sit – ins, in 1960, black students throughout the country, formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

#### **4.4 The Freedom Riders (1961)**

The Freedom Riders were a very brave group participated in the Civil Rights Movement in 1961. They were groups of both black and white persons from the northern US rode together in the buses in the Deep South. In addition, their aim was to test if the decision of the Supreme Court in the legal case of *Boynton v. Virginia* was being respected there. The decision of the Supreme Court in 1960 that ruled against segregation not only interstate but also in the rest of the rooms, waiting rooms, and all terminal accommodations provided them with an opportunity (Stikoff 89).

The freedom riders were organized by the Congress of Racial Equality CORE; organization supporting equal rights for blacks by peaceful actions. James Farmer one of the founders of the CORE said; 'we felt we could count on the racists of the South to create a crisis so that the federal government would be compelled enforce the law' (qtd. in Arsenault 162).

Six white and thirteen black freedom rides left Washington, D.C., on May 4, 1961. Two of the rides were women; the plan was to ride through Virginia, the Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi to their final destination of New Orleans, Louisiana. They knew that it was a risky mission; because of the most they got closer the more the situation become dangerous.

On 14 May, 1961 the Mother's day, the Greyhound bus carrying freedom rides was assaulted by outraged mobs, they greeted them with terrifying violence near Anniston, Alabama and forced to abandon but the trip sustained. They set off on the journey to Birmingham where freedom riders were attacked by the KKK, and arrested for violating the local segregation.

Twenty – one more freedom rides boarded the bus to Montgomery during their voyage they were secured by policemen, and then when they hit the city limits, it all just disappeared.

Meanwhile, the freedom riders were attacked by thousands of mobs. The violence of white's against the rides helped them to increase the nationwide focus.

The subject of racial integration of transport, and the freedom rides was a matter of serious public and political discuss. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1961 Attorney General ordered the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), Issued new rules to end discrimination in interstate travel. In November, the ICC ordered that seating is without regard to race, color, creed or national origin.

#### **4.5. The Victory in Birmingham (1963)**

The Birmingham campaign belonged to a larger range of demonstrations against Jim Crow that swept over the South in 1963. The Birmingham was organized by Martin Luther King as the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Reverends James Bevel, Fred Shuttles worth, among others. They launched a new round of demonstrations in the city. After the Deadlock in Albany, King looked for another occasion to show that nonviolent resistance could effectively eliminate segregation.

During the twentieth century, the pro-segregation laws in Birmingham, Alabama, not only divided schools and shops based on race, but parks, cemeteries, restaurants, and swimming pools as well (Strife 191). It was considered as the most segregated city in the United States, black citizens faced discrimination regarding of both law and culture.

The campaign began on April 3, with mass meetings, lunch counter sit-ins, a march on city hall, and a boycott of downtown merchants. Twenty -two African Americans were arrested, but the marches continued on the next days under the same consequences. At that time, the media was portraying everything to all the people across the United Stated. Shortly after the police started to arrest downtown marchers an Alabama judge commands King and more than 130 civil rights activists from participating in demonstrations (Salvatore 68). In addition, King determined to violate the state court and staged a march on Good Friday,

April 12 who finished up arrested and jailed. The Civil Rights leaders spent the next week incarcerated, but the protest continued to grow.

On May 2, 1963, children ranging in age from six to eighteen gathered at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, adjacent to downtown where lots of them were arrested. The next day more children joined the protest; this time Connor gave them no more hospitable reception than they did with their elders. He ordered the police to use clubs and dogs on the marchers and instructed firemen to get rid of the crowds with high-pressure water hoses, several were injured. To get rid of the crowds with high-pressure water hoses, several were injured. The publicity surrounding police brutality against the young marches riveted the attention of a national audience viewing the horrible scene on televised evening news programs. Alarmed by situation that seemed to be spinning out of control (Salvatore 69).

On 10 May 1963, King and his allies agreed to a deal desegregation lunch counters, rest room, fitting rooms, drinking fountains in large downtown department ,and verity stores, as well as the hiring of an unspecified number of black sales clerks (Salvatore 70). The non-violence demonstrations led to the hard victory in Birmingham, and it was considered as one of the most successful campaigns of the Civil Rights era. It pushed the President to submit new civil right law.

#### **4.6. The March on Washington (1963)**

The victory in Birmingham was hard and expensive. It encouraged the president Kennedy to announce his intent to present new civil rights legislative package to congress; the bill would include the integration of any publicly or privately owned business or facilities, creating jobs, training programs ,and most importantly for freedom. Unfortunately the bill faced strong objection from Southern members of congress. Instantly, Civil Rights leaders of the SNNC, the NAACP, the CORE, the National Council of churches, the National Urban

League, the National Council of the Afro-American Women and others joined together and planned for the most massive rally to be held in Washington D.C, to put pressure on members of the congress to pass it.

On August, 28, 1963, approximately a quarter of million people, an estimated 190,000 blacks and sixty thousands whites, gathered at the Lincoln Memorial to bear witness for freedom (Salvatore 73). They marched in a peaceful manner meanwhile; the Civil Rights leaders gave their speeches, among them was King who delivered legendary I Have Dream speech. King began by mentioning some obstacles that the Civil Right Movement had overcome, but he soon focused on his dream of the future America, after that he said:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed; we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. I have a dream that one day...the sons of former slaves and the sons of the former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood...I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. (Martin Luther King speech)

Full press and television coverage brought the march on Washington to international attention. Undoubtedly, the march was a key fact in the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

## **Conclusion**

The Southern state used a set of illegal norms that divided blacks from whites in all aspects of life. They were forced by the laws of Jim Crow to attend different schools, churches, theaters, restaurants, road in segregated buses, trains, and public parks. African Americans believed that as citizens of the United States should have the same rights and



privileges as all other Americans had. Many efforts, events characterized the Civil Rights Movement was led by courageous leaders with the assistance of individuals. From the Court's Brown decision to the passage of the Civil Right Act of 1965, it had changed the relationships between the two races in America. By breaking segregation it gave them their worthy status full –citizens with the same rights.

## **Chapter two: Black women's Leadership toward Civil Rights Movement**

### **Introduction**

Black women had been concerned in the American experience since their first arriving in America until now. They participated in the voyage from slavery to freedom facing many obstacles with the purpose of better world for the next generations. In fact, they had demonstrated a strong and persistent commitment to promote a civil rights and equal opportunities for themselves, their families, and their race (Gyant 630).

### **1. Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement**

The involvement of Black women in the Civil Rights Movement was encouraged by the well-known Rosa Parks when she refused to give her seat to a white passenger in public bus triggered the Montgomery bus boycott. Moreover, that day is recognized the commencement of the Civil rights movement. African American women played prominent role in the boycotts, demonstrations, education of adults, children, acts of civil disobedience, and voter registration drivers (Gyant 632).

Many black women performed a variety of roles comparable to those of black male Leaders; they didn't stand on ceremony they merely did the work that required to be done. They raised money and provided housing and solace –all without expectation of personal gain (Bell 11). African American women worked all the day prepared a feast for a dozen or more folks, and sat on the front porch with a shotgun in her lap to protect the folks .According to these women, the struggle for freedom and equality was a long battle that required them to arm with patience to continue the long way.

Despite the substantial roles played by black female at all levels of the Civil Rights Movement, still too many times they remain imperceptible to the larger community. However, because of society and of the culture in which they lived, men have been expected to be leaders while women's role as leaders was obscure (qtd. in Gyant 644). It was these women, from various levels of society who worked together and shaped the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement had influence on almost all its aspects.

## **2. African American Women Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement**

Black women from diverse backgrounds performed valuable leadership roles throughout the Civil Rights Movement, these women were often the ones who started protest, developed strategies, plans, and more additional means for the success of the actions. They were instrumental as leaders in the recruitment and mobilization process and were effective, influential leaders who elicited loyalty from their followers (Robnett 191). On the other hand when someone looks at the history of Civil Rights Movement, one would think that there were only some women involved yet, there was a large contingent of women who engaged in the Black Freedom Movement. Indeed, the following names of women are only a sample of hundreds of other extraordinary unsung heroes.

### **2.1. Ella Baker (1903-1986)**

One of the most significant African American leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, perhaps the most influential women in it. Ella Josephine Baker was born on December 13, 1903, in Norfolk, Virginia; Baker grew up in rural North Carolina, where she developed a deep sense of self-respect. she was an activist whose remarkable career spanned fifty years and touched thousands of lives (Ransby 1). Her career as a civil rights organizer and strategist spanned from 1930 to 1986; in 1930 she became involved with the Young Negroes

Cooperative League, which goal was to establish economic opportunities for the Black communities ,and once said: "people cannot be free until there is enough work in this land to give everybody a job" (Baker).

After her role as national director for the Young Negroes Cooperative League, Baker assisted to shape two great organizations, the NAACP and the SCLC. What that she sustained to be an esteemed and powerful leader in the Civil Rights till her death, even though that she was not well-known to the Americans society as many other leaders ; clearly as Baker was never interested in the spotlight and devoted no effort whatsoever to sought recognition. Without hesitation, she was clearly a professional bridge leader (Robnett 75).

## **2.2. Rosa Parks (1913-2005)**

Parks was born as Rosa Louise McCauley in Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1913, and grew up in a world in which oppression of blacks was still a normal incidence. Her family uncovered her to a feeling of black pride so that she was aware that the black people were not measured complete human beings. She argued that: When I learned that we, my family, were Negroes, it caused me to think that throughout my life I'd had to prove myself as something other than a beast (qtd.in Dingemans 7).

Rosa became a figure of the grassroots movement against racial discrimination when she broke the segregation law by refusing to surrender her seat on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955. Her action fundamentally changed America's view of the rights of black people, and it is considered as the start of years of successful nonviolent resistance to southern Jim Crow (Payhe 45). This action was not the first as she had been politically active before and after the Montgomery bus Boycott. She pointed out: Before the bus incident I had been working with NAACP since 1943. And I worked with the...meetings for people to start becoming registered voters. Very few of us were registered in the early 1940's (Parks).

As a result of parks personal courage, strength, dignity, she was nationally recognized as the mother of the Civil Rights Movement. Anyway, she was an activist who for sure merited worldwide recognition.

### **2.3. Septima Clark (1898-1987)**

Septima Poinsette Clark was born in Charleston, South Carolina to Peter Porcher Poinsette and Victoria Anderson. Clark attended small private schools and Avery Institute, getting a teacher's certificate in 1916. She taught in different educational establishment throughout South Carolina, spotlighting the cause of civil rights; she helped in the growing of Civil Rights Movement in the American South, working with the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Cotton, Ralph David Abernathy and other people.

Clark was one of the most important activists. She was one of the women who transmitted a rich spiritual tradition, along with a social consciousness and concern for human dignity and freedom (Verne 646). Moreover, she often called the queen mother of the Civil Rights Movement; she joined the local chapter of a NAACP, SCLC. Under her direction many schools were created in the benefit of people.

Clark made her sterling affect on the Civil Rights Movement through her work in citizenship education, one of her main objectives teaching her people how to read, write and most of all stressed them about their rights as citizen's.

### **2.4. Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977)**

Fannie Lou Hamer, the daughter of Mississippi sharecroppers in Montgomery County. She experienced the extreme poverty of black people during her childhood; that what triggered her passion for the rights of African Americans.

Despite the fact that she was borne poor and had limited formal education, yet that didn't stop her from becoming highly significant figure in achieving civil rights for her race. Although, she was known for her role as cultural carrier, she brought people together into a community to empower them, and encouraged them to participate in the electoral process (Sartain 117). Hamer, volunteered to register to vote after realizing that she as a citizen had the complete right to use her voice as electoral; in 1962 was beaten and jailed for trying to register to vote.

In the summer of 1964, Hamer, co- founded a political party named MFDP (the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party) in order to obtain electoral rights. She also worked as a bridge leader between several organizations for instance SNCC, COR and SCLC.

Following 1964, Hamer founded social service organizations and initiated economic development efforts, including the Freedom Farms Corporation, which was established in 1969 to help poor families raise food and livestock (Robert 2).

## **2.5. Jo Ann Robinson (1912-1992)**

Born Jo Ann Gibson Robinson on April 17, 1912, in Culloden, Georgia, She was a smart learner in high school and was the best of her graduating class. Afterwards she would earn a bachelor's degree from Fort Valley State College in 1934; she was the first in her family to earn a college degree.

Robinson was a juvenile teacher at Alabama State Collage, simultaneously an activist during the Civil Rights Movement. Outside the classroom she became totally devoted to community activism as a member of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Then in 1949 she joined the Women's Political Council's and becoming its president. Under her direction, the WPC developed chapters statewide and began to discuss ways in which some of the laws might be changed (Robnett 56).

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was in fact sparked by Rosa refusal, but the Boycott was organized by the women of the WPC; it was Robinson who proposed the idea more than years before it was applied. She was a key figure who stands behind the scenes organizer of the Civil Rights struggle.

### **3. The Role of the Black Women in the Civil Rights Organizations**

Organizations during the Civil Rights Movement their role was to aid protect and above all, desired to meet the needs of the black population throughout the nation; it's made great contributions to understand the movement. Black male with black female, both worked together sharing different role as leaders of these organizations. But the African American women played a Pivotal role in it. Most of these organizations was co-founded ,led by a hug number of women who in addition were in highly positions of responsibility , but remained behind the curtain ;majority of the victorious achievements, returned to the wise decisions made by those women who worked hard within these organizations .

#### **3.1. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**

NAACP is an organization in the US that works for the rights of African Americans. It was formed in 1909 and played an important part in the Civil Rights Movement. The organization brought together lawyers, educators, and activist to collectively fight for their case as black citizens. During this time, the NAACP continued a steady campaign to end segregation in housing, education, and other areas of public life (Karson 13).

In the 1920s, the NAACP was the main American civil rights organization with a variety of grassroots branches. It would not have been effective without the moral support of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Indeed, in the crucial years of the civil rights era, the NAACP also produced substantive laws and secured human rights

of blacks, which, in effect, also significantly altered the social, economic, and political dynamics that had impacted African Americans. (Karson 169). However, the greatest realizations by the NAACP were the introduction of a court argument that contributed to the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 regarding school segregating in the case of Brown vs. Board. In addition, it reversed Plessey's "separation but equal policy."

In point of fact, black female were in charge of large changes brought to the NAACP, such as Mrs. Parks had been an active member of the NAACP for fifteen years, and at the time of her arrest was a secretary of the local chapter .... Parks Had also created local youth chapter of NAACP. Furthermore, she was well acquainted with Ella Baker, as a seasoned activists and director of the New York chapter of NAACP (Robnett 57). The other case was Daisy Bates an active participant in the organization was president of the Arkansas state conference of NAACP branches; she led the legislative strategy that led to the school's entry of nine black students. Genuinely, with the participation of African American women, NAACP was the real forefront of the movement.

### **3.2. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**

One of the actives African American organizations during the Civil Rights Movement, It was created in April 1960 at Shaw University, a black college in Raleigh, North Carolina. Some of the smartest and bravest blacks were drawn from the organization, in the next half decade SNCC dedicated itself to peaceful, direct demonstrations in some of the most dangerous areas in the deep southern region; its field workers were battling Jim Crow (qtd.in Salvadore 59).

As an entity focused on Baker's leadership theory, group-centered guidance and collaborative decision-making, was created the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); Baker was the magnetic face of it conducted the decision-making, and demonstrated



a priceless figure during all phases. Lot of other women had worked for SNCC, but received little recognition. For instance Diane Nash co-founded of the organization and played a crucial role that no men can say otherwise; her philosophy was based on grassroots popular democracy and on undermining traditional class and gender hierarchies (Salvadore46).

To directly combat the separation, and other racism, the SNCC has sought to coordinate no-violent youth campaigns. Its members were integrally involved in; the Sit-ins, the Freedom Riders, a March on Washington, 1963, and the Mississippi Freedom Summer such as voting education projects (New Georgia).

SNCC delivered vast numbers of black youths a way to engage in the Movement. Indeed it was the women, however, who provided the essential groundwork to create the SNCC (Robnett 99).

### **3.3. Southern Christian Leadership Conference**

A US organization started by Martin Luther King in January 11, 1957, shortly following the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Its members were mostly African Americans church leaders, they supported peaceful protest. The SCLC had a profound impact on the movement: by nurturing people at various levels, activities, and other community residents (Bell 33).

From the start, the SCLC concentrated its efforts on citizenship schools and efforts to separate individual cities such as Albany, Georgia. However, it assisted arrange the 1963 March on Washington, the Selma Voting Rights Campaign and March to Montgomery in 1965. The SCLC additionally increased its priority to include concerns of economic disparity, starting the Poor People's Campaign in 1967. Such efforts led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as well as the 1965 voting act (National Parks Service).

A crucial role was played in the SCLC by black female in the forefront was Ella Baker assisted discovered the organize students leaders into what became the foundation of it. She served as associate director of SCLC, she had to run the day-today organization of the office, and later she served as acting executive director (Anne 39). Besides that, she developed the organizational structure, while King was actively engaged in his speeches and media. Baker explained:

I set up the office of Southern Christian Conference in 1958, but you didn't see me on television, you didn't see news stories about me. The kind of role that I tried to play was to pick up pieces or put together pieces out of which I hoped organizations might come. The theory is, strong people don't need strong leaders (Baker).

One more example Septima Clark was strongly involved in building an infrastructure of activism and resilient behavior at Highlander and the southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

### **3.4. Congress of Racial Equality**

The African American group advocates nonviolent acts in favor of equal treatment for the Black race; it was established in 1942 in Chicago by James Farmer with the assistant of Anna Pauli Murray .CORE addresses segregation and inequality in restaurants, waiting rooms, etc. (Karson 1128).

CORE was a pacifist nonviolent group working to improve race relations. CORE's activities began with a sit-in at a coffee shop in Chicago in 1942 on the grounds of protest against segregation in public settings. The event was one of the firsts such demonstrations in the US recognized CORE as a powerful force in the subsequent desegregation of public facilities in Northern cities. In 1961 CORE organized the Freedom Rides, a number of

interracial groups of its leaders and followers that eventually succeed in ending segregation along inter-state bus routes.

CORE has been one of Washington's sponsors of the Civil Rights march of 1963. Moreover, when Farmer resigned after 1966; the organization focused more on black voter registration in the South and on community issues. However, with the participation of black women like Septima Clark, encouraging the members of CORE to read and write. With many other women who served the chairperson like Norman Hill, and Marvin Rich with large number of women who stayed behind the scenes.

## **Conclusion**

African American women were key leaders in the Civil Rights movement at all levels. They were an essential part in organizations and mobilizing the black race. Hundreds of ordinary women took part in it risking their jobs, their lives, only to fight the oppressive system of segregation. As a matter of fact the black women leaders of this great movement, whose courage and perseverance not only served as inspiration, but most importantly gave African Americans one of the most important qualities of life which were freedom from the oppressive system that dehumanized them.

## **Chapter three: Black Women's Fight for Equality and Justice**

### **Introduction**

The Civil Rights Movement was a battle of many long years by African Americans to reach the rights which are obviously listed in the U.S. constitution, and are examined to be indisputable merited by all people under all conditions. For the success of that crucial event member of the black community were supposed to contribute in it. Therefore, one group had done allot to secure the demands of that race. Sadly, the voice of that group was denied its say. Women particularly African Americans were essential in made it victorious, thought that they were not given the opportunity to participate directly in the protest, but it was them who made the most difficult decisions in every different steps.

### **1. The invisibility of Black women in the Civil Rights Movement**

The movement of the twentieth century was carried mostly by African American women, since it come out of church the number of women who conducted the movement was larger than that of men. Women were at the forefront of every detail to affirm the movement's momentum. Moreover, the big changes introduced to the Civil Rights Movements were their primary responsibility.

The Civil Rights Movement attracted women from all levels of society. They were sharing their energy, abilities and expertise, such as courage, determination, and endurance; to build a powerful sisterhood for their work in the movement. They crossed every challenge by sharing their expertise with others, and their ability to be highly motivated. Indeed, Black women did not only fulfil conventional female nursing and treatment functions or just make contribution to music art and literature they were real leaders who made a huge contribution to the civil rights (Anne 33).

The movement has often sanitized and portrayed as almost exclusively male, black female were invisible in it. Despite the fact that they did the most of the work in organizations few of them acquired leadership positions because black male leaders did not take their work seriously; for instance, Martin Luther related to women in a limited capacity because he was a typical male chauvinist. He believed that the wife should stay at home and take care of the children while he would be out the streets (qatd.in Anne 3). Although many women, such as Baker, Septima criticized dominant gender roles in both written and verbal terms.

The black community with the Americans society at large forced women to play roles in the movement that tends to be invisible, due to racism, sexism; classism and ethnicity all affect the women's leadership opportunities. The majority of African American women did not share primary or secondary formal leadership titles should in no way obscure the fact that they were leaders, particularly those considered by their communities (Robnett 191).

The roles that African American women had performed whether at the grassroots level or behind the scenes represent; profiles in courage, and suggest that they were leaders in their communities. Indeed, Leaders in the day-to-day struggle against various forms of oppression and leaders in the civil rights movement.

## **2. Gender Inequality in the Civil Rights Movement**

In human history and over cultures, architectural, geographic spatial arrangements have increased status dissimilarities between women and men. However, women and men are spatially segregated in a manner that decrease women's access to knowledge and thereby enhance women's lower status relative to men's. During the early years of America, black women were not entitled to the same rights, privileges as men; this is simply because of the American society during the 1950s and 1960s which was characterized by man as the breadwinner whereas, women role was to took care of the household and the children. This

was the same in the African Americans community. Therefore, in the Civil Rights Movement women created the movement, made people feel a part of it, and did the everyday work upon which most things depended, while men made the public announcements, and negotiate with management (Payne 67).

## **2.1. Sexism**

African American women had faced triple barriers; they experienced oppression both for being African Americans, and for being a woman. Sexism was one of the biggest reasons that forced women to play roles in Black Freedom Movement that tended to be invisible. All of that, the sexism that was present in the Civil Rights Movement was a continuation of oppressive mentality that existed in the larger U.S. culture, which was and is a white, male-dominated culture ( Teaching Tolerance).

From the movement's inception, black women served as chief sources for the mobilization of people and movement capital; without such roles, the movement would have never been significantly affected. Unfortunately, due to sexism women's actions were not the kind that was readily visible or easy to define. Indeed, many times black female asked gender-related questions; men often felt that a woman was sidetracking the movement's focus on race. As it was explained: It was thought that we were making a lot of fuss about insignificant issue that we did not recognize that the Movement was about racism, not sexism .... We wanted to hear at least one woman in the Marches dealing with jobs and freedom .... We knew ... most civil rights organizations were largely comprised of women, children, and youth (Height 85). According to the black leaders in the Civil Rights Movement or the whole black community women's primary role is no more than a homemaker or caretaker.

The Civil Rights Movement organizations were also overshadowed by the popularity of male leaders. The NAACP had never elected a woman as its executive secretary. They

were often excluded from the informal inner circle of decision. Otherwise, Baker herself had criticized the leadership roles of W.E.B. Du Bois and Walter White. Where she argued that both men had a great sense of ego and self-importance (Dingermans 38).

Another organization that was most connected with King was the SCLC. Moreover, an active member of that organization was Ella Baker who acted as associate director of SCLC. She had to run everyday organization of the office, and later she served as acting executive director. Baker said, "I knew from the beginning that as a woman, an older woman, in a group of ministers who are accustomed to having women largely as supporters, there was no place for me to have come into a leadership role. The competition wasn't worth it (qtd. in Dingermans 41). To conclude, an organization that was pretty free to women's involvement in reality was not totally opened to gender inequality or sexism.

## **2.2. Media**

The media are the main ways that large numbers of people receive information; it performed a considerable role in the human condition and in public awareness. Newspapers, magazines, and televisions have assisted more to the accomplishment of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition, it has helped largely to the spread of Black race legal requirements, and mainly their day-to-days segregation experiences. It helped to expand legal requirements of the Black community and primarily their day-to-day segregation experiences.

The Civil Rights Movement was probably the most successful in using the media to mobilize sympathetic national support for its cause (Romane 140). Moreover, the mass media embraced a market-driven emphasis on male leaders as a key signifier of political meaning. Civil rights activists came to recognize the enormous importance of the media spotlight. It

Sympathetic news coverage not only helped to spread awareness and to recruit new members, but also to enhance the image of the charismatic male spokesmen (Anne 44).

After all, the negative side of the media was to depict black male as the only one fighting the institutions of slavery where the black female developed the organizational structure remained invisible to large public. The Media coverage allowed male leaders attract a wide number of followers, making it even harder for women to achieve leadership positions. In addition, for black women particularly Baker it was more important to serve than to look after her own status. She was convinced that leaders, who stood in the center of public attention, often lost their credibility as civil rights workers and organizers, since they were too busy with their new celebrity status (Miller 100). As a result, the media coverage was also gendered in way that made black male such Martin Luther King the suitable speaker to the people of the United States.

### **2.3. Class**

Women performed some of the most important roles during the Civil Rights Movement. They were diverse regarding of age, education and socioeconomic background. So the class, and the region they grew up in. However, most of the well-known civil rights activists they became from regions where poverty and segregation were higher than any other parts of the country. The hardships they experienced triggered their passion for the rights of African Americans.

The majorities to black female activists were from the South and witnessed exploitation at a very young age. Moreover, there the oppressive sharecropping system was designed to maintain economic imbalance in favor of white people. The system kept Blacks poor and whites economically secure (Dingermans 42). For instance, Fannie Lou Hamer who was the daughter of Sharecroppers in Montgomery Mississippi the Country and she also used



to work in the plantation .She once said: I have been sick and tiered for 46years and my parents were tiered before me and their parents were tiered .... Now I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired (qtd.in Gyant 53). The things she adventured as a child motivates her to get involved in the Movement.

In the black community, class played an important role because social values were linked to class. In fact, many middle-class women had more chance to be known to the public. However, the rural women were naturally leaders as they grew up conscious of the injustices of racism. They were described as the Towers of strength and mass of the movement because of the support and nurturing they provided, and the act that they were hell –raisers determined to change the system (Gyant 634). Subsequently, educated women, working women, those who had an excellent character are more likely to become a representative. Without the waste of words Class was a significant and decisive factor in black women's civil rights involvement.

### **3. The Civil Rights Movement Effects on Black Women**

The Civil Rights Movement provided African Americans the chance to become full citizens. It also made the American society aware that certain groups, including women, and other minorities were ruled out from American freedom.

The Movement encouraged African American women to challenge their inferior status to men by offering these women the opportunity to articulate their opinions. Indeed, the Civil Rights Movement is regarded as the precedent that opened the doors for the women's Liberation Movement (Clements 5). The women's Movement started in favor to mad an end to the institutional of sexism, equality of women, and most important thing general human rights for all people no regards of their gender, race.

Black women had been motivated by the Civil Rights Movement to call for the abolition of second-class status. With this in mind, it is more useful to explain that Black women argued that discrimination against women was similar to that practiced against white African Americans.

In 1964, the Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, prohibited discrimination in employment based on race, color, national origin, and religion, also prohibited discrimination in regard to sex. Moreover, these suggest that while, a white man might accept that African Americans needed and deserved protection from discrimination, the idea that women deserved equality with men (Khan Academy).

African American women through their struggle in the Civil Rights Movement realize that the society at large and the black community prevented them from living as freely and independent as they hoped. So, they form different ages, socioeconomic came together to share their dreams and hopes for a better world for their race as for their gender.

## **Conclusion**

The Civil Rights Movement didn't just support equality for African Americans. It was also a social justice point of departure for other causes. Black females suffered terribly from lower class position in the white society because of their race, and within their community since they were women. Their position was located under their level of competence, whereas less skilled males were placed above them. However, all this is a result of sexism and male dominate in the black community. According to them women's position in society can't be more than taking care of the family and the household, or being active in church or social organizations. Therefore, women from different sectors of society inspired from the Civil Rights Movement and began to fight to secure a stronger role in the American society.

## **General Conclusion**

African Americans were mistreated since they first set foot in the new world. They faced all kinds of adversity, racism, discrimination, exclusion, and segregation in public institutions. In fact, all the above factors motivated them to start a decade of non-violent protest against their treatment based on their skin color.

During the civil rights movement, ordinary men and women fought for the sake of the achievement of their total equality. This two genders share a long history of mutual support in the fight for freedom. Unfortunately, black male received all the attention as they had the highest status in society while black females stayed behind the backstage in one of the most revolutionary periods of Modern American History. A lot of them worked hard to change America's image and battled for slavery rights, for equal access for housing, employment, education, and the right to vote. Moreover, black women in their homes, churches, social clubs, organizations, and communities performed valuable leadership roles.

African American women faced a double burden. They experienced oppression for being African American as well as being a woman. Therefore, black women had to confront many barriers to achieve first-class citizenship, race, gender, sexism, media, and class limitations. They usually banned their being acknowledged articulates, spokespersons and media favorites. Women like Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hammer, and John Robinson were a central role in mobilizing people, planning new strategies, and overseeing successful protest fights.

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