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Terra Warren
15 April 2013
Mr. Scott Friesner
Sisters of the Spirit: Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement

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Terra Warren
Mr. Friesner
Sisters of the Spirit: Black Women and the Civil Rights Movement
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Sisters of the Spirit: Black Women and the Civil Rights Movement

“Uncle Tom Negro leaders, stand up and fight like men instead of running around here nonviolently acting like women.” –Malcolm X, 1965¹

“Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him. If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.” –Sojourner Truth, 1851²

When students learn about the Civil Rights Movement and the activists involved, they most commonly learn primarily about Martin Luther King Jr., occasionally Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks. Rosa Parks is almost always mentioned by teachers and professors with an emphasis on her gender – “Rosa Parks – a *woman!* – sparked the Civil Rights Movement with her courageous act in 1955.” No such remarks are made about the gender of Malcolm X or Martin Luther King Jr. Rarely are other female activists, such as Mavis Staples, Angela Davis, Abbey Lincoln, Ella Baker, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Mary Fair Burks, mentioned. The impression many students receive, then, is that men alone were leading and participating in the Civil Rights Movement. Women were thought to still be at home, caring for their husbands and children. Given their second class position in society and continued oppression, certainly many women shied away from participating.

¹ Estes, Steve S., “I AM a MAN! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement,” (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

² Truth, Sojourner, “Ain't I a Woman?” 1851. Speech.

This perception is certainly untrue, and a product of top-down historiography, where contributions from the “top” are studied. Unfortunately, since women have never been allowed to be on “top,” women and their contributions are excluded. Even in black colleges, where female students have outnumbered male students every year (except 1947, as a result of the returning soldiers entering the educational sphere), the leadership positions in these colleges have been occupied by males. Thus the historical content is highly biased towards the contributions by black men.³ Despite the fact that, in the South as well as the North, women participated significantly more in the Civil Rights Movement than their male counterparts,⁴ women – specifically, black women – were not allowed to be in formal leadership positions.

Yet most women did not see their gender as restricting; they found their activism in the Civil Rights Movement to be liberating.⁵ Their roles as grassroots organizers were crucial for mobilizing and transforming the Civil Rights Movement. Black women helped to found the United States’ foremost black organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Women were responsible for the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and organized and supported the Little Rock Nine. Some of these women gained prominence through their work within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and one went on to found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. They helped educate their communities, and they encouraged them to vote. Women also used their position as musicians, poets, and entertainers to further the Civil Rights Movement. Although women often worked behind the scenes, their impact is both massive and tangible.

³ Gasman, Marybeth, “Swept Under the Rug? A Historiography of Gender and Black Colleges,” *American Educational Research Journal* 44 (2007): 761.

⁴ Payne, Charles, “Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta,” in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, “Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965,” (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 9

⁵ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1665 - 1676.

The demographics of those involved in the Civil Rights Movement are not completely known – there are a large number of exceptions which do not make the rule, and some exceptions which do. Depending on the year, location, and economic means, the demographics of the Civil Rights Movement change dramatically. While our collective memory has taught many Americans to believe that rebellious social movements are products of the youth, in fact, older men (in their fifties and sixties) were influential in “getting the movement off the ground.”⁶ Moreover, teenage girls and teenage boys participated relatively equally as well. The critical difference in numbers according to gender lies in individuals aged thirty to fifty, where “women were three or four times more likely than men to participate.”⁷ The activism by black women has deep roots within black history, and their contributions to the Civil Rights Movement must be understood within an ongoing legacy and tradition of “sisters of the spirit.”

One “sister of the spirit” encompassed the spirit, energy, and determination of black women in the nascent Civil Rights Movement, and began her activism over fifty years before Rosa Parks’ arrest. Mary McLeod Bethune moved to Daytona, Florida in 1904 with the determination to open the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls. This school would teach the young girls “both academic and practical skills.”⁸ Like many other female activists, Bethune saw her duty to increase self-reliance among blacks. She also subscribed to the “Victorian notion” that it was women who would exhort the black community to spiritual and moral goodness. Bethune’s school became a source of pride for the black community in Daytona, and received financial help from both white and black donors. Though

⁶ Payne, Charles, “Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta,” in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, “Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965,” (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 2.

⁷ Payne, Charles, “Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta,” in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, “Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965,” (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 2.

⁸ McCluskey, Audrey Thomas. “Mary McLeod Bethune’s Impact on Daytona.” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (1994), 201 - 206.

most blacks had very little money, many donated what they could afford to help the school. In addition, many blacks volunteered their time at the school while churches held fundraisers to lend support. The black community of Daytona recognized Bethune's important contributions and its members were eager to help in whatever way they could manage.

When she arrived in Daytona, the school system for blacks, as well as the overall quality of life, was tragic. Florida spent \$2.64 on each black student, while simultaneously spending \$11.50 on every white student. Bethune was a realist as well as a visionary; she understood that in order to create a school for black girls, she would need white money, and Bethune, no doubt, understood the philosophy and practices of Booker T. Washington. Dora Maley, a wealthy white woman in Daytona, was the first to donate money to Bethune's cause. Bethune also placed both black and white women on the Board of Advisors. She carefully selected the white women, knowing that as the wives of wealthy citizens, they were prospective donors to the school. For the school's Board of Trustees, she managed to recruit James N. Gamble (of Proctor and Gamble fame) as well as John D. Rockefeller.⁹

When the Bethune School finally opened, the institution taught five girls and one boy (who was Bethune's son). To supply the school, Bethune and her students dove into dumpsters to retrieve utensils and furniture. Bethune burned wood to make pencils for the students and used elderberry juice to provide ink for pens; she would even beg strangers for supplies. She also planted a garden outside of the school to provide lunches for the students, and any surplus food was sold to the public to help fund the school. Eventually, as the student population outgrew the small farmhouse serving as the Bethune School, she purchased a garbage dump called "Hell's Hole" for \$250 and began to build a new school. When she paid the dump owner, she delivered

⁹ McCluskey, Audrey Thomas. "Mary McLeod Bethune's Impact on Daytona." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (1994), 203-214.

the money wrapped in a handkerchief because of a dream that she had which depicted Booker T. Washington giving her a diamond wrapped in a handkerchief while telling her to “go build a school,”¹⁰ and Bethune began to transform “Hell’s Hole” into “Faith Hall.”¹¹

Bethune served as one of the first black presidents of a school. Since Bethune’s vision was to help black women, it is not surprising that she hired female teachers to take over her teaching duties when the school grew too large for Bethune to teach all levels by herself. These women became part of “the Bethune ‘family,’”¹² and their teaching enabled Bethune to focus on administrative and fundraising duties. The school’s curriculum was directly influenced by the everyday social problems she saw within the black community, and she directly addressed the hygienic, culinary, and waste problems she found in African-American homes.

What Bethune witnessed in the black community must have saddened and frightened her into action, because in 1912 she began fundraising for the first black hospital in the area. She received donations from Andrew Carnegie as well as from members of the black community in Daytona. The staff of Bethune’s hospital consisted of white and black doctors and nurses who provided at-home care for blacks who did not have transportation to the hospital. In 1913, the hospital served 530 patients, and the nurses served 230 individuals at their homes. While many of these people could not pay their hospital fees, they received treatment regardless.

Bethune’s bold spirit carried over into other areas of activism as well. One day, as the local Ku Klux Klan marched onto the school’s campus, Bethune marched out to the front of the school and stood there with her arms crossed until the Klansmen left. The next day, she gathered a group of black citizens who went to the polling booth to vote for a local black businessman to

¹⁰ McCluskey, Audrey Thomas. “Mary McLeod Bethune’s Impact on Daytona.” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (1994), 207.

¹¹ McCluskey, Audrey Thomas. “Mary McLeod Bethune’s Impact on Daytona.” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (1994), 208.

¹² McCluskey, Audrey Thomas. “Mary McLeod Bethune’s Impact on Daytona.” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (1994), 208.

win a seat on the city council. They were forced to wait the entire day to vote, but eventually succeeded, although their candidate did not win the seat.¹³

Mary McLeod Bethune was able to overcome the limitations of her societal gender role and became a public speaker for the Civil Rights Movement respected by both blacks and whites. Instead of speaking of the superiority of races, she spoke of humanity as a family while emphasizing the importance of the “traditional values of God and country.”¹⁴ Determined to reverse the stereotype that blacks were intellectually and morally inferior to whites, Bethune was immensely proud of her African heritage, and used her it to explain her virtues, stating that through the matrilineal line, she was able to retain the dignity of African queens. She would proudly announce that she was from “pure African stock,”¹⁵ and stated, “Mother was of royal African blood, of a tribe of matriarchs. Throughout her bitter years of slavery she had managed to preserve a queen-like dignity. She supervised the business of the family.”¹⁶ She was proud of both her racial origins and the heritage of African women. Taking the image of a black woman and man, she infused it with pride. Instead of seeing her skin color as a handicap, she claimed it as a source of honor and “introduced...a counter narrative of black female dignity, competence, and intelligence.”¹⁷

Bethune also strategically befriended Eleanor Roosevelt. In 1927, she attended a luncheon for women’s organizations, where Eleanor Roosevelt and Sara Delano Roosevelt were in attendance. Bethune, the sole black woman at the luncheon, was receiving uncomfortable

¹³ McCluskey, Audrey Thomas. “Mary McLeod Bethune’s Impact on Daytona.” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 73 (1994), 212 - 214.

¹⁴ McCluskey, Audrey T., “Representing the Race: Mary McLeod Bethune and the Press in the Jim Crow Era,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, (1999): 237.

¹⁵ McCluskey, Audrey T., “Representing the Race: Mary McLeod Bethune and the Press in the Jim Crow Era,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, (1999): 238.

¹⁶ McCluskey, Audrey T., “Representing the Race: Mary McLeod Bethune and the Press in the Jim Crow Era,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, (1999): 238.

¹⁷ McCluskey, Audrey T., “Representing the Race: Mary McLeod Bethune and the Press in the Jim Crow Era,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, (1999): 238.

glances from white women at the event. Sara Denalo Roosevelt sat next to her, and introduced Eleanor to Bethune, initiating the beneficial friendship.¹⁸ Eleanor Roosevelt's friendship with Mary McLeod Bethune was not only beneficial for Bethune, but helped to bring national attention to the Civil Rights Movement. Mrs. Roosevelt's attendance at black gatherings elevated national interest in black rights – something of which Mrs. Roosevelt was fully aware.¹⁹ In 1941, Bethune invited Roosevelt to become a member of the board of trustees for the Bethune-Cookman College; the announcement of this prospect alone raised interest and funds for the college. In addition, when Roosevelt visited the school, she chose to stay at Mary McLeod Bethune's house rather than an all-white hotel. This, of course, upset whites and increased Roosevelt's popularity among blacks.²⁰

Bethune would serve in Franklin D. Roosevelt's so-called "Black Cabinet" – an advisory group to the president on the black community in America.²¹ Roosevelt appointed Bethune as the first black female president of the National Youth Association, a position she would occupy for eight years.²² During this time, she would also advise the Secretary of War on the "selection process for a training program for women officers."²³

Bethune's involvement in the government was not popular among all blacks, particularly those in the black press. While the reporters praised her for allying herself with the Roosevelts to improve the condition of blacks in America, they also scorned her for becoming a "politician." Black newspapers mocked her, but Bethune continued to insist that her college was her first

¹⁸ Hanson, Joyce A., "Mary McLeod Bethune: Race Woman," *The New Crisis* 110 (2003): 34-37.

¹⁹ Eleanor Roosevelt famously resigned her membership from the Daughters of the Revolution after they denied singer Marian Anderson, a black woman, the opportunity to sing at an event. See Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 234.

²⁰ McCluskey, Audrey T., "Representing the Race: Mary McLeod Bethune and the Press in the Jim Crow Era," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, (1999): 240.

²¹ Ross, B. Joyce. "Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Youth Administration: A Case Study of Power." *The Journal of Negro History* 60 (1975), 2.

²² "Mary McLeod Bethune," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 20, 1986.

²³ Mary McLeod Bethune," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 20, 1986.

priority. The label as a politician followed her, even after she retired from politics. Despite this, the black press continuously asked for a larger effort from her.²⁴

As effectively summarized in Bethune's obituary, "From an humble beginning as a country school girl...whose parents were slaves, to the position of a great college president which she founded...and among the top advisors to the President of the United States, the story of Mary McLeod Bethune...[reads like] tales of fantasy."²⁵ Yet Bethune herself deserves the last word. In her last will and testament, she bequeathed,

I leave you love. Love builds.

I leave you hope.

I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another.

I leave you the thirst for education.

I leave you racial dignity.²⁶

Bethune's last will entrusts poetry and hope for the following generation to care for the future. She died in 1955.²⁷ Her legacy can be seen in many places, but most notably in her national memorial, which enshrined Bethune as the first black American to receive a memorial in Washington D.C. on federal park land.²⁸

While Bethune subscribed to the philosophies of Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois helped to develop another ideological thread that ran through the black community. Du Bois was "concerned with unhinging Washington's grip on public opinion and resurrecting the struggle for political and civic equality as essential for facilitating black advancement and

²⁴ McCluskey, Audrey T., "Representing the Race: Mary McLeod Bethune and the Press in the Jim Crow Era," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, (1999): 240.

²⁵ "Mary McLeod Bethune," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 21, 1955.

²⁶ "Dr. Bethune's Last Will and Testament." Last modified 2008.

http://www.cookman.edu/about_BCU/history/lastwill_testament.html

²⁷ "Mary McLeod Bethune," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 20, 1986.

²⁸ McCluskey, Audrey T., "Representing the Race: Mary McLeod Bethune and the Press in the Jim Crow Era," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, (1999): 236.

ensuring the health of American democracy.”²⁹ His ideals regarding blacks in America were central to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Du Bois believed that “ideas not slogans, principles not personalities were essential to the eradication of the many forms of bigotry and inequality that had perverted what he called ‘the ideal of human brotherhood’ in America.”³⁰ He encouraged “traditional literary forms, such as poetry, fiction, and an introspective, impressionistic prose which impelled the need to express his most deeply felt emotions”³¹ in order to uplift blacks and celebrate black heritage. Unlike Booker T. Washington, who believed blacks should raise their social and economic standing within white culture, Du Bois hoped blacks would become confident, full individuals within black culture.³² This ideology no doubt influenced many of the black women this essay will explore, including Billie Holiday, Sonia Sanchez, Mavis Staples, and Abbey Lincoln.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People grew out of Du Bois’ ideology and in reaction to social violence. In 1908, a violent riot against blacks in Springfield, Illinois occurred. Eight blacks were murdered, and around two thousand blacks fled the city. Reporter William English Walling reported on this incident in a liberal newspaper, the *Independent*, stating that the “spirit of the abolitionists must be revived.”³³ He called his fellow liberal colleagues to take a stand for black equality, and Mary White Ovington, a white suffragist, responded “immediately expressing her interest and support,”³⁴ and the two set out to

²⁹ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 2.

³⁰ Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Nellie Y. McKay, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 606.

³¹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Nellie Y. McKay, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 606.

³² Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Nellie Y. McKay, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 608.

³³ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 5.

³⁴ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 5.

construct what would become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. After consulting with W. E. B. Du Bois, Ovington and Walling called upon several prominent New Yorkers to enlist in their cause. These New Yorkers included white men, white women, and black men. Indeed, when “The Call,” the group’s call to action, was published on February 12, 1909, the signatories included white women, black and white men, and one black woman: Ida B. Wells-Barnett.³⁵

The group that was to become the NAACP hosted the National Negro Committee Conference in 1909, inviting both black and white citizens. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, a prominent black rights advocate, spoke at this conference. Her prior fifteen years as an anti-lynching advocate made her a well-chosen candidate. She spoke about how public sentiment had failed to protect blacks from lynch mobs, and that the “only certain remedy was federal protection of American citizenship.”³⁶ She advised the group to challenge, investigate, and publicize every lynching in order to sway public opinion.

At the end of the National Negro Committee Conference, the Committee on Nominations selected forty individuals to found and, effectively, run the organization. Out of the forty individuals, only six were black. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was excluded from the group. She blamed Du Bois, believing that if Du Bois wished her to be on the committee, he could have swayed the Committee on Nominations in her favor. Ovington later explained that the “nominating committee took a middle course, omitting Booker T. Washington (who plainly would not have agreed to serve), as well as his two most outspoken critics, Wells-Barnett and [Monroe]

³⁵ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 6.

³⁶ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 11.

Trotter.”³⁷ Hurt and disappointed, Wells-Barnett protested to Charles Russell, the committee chairman, who agreed to add her name to the Committee of Forty. Despite her addition to the group, she was insulted “by the treatment she received ‘at the hands of men of my own race,’”³⁸ and chose to stay relatively inactive.

Ella Baker, who would later found the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and serve on the board of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was hired as a field-worker for the NAACP in February, 1941. Field-workers in the NAACP were “critical to recruiting the membership essential to the fiscal viability of the organization.”³⁹ Baker’s efforts in Birmingham, Alabama, increased the NAACP’s local population to 1,619 individuals. As stated in Patricia Sullivan’s history of the NAACP, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, “Ella Baker brought a rare combination of intellect, experience, and talent to the NAACP at a transitional moment in its history.”⁴⁰ She was known for her energetic personality and perseverance, and soon became recognized as an extremely successful campaign organizer within the NAACP. She encouraged the Association to begin organizing at a grassroots level, and pushed for local participation within the Movement. In 1943, she became director of branches, and expanded the NAACP’s membership and influence significantly.⁴¹

One of the first cries of the modern Civil Rights Movement was sounded in 1939 by Billie Holiday. Though Holiday did not write the song “Strange Fruit,”⁴² she is justly identified

³⁷ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 12.

³⁸ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 13.

³⁹ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 260.

⁴⁰ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 261.

⁴¹ Sullivan, Patricia, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 260-286.

⁴² The author of “Strange Fruit” was Abel Meeropol, a white, Jewish teacher, who, although not black, sympathized with the black struggle and was horrified by lynching practices in the United States.

with the song. The song is different from most jazz and blues songs that protested Jim Crow-era racism in that it was not in the spiritual tradition of “We Shall Overcome.” Instead, “Strange Fruit” is a solemn, haunting description of a lynching. When Holiday’s mother asked her why she was willing to risk her safety over the song, Holiday replied, “Because it might make things better.” When her mother responded, “But you’d be dead,” Holiday bravely countered, “Yeah, but I’ll feel it. I’ll know it in my grave.”⁴³ Holiday’s protest was not what was expected from black “girl singers;” the public was used to hearing “A-Tisket, A-Tasket.”⁴⁴ Black girls and women, society had seemingly decided, were for consumption. Black female entertainers were placed on a stage and were supposed to put a smile on the face of her white audience. Billie Holiday was no longer for consumption; she was using her position in society (positioned on a stage, specifically) to speak out against the gruesome violence that was inflicted upon the black community.

Holiday first publicly performed “Strange Fruit” in late 1938 at a party. The loud scene paused as Holiday announced, “I would like to sing a new song which I have been rehearsing all day; it’s called ‘Strange Fruit.’ I want to see what you think of it.”⁴⁵ One of the attendees, Charles Gilmore, describes the change in mood at the gathering as going from a roaring party to a solemn get together, like a funeral. “Nobody clapped or anything,”⁴⁶ Gilmore said. When she performed “Strange Fruit” at the Café Society in 1939, however, she received a “tremendous ovation.”⁴⁷

Holiday’s performances of “Strange Fruit” were as dramatic as its poetry. She would sing the song at the end of each set, and all employees were instructed to stop serving patrons, and

⁴³ Lynskey, Dorian, *33 Revolutions Per Minute: A History of Protest Songs, from Billie Holiday to Green Day* (Harper Collins, 2011), 13.

⁴⁴ Margolick, David. *Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2000), 20.

⁴⁵ Margolick, David. *Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2000), 45.

⁴⁶ Margolick, David. *Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2000), 45.

⁴⁷ Margolick, David. *Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2000), 46.

even to silence noisy customers (in fact, noisy customers upset Holiday to such a degree that one evening, after performing only a few songs, she lifted her gown and “showed her black ass... That was the one time a black person said ‘kiss my ass’ to a white audience and showed it.”)⁴⁸ Before “Strange Fruit” began, the room would dim to complete blackness except for a spotlight on Holiday’s face. Once “Strange Fruit” was finished, the spotlight would darken, and Holiday and her sole accompanist would leave the stage. Regardless of whether the audience called for one, there was never an encore. Holiday left the audience in Café Society with the haunting imagery of “Strange Fruit.”

The “poplar trees” that “Strange Fruit” describes bear the blood of black bodies “swinging in the southern breeze.” After Holiday artfully describes a sentimentalized view of the South as a “pastoral scene of the gallant South...scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,” she juxtaposes “the sudden smell of burning flesh.” Indeed, it is a “strange and bitter crop.” Nina Simone called “Strange Fruit” the “ugliest song I have ever heard...Ugly in the sense that it is violent and tears at the guts of what white people have done to my people in this country.”⁴⁹

Holiday herself experienced racism throughout her life. In 1944, when a naval officer called Holiday a “nigger,” she reacted by smashing a glass bottle over a table and attempting to attack the man. Later that evening, a friend saw her walking down the road, and asked her how she was doing, to which Holiday replied, “Well, you know, I’m still a nigger.”⁵⁰

Not all women were as visible as Bethune and Holiday; nevertheless, they were as important and as involved in the Movement, although their faces less recognizable. In the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a significant African American civil rights

⁴⁸Margolick, David. *Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2000), 51.

⁴⁹Lynskey, Dorian, *33 Revolutions Per Minute: A History of Protest Songs, from Billie Holiday to Green Day* (Harper Collins, 2011), 5.

⁵⁰Lynskey, Dorian, *33 Revolutions Per Minute: A History of Protest Songs, from Billie Holiday to Green Day* (Harper Collins, 2011), 12.

organization, males held the large majority of formal leadership positions, while women were subjected to working in either the fundraising department or the Citizenship Education Program.⁵¹ In 1964, the first woman was elected to the SCLC board of directors; in 1965, three women sat on the board, as compared to the thirty-nine males that served on the board.⁵² Ella Baker, who would become instrumental in forming SNCC, was hired as acting director of SCLC while the male board could search for a more “appropriate replacement.”⁵³ Even when serving as active director, Baker felt her opinions were not respected by the male preachers who were assisting her in running SCLC. When questioned as to why she left SCLC, Baker stated, “I had known...that there would never be any role for me in a leadership capacity with SCLC. Why? First, I am a woman. Also, I’m not a minister.”⁵⁴

Even when women gained formal leadership roles within an activist group, their positions were often tied to traditional social roles for women. For example, in the Montgomery Improvement Association, a black, church-based group, Rosa Parks helped to write the constitution. Similarly, Irene West served on MIA’s financial committee. The welfare committee and the membership committee were chaired by women. While this may seem progressive, these roles that women took in the MIA were reflective of the roles that women would take in the church. Women serving as a financial secretary, or being in charge of membership of the organization, was something that they had already been doing in their respective churches, and therefore is not as progressive as some would like to believe.⁵⁵ These women were still not

⁵¹ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1670.

⁵² Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1670.

⁵³ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1670.

⁵⁴ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1670.

⁵⁵ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1669.

formal leaders, and were still unable to move out of traditionally female positions. Regardless, these roles were still extremely influential and helped to shape the Civil Rights Movement.

Though the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was open to female leadership, the group was not without its sexist incidents. In 1964, the director of communications for the organization, Julian Bond, stated that he disliked working with women; his view was not questioned by the male or female members of his staff. Despite this outright declaration of sexism, most in the movement did believe that although women were capable of formal leadership roles, they should not occupy them. Women seemed to understand this unfortunate part of their lives, but instead of leaving the movement altogether, chose to exercise their power in different ways.⁵⁶

Despite occasional sexist comments from the men in SNCC, women did play major roles within it, especially in recruiting new members. In the South, media coverage of the Civil Rights Movement was run by powerful whites who portrayed the Movement as a Communist organization. Thus, many blacks in the South initially viewed the budding Civil Rights Movement as a group of “outsiders’ who were stirring up trouble in their communities, [and] were going to get them [blacks] killed.”⁵⁷ These women were then deemed responsible for recruiting new members (in communities as well as on college campuses⁵⁸), and convincing citizens that civil rights were something, quite literally, to “risk their lives for.”⁵⁹

Not only were women involved in SNCC, women were involved in other organizations as well. Women were the majority demographic involved with cooperatives that grew out of the

⁵⁶ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1675.

⁵⁷ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1663.

⁵⁸ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1674.

⁵⁹ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1663.

Poor People's Campaign, an organization whose mission was to find work for individuals who had lost their job because of their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. These organizations taught blacks traditional crafts that had been historically dominated by females, such as sewing. Their goal was to empower blacks to envision their future as working for *themselves*, as many blacks never realized they could attempt to gain employment that was not connected to serving whites. These black women sold clothes that they had sewn in a Poor Peoples Corporation store in Jackson, Mississippi.⁶⁰

Mary Fair Burks had a "desire to arouse black middle-class women to do something about the things they could change,"⁶¹ and founded the Women's Political Council which grew out of Burks' church community in Montgomery, Alabama in 1946. Out of the fifty women Burks invited to join, forty agreed. The three primary goals of the Women's Political Council were registering people to vote, protesting segregation in public spaces (despite blacks paying taxes to the community to supplement the maintenance of both black and white spaces), and to educate individuals who did not have the means to receive an education. They wished to teach adults to read, and to teach the youth about democracy.⁶² These efforts pointedly served to assist was an attempt to assist with the Women's Political Council's first goal – voter registration. If the low-income black population understood democracy and could read and write, they could understand how to vote and attempt to change their environments through the ballot. Following

⁶⁰ Crawford, Vicki, "Beyond the Human Self: Grassroots Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 15.

⁶¹ Burks, Mary Fair, "Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 76.

⁶² , Mary Fair, "Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 79.

Rosa Park's arrest, the Women's Political Council also organized blacks to protest the Montgomery bus system.⁶³

In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to leave her seat in the "White" section on a Montgomery bus. Certainly Parks' actions sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, but the boycotts were in fact organized by another woman. Jo Ann Robinson, president of the Women's Political Council, became committed to mobilizing the community in solidarity against the bus system to support Rosa Parks and civil rights for blacks. Mary Fair Burks, former president and founder of the Women's Political Council, states this regarding the two women: "Jo Ann Robinson was the Joan of Arc of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks was its patron saint."⁶⁴

Prior to the bus boycott, the women of the WPC had met with city officials, including the mayor of Montgomery, six times in an attempt to discuss and improve the bus conditions for blacks. It was only after these six unsuccessful meetings that the women decided to organize the boycott in March 1954. On December 1, 1955, the Montgomery Bus Boycott began.⁶⁵ While cultural myth allows students of history to believe that Rosa Parks was an elderly woman, tired from her long day at work, who refused to give up her seat, this American nostalgia is untrue. In fact, Rosa Parks had been involved in the NAACP for fifteen years prior to this event; she advocated for women's rights, and was an investigator for black women who had been raped by white men.⁶⁶ She was not a passive woman, simply tired from a day at work, as the American

⁶³ Burks, Mary Fair, "Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 78-79.

⁶⁴ Burks, Mary Fair, "Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycott," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 76.

⁶⁵ Robnett, Belinda, "How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights," (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 56.

⁶⁶ McGuire, Danielle L., "At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance – A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power," (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), xvii.

cultural memory would prefer to remember her; Parks was a trained, committed, intelligent activist prior to and after her arrest.

The Little Rock Nine were a group of nine black teenagers who, after the federal government determined that the segregation of schools was unconstitutional in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, insisted upon their right to attend Little Rock Central High School. Of the Little Rock Nine, six of them were young women and three of them were young men. The nine teenagers' actions were organized by Daisy Bates. An associate of Ella Baker, Bates had worked previously for the NAACP's State Conferences Committee for Fair Employment Practices; she organized the morning meeting locations of the Little Rock Nine as well as their protection (by ministers, both black and white, and policemen) while attempting to enter the school.⁶⁷ When the National Guard refused the students entry, Bates thought of another strategy. On September 24, 1957, the Little Rock Nine met at Daisy Bates' home, and she drove them to Little Rock Central High School. She dropped the students off at the side entrance (since a mob was gathered at the front entrance of the school), and waited until the students were safely inside before leaving quickly, escaping the mob.⁶⁸ Bates received the majority of the animosity from angry whites, having crosses burnt on her lawn, her house set on fire, bombs thrown at her front lawn, constant threats, and having every advertisement removed from her newspaper, so that the paper could no longer economically function.⁶⁹ Despite these horrific acts of terror, Bates continued to advocate for the integration of blacks within Little Rock schools. Although intimidation by white mobs lead five of the Little Rock Nine's families to move away from Little Rock, by 1962, seventy-five black students were admitted into Little Rock schools. While this was still a very small

⁶⁷ Robnett, Belinda, "How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights," (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 77.

⁶⁸ Robnett, Belinda, "How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights," (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 79-80.

⁶⁹ Robnett, Belinda, "How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights," (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81.

number of students, it represented to black and white Americans alike that the struggle for civil rights was a persistent one that, despite serious danger for blacks and sympathetic whites, would continue.⁷⁰

One of the most important recruitment and educational centers of the Civil Rights Movement was Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee. The school focused on educating progressive individuals on how to become successful activists, on advocating for civil rights, on democracy and voting, and on labor studies. It empowered impoverished young men and women into becoming self-possessed, confident individuals who often graduated to join the Civil Rights Movement. Rosa Parks, indeed, attended classes at Highlander the summer before her protest in Montgomery. The institution was largely funded by Dr. Lillian Johnson in 1932, who obtained her degree in history from Cornell University. She was an activist in the Women's Christian Temperance Union – a group that advocated for prohibition on the basis of societal moral standards with the undertone of women's rights advocacy.⁷¹ Highlander Folk School's most revolutionary and progressive aspect was not its curriculum, but its students; because of its founder, Dr. Lillian Johnson, Highlander was integrated from its inception in 1932. Highlander Folk School "believed that democracy in the unions should apply to both sexes and all races. The facilities had no provisions for segregation."⁷² Other women, including Zilphia Horton, Bernice Robinson, and Septima Clark, helped develop the curriculum for Highlander Folk School.⁷³ Horton developed a program devoted to labor studies at Highlander Folk School, and helped teach low-income women both how to protest and how to recognize economic inequality and

⁷⁰ Robnett, Belinda, "How Long? How Long?: African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights," (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 82.

⁷¹ Langston, Donna, "The Women of Highlander," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 146.

⁷² Langston, Donna, "The Women of Highlander," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 151.

⁷³ Langston, Donna, "The Women of Highlander," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 145.

injustice in their workplaces - something with which the women, unsurprisingly, were already familiar with.⁷⁴

One would assume that the most visible leader of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., would speak out in favor of women's equality within society and within the Movement. Instead, when Dr. King spoke about women's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, he argued that that women were "capable of leadership...[but] should not exercise this ability by choice. A woman's position was more naturally suited as a support for her husband and as a mother to her children."⁷⁵ Although King did not discuss his views on women's involvement in the Movement in public, regardless, he held views that directly excluded women's involvement. King felt this way towards women's participation in the Civil Rights Movement in spite of the involvement of his wife, Coretta Scott King. When Martin Luther King Jr. was unable to speak at an event, Coretta would sometimes substitute for him. She would travel around the country and speak at her own events regarding the Civil Rights Movement. She was also associated with SCLC, Women's Inter-League For Peace and Freedom, and the National Council of Negro Women.⁷⁶

Historian Charles Payne believes the great number of female participants in the Civil Rights Movement is largely due to the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and states, "If anyone can be called the founder of SNCC, it is Ella Baker."⁷⁷ Since a woman was integral in the founding of SNCC, it is not surprising that women were welcome and involved in the organization's activities. They were active as well in the "development of policy and the

⁷⁴ Langston, Donna, "The Women of Highlander," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 147.

⁷⁵ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1672.

⁷⁶ *Advertisement for Mrs. King's Upcoming Appearance*, Atlanta, Georgia, *The King Center, 1964*,

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/advertisement-mrs-kings-upcoming-appearance>, 28 November 2012.

⁷⁷ Payne, Charles, "Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 2.

execution of the group's program."⁷⁸ SNCC did not abide by traditional hierarchies, and welcomed anyone who wished to help in the organization. The group attempted to find "nontraditional sources of leadership,"⁷⁹ and as Payne aptly states, "women obviously represented an enormous pool of untapped leadership potential."⁸⁰

One theory on why women participated more in SNCC's operations suggests that due to a mass exodus of black males from the South to the North in the 1940s and 1950s, there were many more women who stayed in the South, and were thus able to participate in Southern operations. Another sociological theory offered to explain why black women partook in so many Civil Rights protests suggests that white men were less afraid of black women, and therefore less likely to engage "physical violence or economic reprisals against them."⁸¹ Payne discounts the latter theory by arguing that some of the most visible acts of violence occurred against women, and that many women were fired from their places of employment because of their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. He interviewed women who were involved in the Movement, and states that none of these women implied that these were her reasons for joining the Movement.

Rather, the women that Payne interviewed often cited religious and familial reasons for joining the Movement. Many women joined because their daughter, son, or brother had joined, or because a family member had been a victim of racial violence. Some women stated they

⁷⁸ Payne, Charles, "Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 2-3.

⁷⁹ Payne, Charles, "Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 3.

⁸⁰ Payne, Charles, "Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 3.

⁸¹ Payne, Charles, "Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta," in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, "Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965," (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 3.

joined the Movement because they felt a “source of support from the Lord.”⁸² This latter point is unsurprising – the Movement was largely based in churches, where women were already significant participants.

Some uncomfortable stereotypes contribute to the reasons why women were the organizers while men were the public figures. The gender stereotypes of the mid-twentieth century suggest that, in areas of work and home, the women worked behind the scenes, while the men were the “bosses.” These sorts of stereotypes extended into the hierarchies and roles of the Civil Rights Movement.⁸³ Despite the fact that women were not considered *leaders* of the Civil Rights Movement, this does not mean that they were not in *leadership* positions.⁸⁴ Black women in the Civil Rights Movement were considered “bridge leaders.”⁸⁵ These women, as stated by historian Belinda Robnett:

initiated ties between the social movement and the community and between prefigurative strategies aimed at individual change, identity, and consciousness and political strategies aimed at organizational tactics designed to challenge existing relationships with the state and other societal institutions.⁸⁶

Women, through their role as community organizers, connected the community with the leaders of the movement, helping to mobilize the black population and connect their interests and ideals with the views of the Civil Rights leaders.⁸⁷ Many women, particularly in SNCC, held positions

⁸² Payne, Charles, “Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta,” in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, “Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965,” (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 5.

⁸³ Payne, Charles, “Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta,” in Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, Woods, Barbara, “Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965,” (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Series, 1990), 8.

⁸⁴ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1664.

⁸⁵ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1664.

⁸⁶ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1664.

⁸⁷ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, American Journal of Sociology, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1664.

where their job was to see “what was on people’s minds – what kinds of things they would like to see done.”⁸⁸

Many black women also hoped for gender equality in the Black Power Movement. Unfortunately, they were, yet again, disappointed. As stated by historian Winifred Breines, “The racial solidarity for which women hoped, the community they imagined, was weakened by male dominance and sexism. The movement empowered women while simultaneously angering and disappointing them.”⁸⁹ While the Black Power Movement was meant to empower all blacks, and to lead blacks to discover power that is not contingent on whites, the Movement, through its rhetoric, naturally excluded black women. As implied by Malcolm X in many of his speeches, the “central goal of the Black Power and black nationalist political movement was for the black man to recover the manhood that had been destroyed by racism.”⁹⁰ Manliness, and the act of “being a man,” therefore became synonymous in the Black Power Movement for becoming a true black nationalist.⁹¹ Malcolm’s view that “all women were, by nature, weak and unreliable”⁹² was conceived when his mother, Louise Little, was institutionalized at the Kalamazoo State Hospital on January 31st, 1939. Louise’s mental illness left Malcolm “deeply ashamed,”⁹³ and as a result he rarely visited her. Malcolm’s numerous romantic relationships with women contributed to his belief that “most women were dishonest and could not be trusted.”⁹⁴ Since he held romantic relationships with many women simultaneously, he came to the conclusion that these women must be doing the same. He stated, “Never ask a woman about other men. Either she’ll

⁸⁸ Robnett, Belinda, *African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization*, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 101, 6, May 1996, 1676.

⁸⁹ Breines, Winifred. “The Trouble between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 51.

⁹⁰ Breines, Winifred. “The Trouble between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 55.

⁹¹ Breines, Winifred. “The Trouble between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 55-56.

⁹² Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 35.

⁹³ Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 36.

⁹⁴ Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 47.

tell you a lie, and you still won't know, or if she tells you the truth, you might not have wanted to hear it in the first place.”⁹⁵ One of these women, Bea Caragulian, went on to falsely testify that Malcolm X had coerced her to participate in robberies with him in order to shorten her own sentence. This strengthened Malcolm's resolve that women were “by their nature...fragile and weak...[women are] deceptive, [and had] opportunistic tendencies.”⁹⁶ These deeply held views, in addition to the sexist practices of the Nation of Islam, led many women to choose not to attend his Nation of Islam events. To Malcolm, this only affirmed his negative beliefs about women. Instead of examining his own rhetoric for sexist language⁹⁷, he blamed black women further, stating that the lack of female recruits was due to “excessive gossiping of the temple's females.”⁹⁸

Amiri Baraka, formerly LeRoi Jones, equated “femininity...with whiteness.”⁹⁹ Baraka admitted that he believed that men and women were not equal because they were inherently different, and that women should spend their time raising children to become black nationalists. Black Power authors and poets publicly stated that while they believed that black women were equal to black men, they nonetheless should spend their energy encouraging their men to become enlightened, manly black men (despite the fact that many black nationalist men *blamed* black women for the moral denigration of black society – according to these men, it is because of bad mothers and the causes of “sexual promiscuity, crime, and poverty”¹⁰⁰).

⁹⁵ Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 47.

⁹⁶ Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 68-69.

⁹⁷ For example, Malcolm X believed that “The true nature of a man is to be strong, and a woman's true nature is to be weak...[a man] must control her if he expects to get her respect.”

Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 142.

⁹⁸ Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2011), 116.

⁹⁹ Breines, Winifred. “The Trouble between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement,” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56.

¹⁰⁰ Kelley, Robin D. G., *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 142.

The dream of Black nationalists to overthrow the white oppressors in America by a military victory was “a male dream,”¹⁰¹ and women, upon return to Africa, would certainly take up careers as mothers and caretakers. While black nationalist men wished to return to the days of women solely as mothers, black feminists were looking to uproot the class system completely. Black feminists believed that if black women were equal, then everyone would be equal. Since black women were second class citizens because of their race *and* their gender, it stood to reason that if their white oppressors gave freedom to black women, everyone else would have freedom as well. bell hooks stated that “Feminism is for everyone,”¹⁰² and unlike many of the different ideas and strategies of civil rights activists which excluded the Woman Question from their discussions, black feminism would address race, class, gender, and subsequently, free *all* blacks.¹⁰³

Black feminists found little refuge in white feminism. White feminists were constantly comparing to their struggle to the black struggle – often calling it the “new Civil Rights Movement” - to which black women asked, rhetorically, how does white middle-class feminism compare to the tear gas, rubber bullets, and police dogs that black activists experience? In addition, a group of women within the Students for a Democratic Society announced that women should “not make the same mistake the blacks did at first of allowing others (whites in their case, men in ours) to define our issues, methods, goals.”¹⁰⁴ Many white feminists seemed to forget that there were indeed *black women*. It is as if both groups – white feminists and black males – assumed the other was focusing on the rights of black women, and that it was not necessarily their duty. Black women, again, were forgotten.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Kelley, Robin D. G., *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 136.

¹⁰² Kelley, Robin D. G., *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 137.

¹⁰³ Kelley, Robin D. G., *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 137.

¹⁰⁴ Kelley, Robin D. G., *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 141.

¹⁰⁵ Kelley, Robin D. G., *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 136.

These courageous women had advocated and risked their lives for the Civil Rights Movement, and yet they were being regarded as second class citizens by their fellow black nationalists. Black men believed that a woman attaining the position of leadership was a threat to their manhood and, therefore, the Black Power Movement as a whole. For many black men, feminism equated to man-hating, and to hate a man was to side with white supremacists.¹⁰⁶ A female leader of the Black Panther party, Elaine Brown, believed that black men viewed black women's quest for power within the movement as "counter-revolutionary...she was said to be eroding black manhood, to be hindering the progress of the black race."¹⁰⁷ If a woman obtained too much power, she was "castrating the men,"¹⁰⁸ which, according to the black males of the Movement, was anti-black power. Some black men argued that it was black women who were oppressing them.¹⁰⁹ Unsurprisingly, most black women did not accept this view. These women advocated fiercely for their rights as an important demographic of the Movement, and refused to accept second-class citizenship.

It deserves to be mentioned that black women were honored by musicians of the Black Power Movement, albeit in 1990. In Public Enemy's highly acclaimed black power album, *Fear of a Black Planet*, rappers Chuck D and Flavor Flav honor women's role within the black community in their song, "Revolutionary Generation," and discuss the demonization of black women within American culture. The duo celebrates women, telling them, "Sister, soul sister, we goin' be alright. It takes a man to make a stand, understand it takes a woman to make a stronger

¹⁰⁶ Breines, Winifred. "The Trouble between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement," (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 57.

¹⁰⁷ Breines, Winifred. "The Trouble between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement," (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 57.

¹⁰⁸ Breines, Winifred. "The Trouble between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement," (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 58.

¹⁰⁹ Kelley, Robin D. G., *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 141.

man.” These words echo their predecessors, who believed that women were supposed to uplift the black community by raising the next generation of children.

Public Enemy asks white America to “Forget about me, just set my sister free. R-E-S-P-E-C-T, my sister’s not my enemy, ‘cause we’ll be stronger together.” Public Enemy is preaching what black women knew all along: the black community will be uplifted when black women receive equality within it. Chuck D continues on to rap about how women deserve respect from both white and black men. He discusses how black women have been treated throughout American history, saying, “they [white America] disrespected Mama, and treated her like dirt. America took her, reshaped her, raped her. Nope, it never made the paper.” He continues on to discuss the rape of black women by white men: “Why is it that we’re many different shades? Black woman’s privacy invaded years and years; you cannot count my mama’s tears.” This rhetoric was preached by Malcolm X as early as 1965, as noted in his speech, “The Rapist Slavemaster.” Malcolm tells his audience to:

*look at your skins! We’re all black to the white man, but we’re a thousand and one different colors!...it was a rare one of our black grandmothers, our great-grandmothers and our great-great-grandmothers who escaped the white rapist slavemaster...Think of hearing wives, mothers, daughters, being raped! And you were too filled with fear of the rapist to do anything about it!*¹¹⁰

Malcolm X’s views on black women in America have directly influenced other black power figureheads, even on the eve of the 21st century.

A cultural figurehead of the Black Power Movement, Abbey Lincoln, crafted the album *We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite* with Max Roach in 1960. Not many may know, though, that Abbey Lincoln was born as Anna Marie Woodridge in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1930. During her teenage years, she worked as a maid while attending Kalamazoo Central High

¹¹⁰ X, Malcolm, “The Rapist Slavemaster,” (1965), Howard-Pitney, David, *Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and the Civil Rights Struggle of the 1950s and 1960s: A Brief History with Documents*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004), 108.

School until her graduation in 1948, where she sang in the Band Follies for three years.¹¹¹ She also sang at the African Methodist Episcopal church in town. When the minister of the AME church moved to Jackson, Michigan, he asked Abbey to sing at his new church.¹¹² It was here that she “began her singing career...in 1950.”¹¹³

Abbey’s “cultural life...centered around the Douglass Community Center,”¹¹⁴ an important black cultural institution in Kalamazoo. The Douglass Community Center was began “as a center for black soldiers...created at the end of World War I, to its present status as a neighborhood center – social service agency – community focal point”¹¹⁵ for blacks in Kalamazoo.

Abbey Lincoln’s Kalamazoo did not experience as many race riots as many other American cities did in the latter half of the 20th century. Some believe that this was because “Kalamazoo was a city that prided itself on treating its black citizens well, at least compared to the standards of the time...So, blacks say now, it’s not surprising that Kalamazoo’s black community was fairly restrained for years while other cities experienced disturbances over civil rights through the 1950s and early 1960s.”¹¹⁶ Despite this seemingly better standard of living for blacks in Kalamazoo, the town did not exist entirely without racial tension.

More than one in four black homes in Kalamazoo listed women as the head of the household in 1945. The children of Kalamazoo would have experienced some of the best care that black children could receive in Michigan – on average, black women in Kalamazoo

¹¹¹ Cinerama Releasing Corporation, “Biography of Abbey Lincoln”

¹¹² The Girl from Calvin Center: Abbey Lincoln Returns to Michigan For Role In Original Drama

¹¹³ Cinerama Releasing Corporation, “Biography of Abbey Lincoln”

¹¹⁴ The Girl from Calvin Center: Abbey Lincoln Returns to Michigan For Role In Original Drama

¹¹⁵ Marlett, Mary. "50 Years For Douglass Association: Community Center Observes Its Anniversary Today." *The Kalamazoo Gazette*, July 20, 1969.

¹¹⁶ “Tales of the Century”

surpassed all other black Michigan women in education by “slightly more than a full grade.”¹¹⁷ This is compared to black men in Kalamazoo, where one in five received “less than a fifth grade education,” and thus were considered “functionally illiterate.”¹¹⁸ Despite this, three times as many women were unemployed compared to their male counterparts. In addition, when women could find work, it was often in “service occupations with forty percent of them as janitresses, seamstresses, and elevator operators in hotels, hospitals, factories, and stores and almost as many (36 percent) as servants in private homes.”¹¹⁹ Only 5.6 percent of black women received jobs in professional or clerical settings. When both sexes received work, men made twice as much as women (on average, men received \$42.39 per week, while women earned an abysmal \$22.24). The minimum wage was \$26 per week in 1945 – 7% of Kalamazoo men received less than minimum wage, while 88% of women were “earning a sub-standard wage, are heads of families and are supporting others on their meagre [*sic*] wages.”¹²⁰

Working as a maid in the 1940s in Kalamazoo, Abbey Lincoln would have been a member of the 40% of women who were working in a service job, probably earning significantly less than her male counterparts. In addition, she would have experienced restrictive real estate laws. Kalamazoo real estate agents had a “gentlemen’s agreement” to only rent or sell certain real estate to blacks, restricting almost the entire black population to the north side of Kalamazoo. This would be executed by labeling properties as “colored,” and not allowing blacks to buy or rent property otherwise. These restrictions would not be placed upon affluent properties because it was unlikely that black citizens would be able to afford these properties – instead, these restrictions were placed on middle class homes in predominantly white neighborhoods that

¹¹⁷ *Negroes in Kalamazoo*, 1945, 9.

¹¹⁸ *Negroes in Kalamazoo*, 1945, 9.

¹¹⁹ *Negroes in Kalamazoo*, 1945, 12.

¹²⁰ *Negroes in Kalamazoo*, 1945, 13.

some black citizens had the means to afford. Furthermore, there was “support for a segregation policy from the Federal Housing Administration which refuses to insure loans for Negroes in predominantly ‘white neighborhoods’ or for whites in predominantly ‘Negro neighborhoods.’”¹²¹

The living conditions for black residents were also abysmal. Only 60% of families had access to showers, while 40% of the population did not. A 1945 survey states that “one family in twenty was sharing regular bathrooms with persons living outside the dwelling unit.”¹²² Only 67% had access to a private, inside toilet.¹²³ Overcrowding plagued Kalamazoo’s black community – as stated in a survey, “in one case thirteen persons occupied three rooms: in another, a woman and four children, ranging in age from two to six years, shared two dark, dank basement rooms only one of which received natural light; a kerosene lamp was used for light in the kitchen; and an old stove served as combination cook-stove and heater.”¹²⁴

Abbey Lincoln would have experienced these atrocious living conditions during her teenage years before leaving Kalamazoo and beginning her career as an activist and an artist. In 1960, Lincoln joined drummer Max Roach to create the masterpiece, *We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite*. The album is described by Ingrid Monson, author of *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, as “[encapsulating] the tensions between the discourses of black nationalism and the mainstream civil rights movement.”¹²⁵ The album was constructed using blues, jazz, and African influences: all of which, of course, are black creations. The album begins with “Driva’ Man,” a song that is set during slavery. Lincoln sings about the rape of slave women by the “driva’ man,” who watched the slaves work in the cotton fields. She sings about her fear of the “driva’ man,” and ends her poem with, “Ain’t but two things on my mind: driva’

¹²¹ *Negroes in Kalamazoo*, 1945, 19.

¹²² *Negroes in Kalamazoo*, 1945, 22.

¹²³ *Negroes in Kalamazoo*, 1945, 24.

¹²⁴ *Negroes in Kalamazoo*, 1945, 27.

¹²⁵ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 171-172.

man and quittin' time." On the first beat of every measure, "the rim shot [evokes] the crack of the driver man's whip."¹²⁶ The next song chronicles a slave's reaction to the final abolition of slavery, entitled "Freedom Day." Lincoln sings, "Freedom Day, it's Freedom Day, throw those shackle and chains away. Everybody that I see says it's really true, we're free."

The next piece, entitled "Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace," begins with a somber Abbey Lincoln singing no words, and only notes, as Max Roach responds to her musical phrases on the drumset. Lincoln portrays the sadness of American blacks through this short opening in, "Triptych," but the tone quickly changes. Soon, Lincoln is repeatedly screaming as Roach plays quickly behind her voice. Her voice is crackling and sorrowful, and she is attempting to communicate to the audience the transgressions that have been made against her and against other blacks, and subsequently the pain and suffering she has endured. Triptych ends with Roach no longer responding to Lincoln's calls, but along with her. She is singing with Roach's drumming, as he drums with her singing. The two are in union, and it is with this that the audience is introduced to the song, "All Africa."

"All Africa" embodies how black musical culture is a direct product from African culture. Lincoln sings, "They say it began with a chant and a hum, and a black hand laid on a native drum." As she begins to list numerous African tribes, Max uses an African style of drumming to give homage to his African predecessors. By choosing to use African vocal and drumming techniques, Lincoln and Roach are simultaneously honoring their African heritage as well as the Black Power Movement. The song ends, but the African drumming continues into the album's final song, "Tears for Johannesburg." After the sustained drum solo ends, Lincoln begins singing. She sings about wanting freedom, but it always being stolen away from someone who "wants to rule the world." After American blacks had worked so hard, and lost so many

¹²⁶ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 177.

lives, for their freedom, it was occurring in Johannesburg, South Africa once more, with the onset of apartheid.

The liner notes of *We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite* begin “with a thunderous quotation from A. Philip Randolph: ‘A revolution is unfurling – America’s unfinished revolution. It is unfurling in lunch counters, buses, libraries and schools – wherever the dignity and potential of men are denied...Masses of Negroes are marching onto the stage of history and demanding their freedom now!’”¹²⁷

If one wishes to understand the anger behind the Black Power Movement, *Nina Simone in Concert* also serves as an appropriate demonstration that black women were not immune to the ideological differences that black men in the Civil Rights Movement experienced. Nina Simone’s 1964 album *Nina Simone in Concert* exemplifies the black female singer who uses her power to protest segregation and racism. She begins the album with “I Loves You Porgy” from the black musical *Porgy and Bess*. Her depiction of Bess, declaring her love to Porgy and expressing her fear of her abusive former lover, Crown, is not as pretty or in tune as the famous version of the song by Ella Fitzgerald, yet this is precisely this reason that it is more authentic. In her interpretation of “I Loves You Porgy,” Simone depicts the vulnerable, honest, and fearful Bess that one imagines when thinking of *Porgy and Bess*.

“Pirate Jenny” appears on the album as well – a song about a black servant in a Southern town who, in reality, leads a pirate gang. Pirate Jenny smiles as she hears the pirates approaching town, although her white employers are confused as to why. The pirates arrive on the Black Freighter, chain her former masters, and ask, “Kill them now, or later?” Simone whispers, “Right now, right now!” She “piles up the bodies,” saying, “that’ll learn ya!,” and escapes on the Black Freighter. Pirate Jenny has been freed, murdered her oppressors, and escaped. The song is

¹²⁷ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 172.

haunting, and exemplifies teachings of Malcolm X, who preached self-defense and separatism, themes that are featured prominently in “Pirate Jenny.”

Simone also sings “Old Jim Crow,” a song about the end of Jim Crow laws: “Old Jim Crow, don’t you know? It’s all over now.” Simone’s song celebrates the end of institutionalized racism in the South. Simone ends the album with “Mississippi Goddam,” where she protests the racism in Alabama, Tennessee, and Mississippi, where children are “sitting in jail,” and “hound dogs [are] on my trail.” She declaims how the Civil Rights Movement is portrayed in the conservative media and politics, stating that conservatives claim civil rights are a “communist plot.” All Simone wants, though, is “equality for my sister, my brother, my people, and me.”

Simone’s album is dedicated to protesting racism in the United States, yet one must ask – if Simone were not an entertainer, who would have accepted her onto a stage to speak these same words? Simone was able to use her art to protest her position in life; a stage which she would not have been given if she were not a singer. Nina Simone’s words are immortalized in song, and one cannot speak about black women’s roles in the Civil Rights Movement without mentioning her album, *Nina Simone in Concert*.

Just as Billie Holiday, Abbey Lincoln, and Nina Simone protested in their music, other women chose to speak out against racism through poetry. Poet Gwendolyn Brooks discusses civil rights in her poem “Primer for Blacks.” She writes that the common perception is that it is “Great to be white...thus all that is white has white strength.” The poem states that blacks perceive this to be true as well. Despite this, Brooks gives her audience hope:

Blackness
stretches over the land...
the Black of it, the red-rust of it,
the milk and cream of it,
the deep-brown middle-brown high-brown of it,
the ‘olive’ ochre of it –

Blackness
marches on.

Blacks, according to Brooks, are trapped in a delusion of unworthiness, as propagated by whites and believed by all. She calls out to blacks to recognize and celebrate their differences. She wants blacks to “Love the fact that we are black, which *is* our ‘ultimate Reality’ ...from which our...group or individual, can rise.”

Brooks ends the poem powerfully:
ALL of you –
you proper blacks,
you half- blacks,
you wish-I-weren’t blacks,
Niggeroes and Niggerenes,
You.

She is asking blacks to no longer be ashamed of their skin color, but to celebrate it, because it is their “ultimate Reality” which cannot be changed, and must be recognized. Although this poem was written in 1991, Brooks indeed lived throughout the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century and continued fighting for racial equality until her death in 2000.

Black poet Carolyn M. Rodgers was born in 1945 and became an adult during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. She, like many other women of her time, understood that she was living in a world that knew how to use her, but not how to understand her. Her poem, “Poem for Some Black Women,” advances Brooks’ “Primer for Blacks.” Unlike Brooks, who states that blacks must recognize their power, Rodgers argues that black women understand their power; it is society that does not. As a result, black women are “lonely.” The chorus throughout the poem is, simply, “we are lonely.” She writes that:

when we laugh
we are so happy to laugh
we cry when we laugh
 we are lonely.
we are busy people

always doing things fearing getting trapped in rooms
 loud with empty...
 yet
 knowing the music of silence/hating it/hoarding it
 loving it/treasuring it, it is often birthing our creativity
 we are lonely.

Black women were expected to be “seen and not heard,” and to leave the activism and power to men. Rodgers is lamenting this, yet also argues that issuing from within this silence that society has imposed upon her and other black women, creativity is born. In the final stanza of Rodgers’ poem, she states:

we grow tired but must al-ways be soft and not too serious...
 not too smart not too bitchy not too sapphire
 not too dumb not too not too not too
 a little less a little more
 add here detract there
 .lonely.

Black women are used: they are told to be mothers, and to raise the next generation of strong black men, but not to be too powerful. They are told not to make their husbands feel emasculated, and to be feminine, but not so feminine as to appear too weak. They are told to be sexual, but not *too* sexual. As Rodgers states, “add here” and “detract there.” Black women are seen as pawns for white men, black men, white women, et cetera; but who is concerned with the needs of black women? They are supposed to serve everyone and ignore themselves. This makes them “lonely,” which, as Rodgers states, is “all [black women] really understand.” This sentiment is echoed in the poetry of Nikki Giovanni, another black female poet, who writes in her poem, “Crutches,”

women aren’t supposed to be strong
 so they develop social smiles
 and secret drinking problems
 and female lovers whom they never touch
 except in dreams.

Sonia Sanchez celebrates Billie Holiday in her poem, “for our lady.”¹²⁸ Sanchez laments Holiday’s death, telling her,

billie. if someone
 had loved u like u
 should have been loved
 ain’t no tellen what
 kind of songs
 u wud have swung
 gainst this country’s wite mind
 or what kinds of lyrics
 wud have pushed us from
 our blue / nites.
 yeh. billie.
 if some blk / man
 had reallee
 made u feel
 permanentlee warm.
 ain’t no tellen
 where the jazz of yo/songs
 wud have led us.

Sanchez, writing this poem in 1969¹²⁹, is honoring and thanking Holiday, a fellow black artist and civil rights protester, whose courage helped carve a path for future black poets and artists.

Billie Holiday, Abbey Lincoln, and Nina Simone, as well as Gwendolyn Brooks, Carolyn Rodgers, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez continue to inspire activists and artists today.

These poets and artists understand and reject the expected role that women are supposed to play in society. These women break through this oppressive gender role with their poetry. They use their art form to expose racial and gender issues to their audience.

Modern poets and singers are celebrating those who fought for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s as well. This is shown in Mavis Staples’ 2007 album, *We’ll Never Turn Back*, which is dedicated entirely to discussing racism through modern and traditional songs. Staples’ song

¹²⁸ Sonia Sanchez, *Jazz Poems*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 234.

¹²⁹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Nellie Y. McKay, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 1905.

“Down in Mississippi” not only protests Jim Crow laws of the 1950s and 1960s, but celebrates her personal protests against segregated drinking fountains, which she thanks Martin Luther King Jr. for changing. As a child, Staples sings, she walked into a “washeteria” for whites only. A crowd of black women followed her in, and she was celebrated by her grandparents for her rebellion. Staples sings, “I saw many more of those [colored only] signs as I lived in Mississippi. I’m so glad I can say that I saw every one of those signs, Dr. King saw that every one of those signs, was taken down, down in Mississippi.” She also remembers Dr. King in her song “I’ll Be Rested” where she sings that she will rest when justice has been served to those who enslaved and oppressed blacks in America: “I’ll be rested when the roll is called...See Medgar Evars, when roll is called...Addie Mae Collins, when roll is called...See Fred Hampton, when roll is called, Brother Malcolm...Robert Kennedy...Reverend Martin Luther King, when roll is called.” Though it is apparent throughout the album *We’ll Never Turn Back* that Staples agrees with Dr. King’s integrationist stance, she also honors Malcolm X in “I’ll Be Rested,” and acknowledges many individuals who died during the Civil Rights Movement. She is recognizing that it was not solely Dr. King and his followers who were active in securing equal rights for black Americans; there were many different ideological factions of the Civil Rights Movement that assisted in this struggle, including the lesser studied (albeit no less important) Black Nationalist Movement, with Malcolm X as its figurehead.

The women of the Civil Rights Movement shared the goal of equality while holding different ideologies on how to attain it. Many women performed activities at the grassroots level: Daisy Bates helped to organize and support the Little Rock Nine, Mary McLeod Bethune educated her local community while simultaneously advising President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ida B. Wells-Barnett helped to establish the NAACP, and Rosa Parks advocated for the

Montgomery Improvement Association as well as serving various posts within the NAACP.

These women are joined by artists such as Billie Holiday, Mavis Staples, Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Carolyn M. Rodgers, and Gwendolyn Brooks, who used their position on the stage to allow their voices to be heard, and furthered the Civil Rights Movement. These women were truly “sisters of the spirit.” These women understood the history of black people in America, and risked their lives to fight for freedom. Today, young black women experience similar acts of racism and violence, although on a smaller scale than during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. It is important, then, that young women understand the history of American black women’s strength and perseverance, so that complete equality may finally be achieved.

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Terra Warren

Sisters of the Spirit: Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement

This thesis, written by Terra Warren, was presented on April 26th 2013 during the Thesis Celebration Days, and is entitled *Sisters of the Spirit: Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement*. The thesis discusses the often ignored topic of black women's participation in the 20th century Civil Rights Movement, and begins with an analysis of stereotypes that surround the Civil Rights Movement and women's participation within it. *Sisters of the Spirit* continues to on to argue why these myths have been perpetuated throughout the study of history, and cites specific examples that counter history's typical narrative of male leadership and activism. The thesis also examines the art of several black female musicians, including Mavis Staples, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, and Kalamazoo's Abbey Lincoln, and how their occupation granted these women a stage upon which to protest racism in America and further the Civil Rights Movement. The thesis discusses the sexism that women experienced within the Movement from their male counterparts, notably Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. The activists whose contributions were invaluable to the Movement include Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Mary McLeod Bethuen, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Daisy Bates, and poets Carolyn Rodgers, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Sonia Sanchez.