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**The Role of Trailblazers Black Women Activists in the American  
Civil Rights Movement**

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

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to

Our family members for their endless love.

Our friends and colleagues for all their encouragement

Patience and support throughout this process

Our supervisor Dr. YUCEF Kouider for his amazing guidance

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Abstract**

The American Civil Rights movement has been heavily debated throughout the history of the United States. Afro-Americans have been subjected to brutal kinds of segregation, both inside and beyond the law. Black people, of both genders, rejected the injustice that devoured the American society at the time. The present study examined the possible causes that resulted in the American civil rights movement. Equally relevant, the goal of this research is to emphasize the significance of trailblazers black female activists in this movement. This study aims to interpret historical events through qualitative research, which requires gathering and evaluating data from both primary and secondary sources. A comprehensive literature review was conducted, and the information and data gathered are studied from a theoretical point of view, applying the descriptive and narrative approaches to investigate and interpret the documented stories. The study examined the fundamental key determinants of the American civil rights movement. The study revealed that trailblazer black female activists played an essential role in the nonviolent revolution that ended a century of segregation and achieved equality for black people.

**Keywords:** Afro-Americans, Equality, Nonviolent –Revolution, Segregation, Trailblazers.

## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>CORE:</b>	Congress of Racial Equality
<b>DNC:</b>	Democratic National Convention
<b>EJI:</b>	Equal Justice Initiative
<b>FBI:</b>	Federal Bureau of Investigation
<b>HYC:</b>	Harlem Youth Council
<b>KKK</b>	Ku Klux Klan
<b>MFP</b>	Mississippi Freedom Project
<b>MIA</b>	Montgomery Improvement Association
<b>MLK Jr</b>	Martin Luther King junior
<b>MFDP</b>	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
<b>NAACP</b>	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
<b>NCNW</b>	National Council of Negro Women
<b>NWPC</b>	National Women's Political Caucus
<b>NSDI</b>	National Social Development Initiative
<b>NPA</b>	National Press Association
<b>SCLC</b>	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
<b>SCOTUS</b>	The Supreme Court of the United States
<b>SNCC</b>	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
<b>YWCA</b>	Young Women's Christian Association

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1.1:</b> Rosa Park's arrest. ....	17
<b>Figure 1.3:</b> Linda Brown and her family.....	20
<b>Figure 2.1:</b> Ida Barnett Wells.....	31
<b>Figure 2.2:</b> Ella Baker.....	35
<b>Figure 3.3:</b> Fannie Lou Hamer.....	40
<b>Figure 2.4:</b> Dorothy Iren Height.....	45

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	I
Acknowledgements.....	II
Abstract.....	III
List of Abbreviations and acronyms .....	IV
List of Figures.....	V
Table of Contents.....	VI
General Introduction.....	1

### **CHAPTER ONE: Reasons for the American Civil Rights Movement.**

Introduction.....	5
1. Terrorist Associations and Racial Superiority .....	5
1.1. The KKK’s Violence against African Americans:.....	6
1.1.2 The Ku Klux Klan Methods.....	6
1.1.3 Activities of KKK.....	7
1.1.3.1 The Klan’s Targets.....	7
1.1.3.2 The Bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.....	8
1.1.3.3 Resistance and Decline.....	8
1.1.3.4 The NAACP VS. the KKK.....	9
1.1.4 Violence of Race: Lynching .....	9
1.1.5 The Napoleonic Codes.....	11
1.1.5.1 The Black Laws.....	11
1.1.5.2 Jim Crow Laws.....	12
1.2 Social Discrimination; Colored People.....	13
1.2.1 Emmett Till.....	14
1.2.1.1 The Murder of Emmett till.....	14

1.2.1.2 Open Casket Funeral of Emmet Till.....	15
1.2.1.3 Carolyn Bryant’s Lie.....	15
1.2.1.4 How Emmett’s Case Influenced Civil Rights? .....	16
1.2.3 Rosa Park and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.....	16
1.2.3.1 The Arrest .....	16
1.2.3.2 Court Ruling .....	18
1.2.3.3 Formation of the SCLC.....	18
1.2.3.4 From Montgomery to SCLC.....	18
1.2.3.5 Christianity in the Movement .....	19
1.3 Racial Segregation in Public Schools: the Case of Linda Brown.....	19
1.3.1 Brown v. Board of Education.....	19
1.3.2 The SCOUTS Decision.....	20
1.4 Economic Struggle: Marches for Justice and Equality.....	21
1.4.1 Insufficiency in Albany.....	22
1.4.2 Birmingham Hardly Earned Victory.....	22
1.4.3 The March on Washington.....	24
1.4.4 The Civil Rights Act of 1964.....	26
1.4.5 Selma Protest: Under Federal Protection .....	27
1.4.6 The Voting Rights Act of 1965.....	28
Conclusion.....	29

**CHAPTER TWO: Trailblazers Black Women’s Contributions and  
Achievements in The American Civil Rights Movement.**

Introduction:.....	30
2.1. Ida Barnett Wells (1862 – 1931).....	30

2.1.1 Childhood and Early Life: .....	31
2.1.2 The Beginning of theLifeBattle against Segregation:.....	32
2.1.3 Journalism and Anti-Lynching Battle:.....	33
2.1.4Ida B Wells’ Contribution and Achievements in the American Civil Rights Movement:.....	34
2.2 Ella Baker (1903 – 1986).....	35
2.2.1 EarlyLife:.....	36
2.2.2 Ella Baker’s Activist Life:.....	36
2.2.3 Ella Baker's Contributions and Achievements in the Civil Rights Movement: .....	38
2.3 Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977).....	39
2.3.1 Childhood and Early Life.....	40
2.3.2 Hamer’s Life as an Activist:.....	41
2.3.3: Fannie Lou Hamer’s Contributions and Achievements and in the American Civil Rights Movement:.....	43
2.4 Dorothy Iren Height (1912-2010).....	45
2.4.1 Childhood and Early Life:.....	45
2.4.2 Social work and Activism: .....	47
2.4.3 Dorothy Height's Contributions and the Achievements in the Civil Rights Movement.....	48
Conclusion .....	49
General Conclusion .....	50
References .....	52
الملخص.....	58

# **General Introduction**

## **1. Background of the Study**

The civil rights movement sought to ensure equal access to and opportunity for the basic privileges and rights of U.S. citizenship for African Americans. After the American Civil War, which ended slavery in 1865, the Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution of the United States extended freedom and constitutional rights of citizenship to all Afro-Americans. Although the civil rights movement had its roots in the nineteenth century and persisted into the 1950s and 1960s, it was during that time that many of its most prominent achievements occurred. African Americans, along with whites, led the campaign at a community level. They achieved their objectives by using legitimate methods, negotiations, petitions and peaceful protests.

The civil rights movement was based in the American South, where the African American population was dominant and racial inequality in education, employment prosperity and political legal systems that were most apparent. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, local and federal governments enacted Jim Crow legislation and imposed restrictions on voting requirements, keeping black people economically and politically weak. Black people were denied the right to vote in southern areas, barred from public facilities and faced racial discrimination in nearly every aspect of daily life, exposed to insults and violence, and could not expect accountability from the courts. However, the civil rights movement had taken a major step, and transformation was already on the way. As an income, education and job prospects grew more available, they became more hopeful and got more involved in groups fighting for their legal and civic equality. Although males occupied the majority of leadership roles in civil rights organizations, women were as involved in the campaign for equality. While Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ida Barnett Wells, and Ella Baker were among women

who acquired national attention for their activism, there were hundreds of other women who worked to secure African-American rights.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Since the first Africans were shipped to America, The Black population in the United States has been a victim of racial violence. Despite the fact that the Civil War abolished slavery and granted liberated Blacks some fundamental civil rights, individuals of African heritage continued to strive for their civil rights. The passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th constitutional amendments, the Civil War amendments, provided for the elimination of slavery and guaranteed Blacks and whites equality under the law. On a national and universal scope, the civil rights movement emphasizes the subject of racial violence and gender inequality. Thus, this research explores the fundamental reasons behind the civil rights movement and demonstrates the role of black women who stood up to legal segregation and white supremacy, which defined black Americans as inferior people.

## **3. Research Questions**

The current study seeks to provide conclusive answers to the following questions:

- 1-What were the forms of racial violence inflicted on African Americans?
- 2-What were the fundamental reasons for the American civil rights movement?
- 3-Who were the trailblazers black women?
- 4- What is the role that trailblazers black women played in the civil rights movement?

## **4. Hypotheses**

To answer the questions of this research, the study considers the following hypotheses:

- 1-African Americans have endured various forms of racial violence throughout history.
- 2-Legal segregation, economic discrimination and social separation were the main reasons for the American civil rights movement.

3-While Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ida Barnett Wells, Ella Baker and Dorothy Irene Height along with other women were the main female figures of the movement.

4- Black women played a major role in the movement, prioritising their children's education, they also worked side to side with men, participated in organizations, organized marches and socially held prestigious positions

### **5. Aims of the Study:**

This study examines the role of black women in activism during this period. It also investigates the basic reasons that led to the American civil rights movement, as well as explore the roots of racial violence in America against black citizens by listing its forms.

### **6. Research Methodology**

The method used to conduct this research is the historical descriptive-analytical method. The study describes the historical events that paved the way for the black people to conduct the American civil rights movement, then; it explores the role of trailblazers black women in the movement.

This methodology requires a systematic collection and a comprehensive analysis of data. Thus, the data used in this study have been derived from primary and secondary sources including books, articles, and reliable websites.

### **7. The Significance of the Study**

The study attempts to consider the factors that might involve the African American people in the American civil rights movement. In addition, it explores the racial violence that black citizens endured in the nineteenth century. This research also examines the contribution of black women activists in the peaceful revolution.

### **8. Structure of the Study**

The research is divided into two chapters. The first chapter entitled Reasons for the American civil rights movement; provides a comprehensive description of the political, social

and economic factors that black society faced after the reconstruction era that contributed to the rise of the American civil rights movement. The second chapter entitled Trailblazers Black Women's Contributions and Achievements in The American Civil Rights Movement addresses the most known female figures who left an important mark in the history of the African American society.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Reasons for the American Civil Rights Movement**

## **CHAPTER ONE: Reasons for the American Civil Rights Movement.**

Introduction.....	5
1. Terrorist Associations and Racial Superiority .....	5
1.1. The KKK's Violence against African Americans:.....	6
1.1.2 The Ku Klux Klan Methods.....	6
1.1.3 Activities of KKK.....	7
1.1.3.1 The Klan's Targets.....	7
1.1.3.2 The Bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.....	8
1.1.3.3 Resistance and Decline.....	8
1.1.3.4 The NAACP VS. the KKK.....	9
1.1.4 Violence of Race: Lynching .....	9
1.1.5 The Napoleonic Codes.....	11
1.1.5.1 The Black Laws.....	11
1.1.5.2 Jim Crow Laws.....	12
1.2 Social Discrimination; Colored People.....	13
1.2.1 Emmett Till.....	14
1.2.1.1 The Murder of Emmett till.....	14
1.2.1.2 Open Casket Funeral of Emmet Till.....	15
1.2.1.3 Carolyn Bryant's Lie.....	15
1.2.1.4 How Emmett's Case Influenced Civil Rights? .....	16
1.2.3 Rosa Park and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.....	16
1.2.3.1 The Arrest .....	17
1.2.3.2 Court Ruling .....	18
1.2.3.3 Formation of the SCLC.....	18
1.2.3.4 From Montgomery to SCLC.....	18

1.2.3.5 Christianity in the Movement .....	19
1.3 Racial Segregation in Public Schools: the Case of Linda Brown.....	19
1.3.1 Brown v. Board of Education.....	19
1.3.2 The SCOUTS Decision.....	20
1.4 Economic Struggle: Marches for Justice and Equality.....	21
1.4.1 Insufficiency in Albany.....	22
1.4.2 Birmingham hardly Earned Victory.....	22
1.4.3 The March on Washington.....	24
1.4.4 The Civil Rights Act of 1964.....	26
1.4.5 Selma Protest:Under Federal Protection .....	27
1.4.6 The Voting Rights Act of 1965.....	28
Conclusion .....	29

## **Introduction**

For African-Americans, the year 1865 is a year of celebration. It was the last day of slavery. Unfortunately, it also declared the start of a new period of oppression. Racism pervaded American society, and African Americans were not enjoying their ostensibly newfound freedom. The following chapter explores the history of the Civil Rights movement and its reasons, in order to better understand the background of racial violence against African Americans. This chapter begins with the suffering of black people at the hands of white people; it also covers political legislation and organizations that portrayed the white race as dominant and the black race as inferior. In addition, it also covers racial and social conditions experienced by black people in the 1950s.

### **1. Terrorist Associations and Racial Superiority**

White supremacy has hitherto dominated American history as an ideology. White supremacy is defined as "the conviction that the white race is naturally superior to other races and white people should have rule over persons of other races," (Merriam- Webster dictionary, n.d).

White supremacy was common among both northerners and southerners prior to the Civil War. After four years of war and the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed 4 million slaves, the victorious south felt obligated to maintain and defend white supremacy against the danger of former slaves. During Reconstruction, white supremacists organized political and social groups to defend whites while terrorizing Blacks in order to maintain them in a subordinate position and pass laws that encouraged racial inequity. Southerners refused to embrace equality with their former slaves because of their innate racial hierarchy (whites are superior over blacks)(Terkel, 1993).

To counter the Reconstruction transformations, the white reaction showed itself in the form of terrorist groups. The Ku Klux Klan, which was formed in 1866, was not the only racist organization; the Knights of the White Camellia (1867), the White League (1874), and the Red Shirts were other racist organizations (1875). These all shared the same concept of white supremacy and the methods of using violence to scare blacks and Republican votes, ranging from secrecy to public knowledge. As a result of the fall of Reconstruction in 1877, these terrorist groups were able to seize control of the southern half of the country based on the belief in white supremacy (PBS, 2017).

### **1.1 The KKK's Violence against African Americans**

Prior to The Civil war, six Confederate southern soldiers assembled in Tennessee in 1866 to form the Ku Klux Klan, which developed into an organization until it was suppressed by the federal government in 1871. Despite this, the band reformed in 1915 and 1950, respectively. The Ku Klux Klan was formed in 1866 and is an extremist, white supremacist organization. The Klan's purpose was to oppose Republicanism, the Reconstruction policy of the United States Congress following the Civil War in order to restore white supremacy and suppress African Americans' voting and civil rights. The KKK employed violence and intimidation against Blacks and their white allies to keep them from participating in politics. They wore white robes and robes and claimed to be the ghosts of Confederate warriors of Reconstruction. (Harcourt, 2017).

#### **1.1.2 The Ku Klux Klan Methods**

They used violent techniques such as burning houses, raping, lynching, kidnapping, whipping, mutilating, and murder, as well as mob violence such as lynching, kidnapping, flogging, mutilating, and murder. 5000 black people were murdered by Klansmen during the

first year. Many African-Americans were killed in massacres. Lynching became a common occurrence in the South. (Hazen 2004).

During lynching, victims were tortured by being shot, mutilated, or burned alive. Lynching were documented and turned into postcard souvenirs. The Klan conducted Black massacres in Orleans, Louisiana, and Memphis, Tennessee, as ethnic violence against Black people increased. During the Civil Rights Movement, the Klan found the use of bombs by altering the weapons of brutalisation(Bullard, 1996).

### **1.1.3 Activities of KKK**

The KKK bombed 138 residences between 1965 and 1963. One of these residences was MLK Jr. home, which was demolished in 1965. Terrorist assaults were also carried out on Black churches. The newly freed Blacks were confronted with a new existence away from the property while still being scared by racial violence(Hazen, 2004).

Klansmen wore masks and robes to conceal their identities, adding to the drama of their night rides, which were their preferred time for attacks. Many of them worked in small towns and rural regions where residents knew one other's faces. Therefore, they occasionally could distinguish the assailants based on their voice and attitude. Klansmen used this fear of ghosts to their advantage as well. They sometimes purported to be ghosts of Confederate soldiers in order to terrify superstitious blacks; few freedmen believed in such foolishness(Horwitz, 1999).

#### **1.1.3.1 The Klan's Targets**

The Ku Klux Klan targeted black Loyal League members and harassed Southern Republicans and Freedmen's Bureau employees. They executed black political leaders, as well as heads of households, church priests, and community leaders since these people had several roles in society. Weekly attacks and killings of blacks were recorded by Freedmen's

Bureau agents. Thousands of Negroes were slaughtered in armed guerilla warfare; political riots were manufactured; their origins or causes were never clear, but their outcomes were always certain: ten to one hundred times as many Negroes were killed as whites. Masked individuals fired shots into homes and set them on fire, often while the residents were still inside (Hernández, 2019).

### **1.1.3.2 The Bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham**

The explosion at the 16th Street Baptist Church occurred on September 15, 1963, when a white supremacist terrorist planted a bomb at the Church in Birmingham, Alabama. On the east side of the church, four members of the Klan buried 19 sticks of dynamite linked to a timing device beneath the stairs. Martin Luther King Jr described the incident "one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity" The church explosion killed four girls and wounded between 14 and 22 others. Although the FBI concluded in 1965 that the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing was carried out by four known Klansmen and segregationists: Thomas Edwin Blanton Jr., Herman Frank Cash, Robert Edward Chambliss, and Bobby Frank Cherry, no prosecutions were carried out until 1977, when Robert Chambliss was tried and convicted of the first-degree murder of one of the victims, Carol Denise McNair, who was 11 years old at the time. Doug Jones, who would later become a United States senator, prosecuted Robert "Dynamite Bob" Blanton and Thomas E. "Misty" Cherry for the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. Herman Cash died in 1994 and was never charged with the crime; he remains a fugitive today. The 16th Street Baptist Church bombing was a pivotal moment in the civil rights movement in the United States, contributing to congressional support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Cochran, 2006).

### **1.1.3.3 Resistance and Decline**

Many groups and leaders, including well-known Protestant theologians such as Detroit's Reinhold Niebuhr, spoke out against the Klan, attracting national attention. The Jewish Anti-Defamation League was established in the early twentieth century in response to anti-Semitic attacks on Jews, such as the hanging of Leo Frank in Atlanta and the Ku Klux Klan's efforts to abolish private schools (which chiefly aimed at Catholic parochial schools). Opposing forces endeavoured to infiltrate the Klan's cover. After one civic group in Indiana began posting Klan membership credentials, the number of Klan members fell precipitously (Pegram, 2011).

#### **1.1.3.4 The NAACP VS the KKK**

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People initiated public awareness expedition against Klan operations and urged Congress to stop Klan atrocities. After peaking in 1925, Klan membership began to fall significantly in most locations. Specific circumstances also had a role in the Klan's demise. The 1925 murder trial of Grand Dragon D. C. Stephenson, who had led the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana and other northern states in seceding from the KKK's central organization, tarnished the Klan's reputation as a law-and-order organization. By 1926, the Klan was crippled and discredited by Stephenson's conviction for second-degree murder (Waren, 2008).

#### **1.1.4 Violence of Race: Lynching**

Thousands of African Americans lived in fear of mob violence, including Lynching and vigilantism, from the Civil War to Reconstruction and into the early twentieth century. Lynching is defined by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (2021) as "the public killing of an individual without due process." (para.1).

The spillover of collective violence as an extrajudicial acted in the south in response to the abolition of slavery laws and political endeavours to establish racial equality between the

master and the former slave was confronted by the new social and political transformations held by the emancipation of slaves and the Reconstruction era. Lynchers were never prosecuted accountable because southern officials turned a blind eye. Although the white mob rationalized their heinous act of lynching by accusing Black males of sexually assaulting white women. The true motivation was to reinstate white supremacy while simultaneously disenfranchising African-Americans. Besides rape accusations, Black people were the target of false accusations of less serious crimes such as arson, robbery, non-sexual assault, and vagrancy. Many of these accusations were proven to be unfounded and the victims found to be innocent. Unlike white lynchings, African American lynchings were significantly more savage, involving acts of torture such as flogging, burning, and amputation. White men who were convicted of the same crime were almost always lawfully tried by a jury and were only rarely lynched by the mob. Moreover, lynching day was a special occasion for which relatives were asked to attend. Attendees brought food to the public spectacle lynching, and pictures of the lynched corpse were taken to be stored as souvenirs (Thompson, 2006).

According to (EJI) (2017), black families were forced to attend the hanging of one of their members in order to heighten the horrors of lynching. Furthermore, lynching is employed as a cruel method to expel African Americans from the south. As a result, during this period of racial fear, the great migration of six million African Americans to the north and west occurred, with Blacks fleeing their communities in search of safety and better living conditions. Throughout all of these racially motivated massacres, scientific academia, by releasing theories asserting that Black men are sexually aggressive, legislators who rely on mob violence to win elections, and an indifferent government and court system, by remaining silent to stop the racial violence, have all been equally guilty in the century-long persistence of lynching. Blacks, like Ida B. Wells, used the press to protect themselves against racial terror. Wells, boycotting white mob businesses, forming anti-lynching organizations like the

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and nonviolent marches which were led by Martin Luther King Jr.

### **1.1.5 The Napoleonic Codes**

Slave codes, as laws, formalized the slave system to maintain the masters' total power and assure slaves' submission. The slave was seen as a pure property or an animal that may be purchased and sold under the rules of these regulations. Slave rules specified that slaves were not permitted to have families or possess property. It was against the slave laws for slaves to learn to read or write. Slaves who disobeyed or resisted these provisions were severely punished. The slave laws were enacted to maintain the institution of slavery and to prevent slaves from revolting. The codes were not exclusive to each state or inflexible; nevertheless, they did share several requirements. Slave laws got increasingly stringent as time went on, ensuring that slaves remained submissive. The conditions said that the kids had to follow in the footsteps of their mother. Slaves were denied the ability to testify in court, they couldn't own property or sign contracts, and they couldn't strike back if they were assaulted. Slaves were also subjected to various social limitations, such as being unable to have reunions unless a white person was present. Corporal penalties, branding, and incarceration were frequently employed to execute these commands, and in certain cases, recalcitrant slaves were slain. The slave codes predated another set of mid-nineteenth-century regulations (Campbell, 2015).

#### **1.1.5.1 The Black Laws**

The abolition of slave ownership, which became lawful under the 13th amendment, cost the south a significant amount of money since the slave workforce abandoned the lands. In retribution, southern officials devised legal means of controlling newly liberated black

people and used the Black Codes to officially return them to the plantations. It was written in the style of free work. Mississippi was the first state to enact the Black Codes in 1865 and 1866, and other states followed suit. Despite the fact that the black codes appeared to protect the rights of freshly released slaves, they aimed to bind former slaves to plantations. It gave emancipated slaves the right to own land, execute contracts, marry, and testify in court. In the meanwhile, it hampered African Americans' political, economic, and social rights. The major portion of state regulations were enacted to keep freed slaves working under their former masters' authority. Unemployed Black would be charged with vagrancy (Stroud & Schomp, 2006).

As a fee, vagrants were detained and put to work on a plantation. Education rules permitted white companies to hire black youth. It also prohibited Black Americans from voting, attending school, using white public institutions, testifying in court against whites, and possessing guns. Furthermore, most states implemented laws prohibiting interracial marriages, with some imposing life jail penalties. The Black laws were eventually weakened by the passage of the 14th amendment. However, in 1877, a new discriminatory statute replaced the Black Codes in order to maintain legal segregation against African Americans (Stroud & Schomp, 2006).

#### **1.1.5.2 Jim Crow Laws**

The use of racial violence by the country's highest court was superseded by the passage of Jim Crow statutes. The word Jim Crow referred to a set of legislation passed in the late nineteenth century by the conclusion of the Reconstruction era (1877). Its goal was to legalize racial discrimination between white residents who had access to political, economic, and social resources and black citizens who were denied their rights (Fremon, 2014).

The term Jim Crow was derived from a minstrel act that mocked Blacks. The show's performer, Thomas Dartmouth, blackened his face and danced like an ancient black slave. It is uncertain how the Jim Crow show became a law name. Regardless of where the term came from, Jim Crow remained a way of life in America for more than a century. It stated that blacks and whites should be treated separately yet equally. These rules distinguished between public transit, schools, workplaces, restaurants, companies and barbers, among other things. Even the water fountains were painted and employers were required to designate toilets for whites and others for blacks. During Jim Crow America, 'white only' or 'colored only' signage were common. Other restrictions prohibited Blacks from dating, marrying, or even touching white women. Notably, many black institutions were underfunded by the government; as a result, black facilities were in worse condition than white ones. Southerners were so inventive in creating several Jim Crows that it was impossible to keep track of them all. Despite the fact that Blacks kept fighting to eliminate Jim Crow laws, they remained in place with the consent of the constitution until President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Legislation of 1964, which abolished them (Tischauer, 2012).

It is reasonable to assume that racial violence against African Americans flourished with the blessings of the legal system in order to sustain and reestablish white dominance.

## **1.2 Social Discrimination; Colored People**

The Civil Rights Movement changed socially as a result of all the Demonstrations, gatherings, boycotts, sit-ins, and massive meetings. The Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery in 1865, but several white southerners were never ready to recognize blacks as peers, let alone citizens of the United States. Institutionalized racism and practices that compelled blacks to be isolated from the rest of society replaced slavery. Segregation prohibited black people from using the same public facilities as white people (hotels, theatres, restaurants, lunch counters,

sinks, restrooms, drinking fountains, waiting rooms, libraries, parks, swimming pools, and so on). Southern courtrooms even had distinct "coloured" and "white" Bibles for swearing in witnesses. Moreover, blacks were prohibited from the same access to public transportation as whites(Morris, 1986).

### **1.2.1 Emmett Till**

In August 1955, 14-year-old Emmett Till was brutally murdered in Money, Mississippi. Till, a Chicago native, had been visiting relatives in the area when he was accused of flirting with a white woman at a local grocery store and subsequently abducted by her husband's cousins from nearby Greenwood. The men severely beat Till before shooting him in the head and then dumping his body in a river outside town(History.com Editors, 2009)

#### **1.2.1.1 The Murder of Emmett Till**

Moses Wright, Emmett's great-uncle, visited Emmett and his family in Chicago in August 1955. Wright intended to return to Mississippi with Wheeler Parker at the end of his journey to meet family in the South, and when Till learned of this, he begged his mother to let him travel. On August 24, 1955, three days after landing in Money, Mississippi, Till and a group of kids attended Bryant's Grocery and Meat Marketplace refreshments after a long day picking cotton in the hot afternoon sun. What transpired inside the grocery store that afternoon will never be discovered(Ray, 2022).

Till purchased bubble gum, and some of the kids with him later said that he whistled, flirted with, or touched the hand of Carolyn Bryant, the store's white female employee and the

manager's wife. Roy Bryant, Carolyn's husband, and his half-brother J.W. Milam took Till from Moses Wright's house four days later, around 2:30 a.m. on August 28, 1955. They viciously beat the adolescent, undertaken him to the Tallahatchie River's bank, shot him in the head, connected him to a giant metal fan with barbed wire, and chucked his dented body into the watershed(Tyson, 2017).

### **1.2.1.2 Open Casket Funeral of Emmet Till**

Despite the fact that racially motivated killings and lynchings had been occurring for decades at the time, Emmett's death gained national attention - the story of a 14-year-old kid who reportedly died for violating a social caste system.Mamie's open-casket decision alerted the world to the limitations and weaknesses of American democracy, in addition to prejudice and terrible lynching. Thousands of people saw his open casket or attended his burial.(History.com Editors, 2010).

Animage of Emmett's disfigured body went viral throughout the country after debuting in Jet Magazine and the ChicagoDefender, andobtained a strong public responses. One of the shots of Mamie standing over her dead kid was named one of the "100 most impactful images of all time" by Time magazine.Less than a month after Emmett Till's lynching, after a five-day trial, an all-white jury took less than an hour to acquit him, citing the state's failure to verify the identity of the body. In a 1956 interview, Roy and Milam acknowledged murdering Emmett.The prosecution contended that Carolyn Bryant's testimony was irrelevant to Emmett Till's kidnapping and murder. Bryant said that Till had grabbed her hand, she had moved away, and he had followed her behind the counter of a grocery store and clutched her waist, using obscene words(History.com Editors, 2010).

### **1.2.1.3 Carolyn Bryant's Lie**

Author Timothy Tyson revealed details of a 2008 conversation in which Carolyn Bryant allegedly admitted to him that her 1955 allegation about Emmett Till was false. During that conversation, Bryant contradicted her story that Emmett seized her about the waist and shouted obscenities, admitting that aspect is false. Carolyn Bryant revealed in an interview in 2008 that she does not remember much of what occurred in the store and that nothing the youngster did can ever excuse what transpired to him (Tyson, 2017).

### **1.2.1.4 How Emmett's Case Influenced Civil Rights?**

Emmett's case drew international attention due to the severity of the lynching, the perpetrator's age, and the conviction of two men who later admitted killing him. By the end of 1955, 14 Mississippi districts had no registered black voters. Martin Luther King led a protest for Emmett Till, and Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger. It sparked a year-long, well-organized community boycott of the mass transit system (Nodjimbadem, 2015).

### **1.2.3 Rosa Park and the Montgomery Bus Boycott**

Rosa Parks was riding the bus home from work at the Montgomery Fair department store on Thursday, December 1, 1955. Because they found the Negroes-in-Back regulation extremely demeaning, black Montgomery residents avoided municipal buses whenever possible. Nevertheless, on almost any particular day, 70% or more of the passengers were Black, including Rosa Parks. Rosa Parks (1913–2005) sparked the American civil rights movement when she refused to surrender her place on a Montgomery, Alabama bus to a white man in 1955. (Gelfand & Blakely, 2006)

Her activities sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which was organized by local Black community leaders. The boycott, which was coordinated by a young Revolutionary

Martin Luther King Jr who continued for more than a year, during which Parks, predictably, lost her job, and ended once the U.S Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation was unconstitutional. Parks grew to national prominence during the next half-century as a symbol of decency and fortitude in the campaign to end racial discrimination(Theoharis, 2013).

### **1.2.3.1The Arrest**

The bus driver left furiously when she declared that she would not give up her seat, only to return later with two police officers. "That one won't stand up," the driver replied, pointing to Parks. After an officer inquired whether the driver had requested she stand, he then inquired, "Why don't you stand up?" "The Straw That Broke the Camel's Back" is a play on words. "What gives you the right to push us around?" As the cops approached, Parks reacted with a question of her own. "I'm not sure," responded the officer, "but the law is the law, and you're under arrest." While Parks was being escorted off the bus, one police snatched her purse and the other her shopping bag. As they were leaving, an officer approached Blake and asked if he wanted to press charges. "Yes," the driver said. He'd finish his route before going to City Hall to swear out and execute an arrest warrant; Parks would be detained in prison until then(Gelfand & Blakely, 2006).



**Figure 1.1: Rosa park arrest:** The figure illustrates The Arrest of Rosa Parks: as An Act of Disobedience & the Start of a Movement. (Beacon Broadside, 2014).

### **1.2.3.2 Court Ruling**

On November 13, 1956, the Supreme Court rules that Montgomery's separation laws are unconstitutional, more than a year after Rosa Parks refused to compromise her seat. Despite the fact that the boycott would not have been effective without the coordinated efforts of Montgomery's 17,000 African Americans, no one will ever forget Rosa Parks, the brave lady who led the way. The next day, Rosa Parks, E.D. Nixon, and Martin Luther King, Jr. board a municipal bus. Rosa Parks sits boldly in the front row. (Theoharis, 2013)

### **1.2.3.3 Formation of the SCLC**

In December of 1955, no one could have predicted a boycott in Montgomery. Nonetheless, it occurred. Many black pastors backed Martin Luther King, Jr., who had been requested to head the MIA, and appealed to him for help when organizing equivalent boycotts

in other urban places, including Tallahassee, Florida; Birmingham, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; and Savannah, Georgia(Sitkoff, 2005, p. 56).

#### **1.2.3.4From Montgomery to SCLC**

The Montgomery boycott had brought them together, and in 1957, they formed a new organization with King as its president. (SCLC) is an acronym for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The SCLC was a watershed moment in the civil rights movement. To achieve racial equality, the North preferred to utilize legal means, but in the South, mass rallies and nonviolent protests were used(Sitkoff, 2005, p. 56).

#### **1.2.3.5Christianity in the Movement**

Black people began to struggle for their own rights, and the church played a significant role. Christianity backed the movement's peaceful stance and supplied the necessary foundation. Churches were used to attracting new members, holding meetings, and raising funds for the organization. Furthermore, its self-contained network functioned as a mobility platform(Reed, 2005, pp. 1-2).

Furthermore, churches provide a safe haven away from white retaliation where people could address injustices or, on the other side, achievements. To discuss it is not totally accurate. They may turn it into a song. Their religious beliefs blended with their traditional black musical tradition, instilling them with hope and faith. Stories were spoken, hatred was buried, hope was communicated, and spiritual support was provided through singing together. Songs were an effective tool for conquering fear. Furthermore, gospel music has a long history, and traditional songs served as a reminder of the atrocious conditions that African slaves were subjected to(Reed, 2005, pp. 1-2).

### **1.3 Racial Segregation in Public Schools: The Case of Linda Brown**

School segregation based on a student's skin color existed until 1954. Separate public schools for black and white children were ruled unlawful. Prior to this, however, school segregation was a standard practice across the country. In the 1950s, there were considerable discrepancies in how black and white public schools were treated, with few parallels. The disparities between black and white schools fostered racism, which increased the level of racial inequality.

#### **1.3.1 Brown v. Board of Education**

The lawsuit began when the Topeka, Kansas, public school system declined to enrol local black homeowner Oliver Brown's child in the neighboring elementary school. In 1954, Oliver Brown of Topeka, Kansas, approached the NAACP for assistance with his daughter Linda. Linda Brown endured much hardship in order to attend her school, which was located far from her home. Because of the Supreme Court's "separate but equal" ruling, she was unable to attend a White primary school. Instead, she has been compelled to ride a bus to a more distant segregated black school. The Browns, together with twelve other local black families in familiar circumstances, filed a class action case in federal court against the Topeka School Board, alleging that the board's integration policy was unlawful(Henderson Jr, 2004).



**Figure 1.2:** Linda Brown (on the left back row) and her family. (EAR HUSTLE, 2014).

### **1.3.2The SCOTUS Decision**

A three-judge panel of the United States District Court for the District of Kansas found the Browns guilty, relying on “Plessy v. Ferguson” precedent, in which the Supreme Court decided that racial discrimination was not a violation of the Thirteenth And fourteenth Amendments Clause if the amenities in question were mostly equal, an ideology known as "separate but equal." The Browns, who were then sponsored by Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP's top counsel, petitioned the Supreme Court to overturn the ruling. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court gave a unanimous 9–0 decision positive of the Browns. The Court held that "separate educational institutions are intrinsically inferior," and hence government establishing them violates the Fourteenth Amendment's Fair Protection Clause. In addition, the Supreme Court determined that psychological "damage" caused by apartheid was a factor in blacks' lower levels of education. This ruling fueled the hard work of the NAACP and social

researchers who were determined to prove that black were "victims" of discriminatory social practices(The Journal of Negro Education 2007).

#### **1.4 Economic Struggle: Marches for Justice and Equality**

In 1962, black leaders realized that, despite their many achievements, full independence was still a long way off. The first half of 1963 saw a growth in the number of protests, economic sanctions, and other kinds of protests. As never before, African-Americans began to fight for their right to first-class citizenship. The reason was that 1963 was the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, which was commemorated. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson had this to say about the situation in the US: "Until justice is blind until education is unaware of the race until opportunity is unconcerned with the colour of men's skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact" (as cited. in Franklin & Moss, 1994, p. 502).

Throughout the spring of that year, additional demonstrations erupted in a number of locations, including Montgomery, Greensboro, Georgia, and others, when the demonstrations proved to be effective. They all demanded non-discriminatory employment, housing, and education. Even communities like Cambridge, Maryland, which had previously solely seen peaceful protests, are suddenly experiencing rioting. Vicious conduct on the part of certain whites who believed their period of dominance was coming to an end exacerbated the issue(Franklin & Moss, 1994, pp. 502-504).

##### **1.4.1 Insufficiency in Albany**

The movement lasted from November 1961 through the summer of 1962. Its purpose was to use sit-ins, boycotts, and marches to desegregate all public institutions. Hundreds of people demonstrators marched onto City Hall day after day, seeking equal civil rights. Police commissioner Laurie Pritchett examined events in other towns and concluded that Albany

could only stay segregated if the police did not advocate violence. His troops defended protestors from white mobs, and he was careful while arresting members of the movement. He avoided using excessive force and stated the arrests were made in response to unapproved demonstrations. Within a year, he had imprisoned over a thousand campaigners in various jails around the county. As a result, the municipal jail was not overcrowded. It was impossible to know what black activists went through in jail. The reality remained that his deliberate activities did not grab the attention of the press, nor did they necessitate federal involvement. He was the one in charge of maintaining order and preventing violence (Sitkoff, 2005, pp. 115-117).

#### **1.4.2 Birmingham Hardly Earned Victory**

After the failure in Albany, Martin Luther King, Jr. was conscious of the misgiving which many black people had been experiencing. He feared that his followers might be converted to Malcolm X's more radical stance. Furthermore, Malcolm's conviction that white people are enemies and that blacks cannot live with them in the cherished society was something King strongly disagreed with. King and the SCLC devised an emancipation plan for Birmingham struggle at the end of 1962 (Jackson, 2006).

Birmingham, Alabama, was formerly known as being the most segregated city in the country. The figure of Eugene T. Bull Connor, who opposed desegregation with all means at his disposal, contributed significantly to the city's notoriety. The situation in the city was as follows:

Absolute segregation was the rule – in schools, restaurants, rest rooms, drinking fountains, and department-store fitting rooms. Municipal officials closed down the city parks and playgrounds rather

than desegregating them. Birmingham abandoned its professional baseball team rather than allow it to play desegregated clubs in the International League. It even banned a textbook because it had black and white rabbits in it. Although over 40 percent of the population was African-Americans, fewer than ten thousand of the 80,000 registered voters were black. (as cited in Sitkoff, 2005, p.120)

The demonstrations began on April 6th. Fifty Afro-Americans marched to City Hall and, as expected, the next days' marches produced the same outcome. During this moment, news cameras captured everything and transmitted it to the whole United States. Municipal officials prohibited racist demonstrations on April 10th. Another march, according to MLK's plan, would take place on April 12th. Connor grew enraged, and police officers, accompanied by dogs, detained over a thousand protestors. Many Americans were shocked by images of dogs barking and attempting to bite protesters. King was imprisoned as well, and when he was released, The-day arrived(Rieder, 2013).

The Albany movement influenced King's views on some strategies. He was adamant about obtaining white support if it was required. The national audience saw over a thousand black children, some as young as six years old, march from the church to City Hall on May 2nd. All of them were arrested by Connor and the cops. The next day, the identical scenario would be replayed. In front of the cameras, Connor lost control of himself. He instructed the police to segregate half of the youngsters in the church, while the other half was arrested in the park across the street. Several youngsters were bitten by vicious attack dogs. Onlookers were upset as police officers beat and injured others. Unfortunately, they seriously hurt both children and adults, and caused property and tree damage.(Sitkoff, 2005, p. 126).

The movement triumphed after a long and arduous fight. Birmingham could now commemorate the "desegregation of lunch counters, rest rooms, fitting rooms, and drinking

fountains; improving and hiring of Negroes on a non - discriminatory basis throughout Birmingham's industrialized society, and the structure of a biracial committee" thanks to King's perfect timing of individual events(Rieder, 2013).

### **1.4.3 The March on Washington**

John F. Kennedy did not wait for the outcome of growing protests. With the Cold War's tensions reduced, he was able to focus more on internal affairs. He was conscious that African Americans' voting rights needed to be strengthened, and in February he made special recommendations to Congress. When he observed the protests nearing a climax, particularly in Birmingham, he proposed a broader civil rights proposal in June. He had talked to the American people a few days previously:

We face a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is time to act in the Congress, in your state and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our everyday lives (as cited in Franklin & Moss, 1994, pp. 504-505).

The legislation was debated in Congress over the summer. Meanwhile, officials from the SNCC, SCLC, NAACP, CORE, National Council of Churches, National Urban League, and other civil rights organizations collaborated to organize the greatest march in history. Because the groupings differed, so did their perspectives on the March for Jobs and Liberties. On August 28, 1963, almost 200,000 blacks and whites from all over the country gathered around the Washington Monument. From there, they marched gently to the Lincoln Memorial, where various civil rights leaders offered speeches. Behind them was Martin Luther King, Jr., who gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. The President then addressed the civil rights

advocates, stressing his support for equal civil rights and his concern that lawmakers House of representatives would bury the measure. (Le Blanc & Yates, 2013).

Desegregation of public facilities began in fifty Southern and border communities, biracial councils were formed, the first black police officers were employed, African Americans were permitted to enrol their kids into white schools. White leaders, on the other hand, were not always prepared to back down. Whites from southwest Georgia to the Louisiana delta were adamant about defending white supremacy in whatever way they could. Murders, bombings, and arson were just a few of the ways they protested. Churches that were not attacked were the outliers to a high degree of dread and violence that had settled in this area (Le Blanc & Yates, 2013).

The killing of Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary in Mississippi, exacerbated the situation and sparked more protests. Three months later, four black girls aged ten to fourteen were slain when a church in Birmingham was attacked. A sixteen-year-old black adolescent was shot in the back, while a thirteen-year-old black adolescent was assassinated while riding his bike by white adolescents (Cochran, 2006).

Before African Americans could rejoice in the Act's adoption, they had faced severe prejudice. After the murders of black children and the continual postponement of the Civil Rights Bill, they had to watch a large number of segregationists win in Upcoming elections. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22nd. The year was nearing to an end, but African Americans are yet to achieve complete liberty (Franklin & Moss, 1994, p.507)

#### **1.4.4 The Civil Rights Act of 1964**

Lyndon B. Johnson, the new President, enthusiastically supported the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which forbade discrimination in public spaces. It gave the attorney general the authority to protect people against racial segregation in public places, housing, and voting. To aid citizens dealing with civil rights challenges, the federal Community Engagement Service was founded. The Act also established a federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (Franklin & Moss, 1994, p.507).

The US Department of Education was given the authority to provide financial and technical assistance in racial integration. This Law was by far the most comprehensive legislation ever enacted in the United States in terms of equal rights for its inhabitants. No one, on the other hand, anticipated things to go well. There was the law, but there were also ingrained views in the U. S. about races and their inequity. Black people were ecstatic and campaigned for equality, which resulted in rioting in several locations. (Franklin & Moss, 1994, p.508).

The worst of the crisis persisted, as expected, in the Deep South, particularly in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Georgia. Legislation, whites failed to obey it and converted public institutions to private ones. The Ku Klux Klan marched through the streets, promising to continue segregation and publicly supporting white city councils. The most vehement opponents insisted on prohibiting black people from voter registration. The SNCC launched a programme known as Mississippi Freedom Summer at the time. It demonstrated that desegregation of public areas would be accepted in the South, but that blacks would be denied the right to vote. Martin Luther King, Jr. realized that this was going to be the last battle in their fight for freedom. (Franklin & Moss, 1994, pp.508-509).

### **1.4.5 Selma Protest: Under Federal Protection**

Whites regarded Selma as a stronghold of the Confederacy, the Black Belt, and white supremacy. Many of Bull's methods of police violence and racial oppression were embraced by Dallas County Sheriff James G. Clark. If he wanted the federal government to intervene, King needed to act with care. He relied on the press and the support of other Americans. He was aware of the strained relationships that existed between whites and blacks in Selma and was anxious about the likelihood of confrontation (Steven 1991, p. 105).

King was fortunate to have the President's backing. Following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the President lost white support in the Southern states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. He anticipated blacks with equal voting rights to support his party rather than white supremacists. Furthermore, he believed that granting African Americans formal citizenship would allow them to advance more easily on their own. Perry County supported the Selma protesters with rallies and marches. In mid-February, a young man was shot while aiding his mother, who had been beaten by state police (Steven 1991, pp. 105-108).

Local activists were angered by this move, and they organized a fifty-mile walk from Selma to Montgomery. On Sunday, March 7th, 600 protestors began their trek. They were interrupted on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, however, where state troopers and Clark's posse assaulted them with tear gas, kicking, beating, and injuring several of them. The remaining marchers were apprehended and driven back to town. The public's outrage drew national attention to the situation, and King was able to get the government help he needed (Steven 1991, pp. 111-112).

The President ordered that the march proceed, and a new one was set for March 21st. The demonstrators were protected by the federal government, which inhibited white

retaliation. The march, which began with just 300 participants, drew nearly 50,000 black and white individuals from throughout the country on its closing day (Franklin & Moss, 1994, p. 510).

#### **1.4.6 The Voting Rights Act of 1965**

The President advocated for women's suffrage. During the Alabama incident, he acted quickly and submitted the voting rights package to Congress. It was passed without a filibuster in both the House of Legislature. It was signed into law in August of 1965. According to a Gallup poll released that spring, 76 percent of the country supported a voting rights proposal. In the South, a stunning 49 percent of participants approved, while 37 percent disapproved(Steven, 1991, p. 115).

The Act outlawed any racial laws that made it difficult for people to vote, such as literacy tests and other measures supported mostly by southern states. Citizenship would be the only requirement for registering to vote. The prosecutor was granted jurisdiction to monitor states or counties that were suspected of preventing black people from voting. Federal registrars might be sent to Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia, as well as twenty-six counties in North Carolina and Alaska, and remote counties in Arizona, Idaho, and Hawaii. If some of these states' jurisdictions sought to make vote changes, they had to first obtain authorization from the attorney general(Franklin & Moss, 1994, pp. 510-511).

Nearly 250,000 more African Americans were added to the lists by the conclusion of the year. The most substantial shift occurred in the Deep South: "Black membership in Mississippi jumped from 6.7 percent in 1964 to 59.4 percent in 1968..." In Alabama, the percentage increased from 23% to 53%. Within months of the suffrage statute taking effect,

the population of Dallas County increased from fewer than 1,000 to over 8,500."(Steven, 1991, p. 116).

## **Conclusion**

Between 1963 and 1965, African Americans saw significant changes in their circumstances. These liberties would not have been possible without their efforts, as detailed above. Since more African Americans were active in the civil rights struggle, white supremacists eventually gave up. Millions of Americans backed the black protestors, marchers, and protesters because of their prejudice and hostile conduct toward black people. During those years, both presidents recognized that race had no place in a democratic democracy and aggressively advocated complete black equality. The Civil and Citizenship Rights Acts brought about not only statutory changes in the life of African Americans, but also ensured the law's efficacy. The first win was achieved through integration of public facilities, housing, and employment. The second win was assured through unhindered suffrage. However, the battle is far from over. School desegregation took a long time to complete. It took a long time to enhance black living conditions in terms of employment and housing. However, with the help of the legislation, African Americans can acknowledge their itinerary for liberty and fairness to be mostly won.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Trailblazers Black Women's Contributions and Achievements in The American Civil Rights Movement.**

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Introduction:.....	30
2.1. Ida Barnett Wells (1862 – 1931).....	30
2.1.1 Childhood and Early Life: .....	31
2.1.2 The Beginning of the Life Battle against Segregation:.....	32
2.1.3 Journalism and Anti-Lynching Battle:.....	33
2.1.4 Ida B Wells’ Contribution and Achievements in the American Civil Rights Movement:.....	34
2.2 Ella Baker (1903 – 1986).....	35
2.2.1 EarlyLife:.....	36
2.2.2 Ella Baker’s Activist Life:.....	36
2.2.3 Ella Baker's Contributions and Achievements in the Civil Rights Movement: .....	38
2.3 Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977).....	39
2.3.1 Childhood and Early Life.....	40
2.3.2 Hamer’s Life as an Activist:.....	41
2.3.3: Fannie Lou Hamer’s Contributions and Achievements in the American Civil Rights movement:.....	43
2.4 Dorothy Iren Height (1912-2010).....	45
2.4.1 Childhood and Early Life:.....	45
2.4.2 Social work and Activism: .....	46

## **Introduction**

The fight for racial equality has been a long struggle for many centuries. It reached its climax during the midtwentieth century. Women were certainly an important piece of the puzzle. In many occasions, they were at the forefront of the battle for human rights, but their stories were rarely told. The fight against colour segregation has been always related to Malcom X or Martin Luther King Jr. Nevertheless, many hidden female figures played a prominent role to earn fundamental rights that American men and women enjoy today are still unknown. Many instances may be given here, such as Ella Baker, who helped create the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and Fannie Lou Hamer, who successfully challenged segregation in the Democratic Party. Septima Clark formed a network of citizenship schools to educate and assist black people in registering to vote. These women gave their time, energy, money, and even their lives for the cause, whether in groups, parties, or formations like the Black Panther Party.

We have selected some of the most outstanding black female figures who contributed in a way or another in the fight for black civil rights and equality in the USA. These profiles represent a range of leaders but they are by no means all.

### **2-1 Ida Barnett Wells (1862 – 1931)**

Wells was an American investigative journalist, educator, and civil rights, activist. She was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). During a career dedicated to combating prejudice and cruelty, as well as the fight for African-American equality, particularly that of women, Wells probably became the most renowned Black woman inside the United States.



**Figure 2.1: Ida Barnett Wells** (Because of Her Story,2019).

### **2.1.1. Childhood and Early Life**

Ida Bells wells was born on July 16, 1862, in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Her father, Jim was the sole son of a plantation owner and his slave. He could have lots of chances that many other slaves could not have. At the age of eighteen, Jim was sent by his master to learn carpentrywith mr. Bolling (Gidding.2009).

Ida's mother, Elizabeth Warronton, was born in Virginia. After being sold as a slave. She was away from her family serving the Bolling as a chef. Ida's parents met while serving for Mr. Bolling. They were both known for their discipline and strictness. Ida Wells grew up in a house built and owned by his father who was a talented carpenter. She went to school than to university taught by white teachers. Wells was encouraged to study and learn by her mother who visited her school regularly to see how well her kids were doing. She even won the prize of Regular Attendance at Sunday school (Duster, 1970).

Things changed when the yellow fever stroke in 1878 killed Wells' parents and her little brother Stanley. She had to take care of her brothers and sisters as she was only 16 years of age. She started working as a teacher six miles far from home for only 25 dollars per month which was really few and could not support the whole family without the assistance of her grandmother and the help of the community (McCurry, 2000).

Only few months later, Ida had to move to her aunt's Belle in Memphis, Tennessee, where she had to work as a teacher too but with a much better salary (Gidding, 2009).

### **2.1.2. The Beginning of the Life Battle Against Segregation**

It is true that life in Memphis was much better. Since the end of the civil war, the city was developed economically and socially and provided many job opportunities. Nonetheless, hatred and segregation were more visible and Wells, for the first time, had to face that in her life when she was travelling on a train. In the second chapter of her autobiography «*Hard Beginnings*», she tells what happened that day when she refused to move to a seat for blacks, she said:

The conductor tried to drag me out of the seat, but the moment he caught hold of my arm I fastened my teeth in the back of his hand. I had braced my feet against the seat in front and was holding to the back as he had already been badly bitten he didn't try it again by himself. He went forward and got the baggage man and another man to help him and of course, they succeeded in dragging me out. (as cited in Duster, 1970, p.20).

Wells immediately sued the train corporation and was awarded \$500 in damages. Wells' conduct drew a lot of attention and demonstrated how brave she was to rise to anyone for the cause of justice. That was the first case wherein a colored defendant in the South had

transferred to a state court since the United States Supreme Court repealed the Civil Rights Act. (Duster, 1970).

Even though Wells had to pay court costs for that case, it was not a failure at all. That step taken by Ida encouraged many other blacks to seek justice through the court.

### **2.1.3. Journalism and Anti-Lynching Battle**

Ida Wells used to teach for a living, but she never felt that she was made for that job. She preferred writing. She started her career as a journalist while attending Lyceum Meetings during the 1880's. The Lyceum was made up of mostly teachers who attended meetings, debates and discussions about world news as well as local ones. Shortly after, she was elected editor of « the Evening Star »; a journal published by the Lyceum. Although she admitted having no special gifts in writing, she was successful enough to attract a huge number of readers because she used simple everyday language which she considered understandable to a greater number of people especially black women who received no education. She was successful enough to attract the attention of many journals like « the weekly » or « the free speech » to which she contributed later on (Knight, 2009).

Ida always spoke about the bad conditions of black people and the injustices they suffered from. She wrote many articles; delivered many speeches to expose the atrocities of lynching. Lynching is any sort of execution that occurs without judicial process. The killing of Thomas Moss who was a close friend of Wells as well as Calvin M.C. Dowell and Henry Stewart ,on March9, 1892, was the ignition of Wells' long fight against lynching (Royster, 2016).

Ida Barnett Wells published « Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its phases », the first of many pamphlets, she wrote about her investigations about lynching in the United States in 1893. There were also many other articles which had a heavy impact such as « The Reason

Why Colored America is not in The World's Columbian Exposition » in 1893, « A Red Record » in 1895, and « Mob Rule in New Orleans » in 1900. Her influence was very significant. The Chicago Housing Authority created The Ida B Wells Housing Project in 1941, and several high schools around the country are named after her. The Ida B Wells prize is a very prominent, honourable for supporting black persons in media. The country also recognized her with the Ida B. Wells commemorative stamp, which was published in 1990. (Royster, 2016).

#### **2.1.4. Ida B Wells' Contributions and Achievements in the American Civil Rights Movement**

Ida B Wells is considered as one most famous anti-lynching in the world. One of her biggest achievements was shedding the light on lynching and exposing violence against black people, especially in the South. She published her writings, and delivered her speeches across the country but also abroad to make the voices of those oppressed people heard.

Ida organized the black political power. She wanted to give black women more advantages by getting the right to vote. Hence, she founded the first suffragist organization for black women in Chicago, The Alpha Suffrage Club. Wells believed in the power of black women. She believed the black women could be a strong voting block and could bring changes. Indeed, this club had a great impact on voting resulting in the election of the first black alderman Oscar DE priest in 1915. According to Wells, women had more the one third of the voices for DE priest (Schechter, 2001).

Ida B Wells' contribution to education was also important. She worked for several years as a teacher in public schools in Memphis. However, when she moved to Chicago, many black students could not have the chance to go to school. She could build a new daycare

in Bethel Church's lecture room, which was Chicago's first kindergarten designed particularly for black children.

Apart from education and journalism, Ida B Wells belonged to many groups, organizations and foundations. She was socially very active. She was in touch with all the classes of community . Helped those who were in need. That made her trusted and gained her the support of the whole black community.

## **2.2. Ella Baker (1903 – 1986)**

Ella Baker is the brilliant black woman whose ideas and careful organizing sense helped to give birth of the civil rights movement.



**Figure 2.2: Ella Baker.** (Encyclopædia Britannica,2022).

### **2.2.1.Early Life**

Ella Baker was born on December 13, 1903 in Norfolk, Virginia. During her childhood, she was nourished and educated by strong, hardworking black people especially her mother Anna Ross Baker, whom she described as a very positive and aggressive woman.

Trained as a teacher, Anna instructed all the three of her children speech, grammar and writing before even they went to school. Religion, specifically black southern Baptist religion was of huge importance and strength in Ella Baker's life just like her mother. This profound confidence in God demonstrated her idea that belief must be translated into acts. Ella Baker graduated from Collegiate Institute in Raleigh, North Carolina as valedictorian in 1927 (Ransby, 2003.p.13).

### **2.2.2.Ella Baker's Activist Life**

Soon after graduation, Ella began working for the NAACP as a field secretary where she was widely reputed as an exceptional organizer of black youth. Later on, she became the president of the large NAACP branch of New York. This new position gave her enough freedom and authority to lead some INDS of political campaigns for change that she always envisioned. After that, Baker plunged into politics and run unsuccessfully for the New York city council on the Liberal Party (Shyrlee, 1990).

Students from Greensboro's Agricultural Technical College conducted a sit-in at a neighbourhood business in 1960. This action catapulted students to the fore of the campaign. The students' actions infused new life into the campaign. Baker understood the necessity of student action and summoned over 300 students for the Southwide Student Leadership Conference on Passive Resistance to Separation, using SCLC finances and Shaw University facilities. The name was later changed to Student Non - violence Coordinating Conference. (Morris, 1986, p. 214).

Baker argued that instead of becoming an arm of the SCLC or the NAACP, the students should start their own independent civil rights group. The pupils appreciated her encouragement of their freedom. Baker's effect on the SNCC was, in fact, her most significant contribution. Baker had the clout and drive to reject King's and others' approaches. Baker

challenged students to examine the discriminatory structure of Society as a whole and to evaluate the benefits of a focus group leadership viewpoint (James, 1994).

Baker collaborated with Rosa Parks on a Leadership Conference project at the NAACP office in Montgomery. The program was created to help local NAACP access the shared leadership abilities (Burns, 1997).

Baker believed that the moment was right to continue protest actions after the Montgomery win and the Supreme Court's decision to desegregate transportation. King believed that a quiet following a huge accomplishment was typical. Baker thought that important moments were passing him by and that King had failed to capitalize on them. Seven working papers were created by Levinson, Rustin, and King for the "Southern Negro Leaders Conference on Transportation and Nonviolence." These working papers served as the foundation for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Baker sent the invitation, and more than 60 ministers responded (Elliott, 1996).

The SCLC was a federation of existing and newly founded organizations. The planning board's core was made up entirely of clerics. Baker admits that she realized from the start that as a woman, an older lady, among a group of ministers who were mostly supporters, she would not be able to take on a leadership position. This wasn't worth it to compete (Lerner, 2017).

In 1956, she formed ,with Stanley Levison and Bayard Rustin who were Martin Luther King Jr's closest confidant, a fundraising organization to support and help victims of discrimination in the South. She then served as executive director of the organization for three years and a half (Houck & Dixon, 2009).

In 1957, Ella Baker organized the founding meeting of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference SCLC. This organization aimed at spreading the rebellion spirit in the

South. This resulted in the declaration of the US Supreme Court, in the same year, that the segregation buses were unconstitutional (Ransby.2003).

Despite the fact that the name of Ella Baker is associated with many civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, SCLC or SNCC. She had her own vision of leadership that made her success; she believed in the «grass root» involvement of people and the minimization of hierarchy as she personally preferred remaining behind the scenes. She was nicknamed by her young civil rights activists «fundu», which means «teacher» in Swahili. She was a collaborative leader who was able to create an environment of revolution and innovation (Knight, 2009).

### **2.2.3.Ella Baker's Contributions and Achievements in the Civil Rights Movement**

Ella Baker was a major force in the shaping and the development of the civil rights movement in America. She was a talented behind-the-scenes organizer and an inspiring force behind organizations like SCLC or SNCC.

Baker, with her steely determination and great skill in listening to others, assisted local leaders in carefully crafting and implementing focused campaigns against lynching, job possibilities for black people, and equitable pay for blacks and whites. She was a proponent of participatory democracy, which is focused on people's grassroots engagement in choices that affect their lives and the reduction of hierarchy.

Ella's focus was the organization, mobilization and empowerment of the grassroots, the masses. Through her mother, she inherited a sense of service and dedication that gave her that mixture of organizational skills and intellectual capacities.

Ella graduated Valedictorian of her 1927 class at Shaw. She was a very smart person but she did not compete for leadership. She said about herself:

You did not see me on TV, you did not see news stories about me.  
The kind of role that I tried to play was to pick up pieces and put  
together pieces out of which I hoped organization might come.  
My theory strong people don't need strong leaders (as cited in  
Bobo et al., 2004, p. 79).

Baker provided a wealth of knowledge to a number of communities and movement. She was a prominent policy influencer in the NAACP, SNCC, SCLC, and MFDP. Baker never wanted the limelight, preferring to work in the shadows, encouraging ordinary people to embark on exceptional things. As a "free agent," she questioned the established quo and had an impact on the lives of young people and women. Baker's and other women's stories should be made public and recognized, and they must be included.

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

Fannie Lou Hamer was detained and assaulted so brutally by authorities in 1962 that she was partially blind and lost a kidney. It was all since she attempted to register to vote. That experience didn't seem to stop her; in fact, it fueled her determination to fight for human rights for the rest of her life. Her most active years as an activist were the 1960s and 1970s. Her work focused on the right to vote, social inclusion, and political power. Despite the fact that she had nothing in common with the civil rights movement's heavyweight leaders at the time, neither in voice nor in physical appearance. She could effortlessly communicate with blacks using their slang language. Even though she had no college or university degree, yet she became one of the most valuable advocates (Lee, 2000).



**Figure 3.3: Fannie Lou Hamer(OPINION, 2017).**

### **2.3.1. Childhood and Early Life**

Fannie Lou Hamer was born on October 6, 1917, in Montgomery County, Mississippi, the sixth of twenty children. Her grandmother was a slave who already had 23 children because of sex abuse. Fannie's mother is among them. This grandmother often spoke about the misery of slavery. As a result, Fannie grew up with strong anti-slavery sentiments. Fannie's family was impoverished. Her parents worked many jobs to provide food and clothing for the family. Her father, a Baptist preacher, also ran a small bar and sold illicit alcohol, while her mother, Loo Ella, did some domestic exertion for white households. Furthermore, all of the youngsters used to help out on the farm. Fannie, too, began picking cotton at the age of six. Her official education came to an abrupt end. She had to leave school in the sixth grade to work full-time on the plantations (Houck & Dixon, 2009).

### **3.2.2 Hamer's Life as an Activist**

At the age of forty-four, Hamer started her struggle for civil rights after being asked by her friend Mary Tucker to a meeting at the William Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Ruleville in 1962. The convention's goal was to encourage the black population to register to vote, which was inconceivable in the South at the time due to the violence and intimidation used by whites to prevent them. Fannie was convinced, and she registered to vote at the Indianola court of law with seventeen other members. They were nicknamed the Indianola eighteen. During the journey, the party was subjected to several intimidations and harassment in order to return. However, this did not deter them. Fannie lost her job on the plantation where she had been working for eighteen years as a result of such an act (Knight, 2008).

One of the most significant events in Lou Hamer's life was her detention in Winona, Mississippi on June 9, 1963, and how she was assaulted by police along with many other blacks because they had registered to vote. Three days later, the activists were released following tremendous intervention by civil rights organizations such as the SNCC, SCLC, and even Martin Luther King Jr. Charges have been filed against the perpetrators of those atrocities, but the case was dismissed and all of the cops were acquitted by an all-white jury and a white judge (Mills, 2007).

The years 1964 and 1965 were full of events. Fannie Lou Hamer took part in many SNCC operations, including voter registration drives, with the goal of convincing more blacks to register to vote. Participants in voter registration campaigns handed out voter registration forms, assisted with their completion, and returned the forms to election observers. She also assisted with the delivery of food and clothing to the needy. Fannie's desire to join in politics got stronger, and she was one of the key participants in the formation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party MFDP in response to the tyranny of conservative white Democrats (Robnett, 1997).

Fannie delivered a very heartbreaking testimony in which she revealed her personal experiences and what she observed. On June 8, 1964, she gave her first testimony, in which she discussed her recent misfortunes. Following this statement, a letter was sent to President Lyndon B. Johnson requesting that the impending MFP should be protected. The goal of this effort was to bring national attention to the violent suppression of Mississippi blacks who sought to exercise their constitutionally protected rights. As a result, several of the letter recommendations were incorporated into the 1965 Voting Rights Act (Brooks & Houck, 2011).

Lou Hamer's advocacy transcended national boundaries. In September 1964, she went to Guinea, West Africa, with an SNCC team. They visited for three weeks and were very well received by Guinean President Ahmed Sekou Toure. The experience was quite motivating. In her book, Hamer describes how she was astounded to see black men flying aircraft, driving buses, sitting behind desks in banks, and doing everything that whites did in the United States at the time. She was also surprised by the numerous similarities in traditions and song melodies between Africans and black Americans (Robnett, 1997).

Fannie attended The NWPC in the summer of 1971. One of the primary goals of this group was to inspire women to get more involved in the political process and the working population. She planned to operate for the United States Congress, presenting herself as a campaigner for the poor and a defender of black rights (Asch, 2008).

When considering the civil rights movement as a whole, the movement sector was an evident that Fannie Lou Hamer was a popular heroine. At the formal level of leadership, she was a significant force inside the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, serving as both an articulator and a mobilizer. Her influence, however, was not perceived as genuine by the key official movement leaders because she was a woman with no formal schooling. This emblem of Freedom, like other rare women who were key official bridge

leaders, functioned as a constant voice of conscience for other impoverished people, articulating the sensitivities of those whose wisdom and vision remained behind the scenes and whose often compromised lives were affected (Robnett, 1997).

Fannie lost the election, and she suffered from many illnesses; heart problems, diabetes, breast cancer and died on March 14th 1977, albeit she had a great impact on the ratification of the Voting Act of 1965. In Ruleville, her hometown, to celebrate this unique brave lady, October 31st was made Fannie Lou Hamer's day (History.com Editors, 2009).

### **2.3.3: Fannie Lou Hamer's Contributions and Achievements in the American Civil Rights Movement**

Few people are aware of Fannie Lou Hamer's motivational speeches before small audiences in Mississippi. We can analyze Hamer's immense contribution to the local portion of the black freedom movement because of Ribback and others who realized the importance of her message and recorded her presentations.

According to Brooks and Houck (2011), "We're On Our Way" is one of the greatest of Hamer's historical speeches, and various aspects contribute to its extraordinary reputation. First, the extensive recording of this alternate speech displays Hamer's voice's amazing tone range and emotive strength, suggesting that her address was much more sincerely given than her more famous DNC testimony.

Second, in her attitude to boost Delta black voter registration, Hamer smoothly woven constitutional concepts with biblical promises, developing a complicated rhetorical style that she would use for the following many years of her activism career. Third, the two episodes that served as anchors for her criticism of the government's violently oppressive Jim Crow system, her efforts at voter identification in 1962 and her assault in a Winona jail in 1963, get the most comprehensive articulation.

For these considerations, we believe that, while Hamer's Indianola lecture has attracted little attention, it deserves more proper analysis.

Our rhetorical assessment of Hamer's contribution reveals the intricate rhetorical technique she used to urge civic involvement among her downtrodden Delta black audience. To encourage voter registration among a group that had been exploited and frightened for centuries, Hamer had to not only inform Delta blacks of their privileges and encourage them to see themselves as agents of change, but she also had to undermine the white supremacist fear and panic that had limited their prospects.

In response to the complex situation she faced, Hamer adopted multiple interconnected personae, recognizing herself as a fellow black Deltan, distinguishing herself as a religious leader called by God to perceive "the signs of the times," and recruiting new herself as a religious leader sent to preach "relief to the captives." (Brooks, 2014).

We genuinely feel that Hamer created and shifted between these personalities through two important narratives: her account of her original registration endeavour and her test of fortitude in the Winona prison cell.

Finally, we argue that rhetorical study of this forgotten speech within the activist lifetime of an unusual and underappreciated movement member gives light about the diverse techniques and voices that pushed one of the most renowned social movements in the history of American democracy.

## **2.4 Dorothy Iren Height (1912-2010)**



**Figure 2.4: Dorothy Iren Height**(Black Past,2007).

Dorothy Iren Height was among the few black women activists who had a powerful national position. She was the president of the National Council of Negro Women for forty years. During her battle life, she focused on issues such as illiteracy, voting and unemployment of black people.

### **2.4.1. Childhood and Early Life**

Dorothy Height was born in Richmond, Virginia, on March 24, 1912. Both her parents had been married twice before, so Dorothy had five half-sisters and one full. They had an enjoyable and joyful family. Her father James was an important entrepreneur in the building industry and her mother Fannie was a nurse. When she was five years old, her family moved to Rankin, Pennsylvania. Her father thought that the North would be economically better for the family. Even though Fannie, the mother, had no chance to work there as a nurse in

hospitals because such a job was not available for blacks, she managed to adapt her occupation (Crewe, 2009).

She worked as a domestic and offered medical assistance to patients at home. There were many good points for Dorothy to grow in Rankin. First, Rankin was an industrial city. There were lots of immigrants working there and coming from different parts of Europe. There were Italians, Croatians, Germans, Jewish, Polish and many other ethnic groups. Therefore, Dorothy had a very rich and diverse childhood experience. Another point was that she was provided a comfortable lifestyle by her parents and a nice home in addition to a significant education at the Emmanuel Baptist Church and school (Height, 2003).

At a very young age, Height learned to look for excellence in everything. She tells in her memoir that she never liked doing anything. She was a very good pupil at school. She also liked to be well dressed and tidy. Most of the women Dorothy knew in her childhood including her mother Fannie were neat, wore respectable clothes and paid much attention to their manner, which had a great impact in the shaping of Dorothy's identity as a woman and as a member of its community. Dorothy was politically and socially involved in anti-lynching efforts while in high school. She is a gifted orator who earned first place and a scholarship in a national oratory competition. Dorothy matriculated from Rankin High School and was recruited to Bernard College in 1929, but she was refused admission due to the Cota system regulation of just two blacks being enrolled each year. In 1933, she enrolled at New York University and received a master's degree in educational psychology (Height, 2003).

#### **2.4.2. Social Work and Activism**

Height's career started directly after graduation. She worked as a supervisor in the New York City department of Welfare, assisting volunteers helping immigrants. She also taught religion classes at Columbia University as part time teacher. In her spare time, Dorothy

volunteered for The Brooklyn Bureau of Charities. Her energy and empathy were soon remarked by her employers. Hence, she received multiple offers for new jobs. She worked as an investigator for the Home Relief Bureau of Charities where she provided assistance to welfare recipients and soon promoted to become personal supervisor over all central offices responsible for recruiting, hiring and managing thousands of employees (Knight, 2009).

Dorothy reached out when she was involved with The Harlem Youth Council. One of her first roles in the African American protest was the establishment of The United Youth Committee against Lynching which had a very large impact across the country. Members of The Harlem Youth Council and young activists from the NAACP used to hang a black sign with white letters saying: « man was lynched today », then march in their cities (Knight, 2009).

Height joined The Harlem YWCA as an associate director in 1937. Her job was to oversee the operations of giving food and shelter to freshly arriving young African American women from the South. Dorothy met two significant ladies at an NCNW conference on November 7, 1937, which benefited her career. One of the most notable black ladies was Mary M.C. Leod Bethune. The National Council of Negro Women was created and led by Bethune. She also played an essential part in Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1932 electoral campaign. Eleanor Roosevelt, the president's wife, was the second lady. Height recalled the encounter as follows: "On that autumn day, the venerable Mary M.C. Leod Bethune laid her hand on me, the freedom gates are half ajar" (Gay, 2012).

Bethune invited Dorothy to attend The National Council of Negro Women at the end of that meeting. She was later elected to the YWCA's national board of directors. She was elected as the NCNW's fourth president in 1957. During her presidency, she insisted on civil rights for blacks by organizing voter registration drives in the South, while voter education

drives in the North and scholarship programs for future civil rights workers. She assisted the NCNW in obtaining funds to give vocational training and to assist women in starting enterprises in the 1970's(Height, 2003).

### **2.4.3.Dorothy Height's Contributions and Achievements in the Civil Rights Movement**

Height began her civil rights activism at the age of twenty-five when she joined The National Council of Negro Women. She never stopped until she died in 2010. More than seventy years of fight and struggle have surely left deep prints on the movement as a whole. After being part of so many organizations and associations such as the YWCA, she gained much experience and showed a considerable sense of management. Dorothy was among the very few black women who had a political status. She could rub the shoulders with political icons and famous figures such as Martin Luther King Jr, Mary McLeod Bethune, or even the First lady Eleanor Roosevelt. She was also asked for advice on political issues.

At the head of the NCNW, Dorothy concentrated her work on reshaping the criminal justice system to end lynching. She began her campaign in Mississippi. She aided many women from different communities to join the council and forme them so that they become advocatesfor the black women in their neighborhood. The council also helped poor black families with food and shelter supply through ingenious programs. The Pig Bank, for example, consisted of lending a pig for each poor family to breed andthen fifty pigs turned into two thousand one in a short period of time (Tuuri.2018).

Height was a key leader in organizing the 1965 march on Washington for jobs and freedom. She used her position to make the black population more independent, and to begina war against illiteracy, drugs and unemployment. She was an expert on local, state and national governmental committees around women's issues for the NCNN. She would remain single all her life choosing to fight for the freedom of blacks over marrying and having children.

## **Conclusion**

These women are just a very small sample of the numerous examples that could have been listed in our dissertation. They led extraordinary lives trying to get equal rights with the Whites. Their contributions, for most of them, did not gain real public awareness and other times, their efforts were recognized years after they passed away.

African American women have been fighting for civil rights since the nineteenth century. They opposed slavery. They took a stand against racism. They founded women's groups in order to enhance the lives of African Americans. They were involved in politics and media, as well as organizing black labor and promoting education. They were the backbone of the contemporary Civil Rights Movement in the twentieth century. The critical mass, the grassroots leaders urging America to accept justice and equality for all, were African American women.

These trailblazing black women never gave up. They fought fiercely for their rights defying the stereotypes of their times. They also inspired many other women to follow their path.

## **General Conclusion**

Africans in America used to face several challenges and were denied the rights granted to American citizens at the time. As a result, in order to protest this social injustice, African Americans chose the civil rights movement as their weapon, demanding their basic rights in America. The movement began in 1954 and lasted for more than 10 years, ending in 1968. The fundamental objective of the uprising or movement was to free African Americans from the violence perpetrated against them in the form of racism and other forms of discrimination based on their African ancestry.

The roles black women were performing in the American society must be considered in order to really comprehend the American civil rights movement. In fact, black women were frequently forced to work in the shadow of male authority. They clothed and sheltered workers; they marched and demonstrated, and they took on the job of educating and watching over the children in the neighborhood. Without the active engagement and dedication of women, African-Americans may never have experienced the Civil Rights Movement's legal, social, and political triumphs.

This dissertation takes into consideration the forecastable causes that led African Americans to establish the American civil rights movement. Furthermore; it examines the brutal ways of segregation that black people encountered during that era.

Our research sought to analyze the pivotal role of trailblazing black women activists in the peaceful movement. We used a historical-analytical technique based on qualitative research to carry out this study. The study assisted us in recognizing the substantial role of black women in the post-reconstruction era.

This research is divided into two chapters. The first chapter attempted to recite the main historical reasons that paved the way to the rise of the American civil rights movement and pointed out the key aspects of the white race supremacy as superior people toward black citizens. The second chapter illustrated the dominant black female figures who played a major role in the success of the American civil rights movement.

The findings of this research revealed that Jim Crow Laws, the black codes and the terrorist organization Ku Klux Klan are politically considered among the main reasons for the American civil rights movement. Whereas on the social front, black people were separated from white people and seen as inferiors based on the U.S Supreme Court decision “separate but equal” doctrine that led to the settlement of the civil rights movement. Furthermore, economy was a key section that the American civil rights movement tackled, thus, on the economic front, peaceful marches and civil protests were organized demanding equality and full independence of the black race.

Ida Barnett Wells, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer and Dorothy Iren Height's experiences illustrate what hundreds of African-American women did throughout the civil rights era. Many black mothers played a major role in the movement, prioritising their children's education, and teaching them to embrace the duties and advantages that come with citizenship. Black females worked side to side with men, participated in organizations, organized marches and socially held prestigious positions

Further research is recommended to explore other aspects that might have been seen as reasons to the rising of black people's civil rights movement. Besides the fact that further studies are needed to investigate the unrecognized black female figures who had a massive impact in gaining and normalizing the civil rights for the black race in America.

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## المخلص

شكلت حركة الحقوق المدنية الأمريكية موضوع نقاش حاد على مر تاريخ الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. فلقد كان الأمريكيون الأفارقة عرضة لأبشع أنواع التمييز العنصري وذلك بالاحتكام إلى نص القانون وخارجه. إلا أنّ الأمريكيين السود، ومن كلا الجنسين، رفضوا الظلم الذي كان ينخر جسد المجتمع الأمريكي. تبحث هذه الدراسة في الأسباب المحتملة التي أدت إلى ظهور حركة الحقوق المدنية الأمريكية. وتهدف، فضلا عن ذلك، إلى تسليط الضوء على الدور الهام الذي اضطلعت به الناشطات السود الرائدات في هذه الحركة. اعتمدت الدراسة، في تفسيرها للأحداث التاريخية، على البحث النوعي القائم على جمع البيانات من مصادر أولية وثانوية ومن ثمّ تقييمها. استعرض البحث، من جهة أخرى، أهم الدراسات السابقة التي تناولت هذا الموضوع. اعتمدت الدراسة في تحليل المعلومات على المنهج الوصفي السردى والتأكد من القصص الموثقة وتفسيرها. انتهت الدراسة إلى أن النساء السود اضطلعن بدور هام في الثورة السلمية التي أنهت قرنا من الفصل العنصري وحققت المساواة للسود.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأمريكيون من أصل أفريقي، الثورة، الرائدات من ذوي البشرة السوداء ، الفصل

العنصري، المساواة.