

Women organizers in the civil rights movement

[Politics](#), [Civil Rights](#)



Women organizers in the Civil Rights movement (1950's-1960's) Women have always been regarded as key parental figure in raising and developing children in the society. During the period of 1950 to 1970, many parts of the world were marred with civil rights movement. The movements were characterized with protests and civil resistance complaining about discrimination economic and political self sufficiency. Women took up the initiative to participate in these movements. This situation later led to serious confrontation between government authorities and activists.

Thousands of people took part in the civil right movement of that period especially in the United States. The key leaders of the campaign, include; Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Rosa Parks, James Meredith and Medgar Evers, played crucial roles for of the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement in America[1]. This paper covers factors that motivated women, the contributions they had, roles they played as well as the problems they encountered during the civil rights movement of 1950's and 1960's.

Most of the women who were involved in these movements were born during the slavery period, hence the pain and suffering they experienced at that time stimulated them to speak out against oppression. One of the most vocal women who started to speak against oppression was Wells Barnett. She began her struggle in 1909, by travelling abroad to seek international attention on this issue[2]. She also formed National association for the advanced of Colored people. Her efforts were later joined by the struggle for gender sensitization by Mary Church Terrell. She was very vocal and spoke about segregation of the blacks in public eating joints.

She led most of the citizens to boycotts and picketing to attract attention to racial injustice[3]. She established the black club movement that led to the formation of National Association of Colored Women similar to that of Barnett. She was also very instrumental in bringing up socially progressive institutions such as mother clubs and nursery schools. The three year struggles with authorities bore her fruits when the Supreme Court ruled that segregation of public eating places was unconstitutional[4]. Another very instrumental lady in these movements was Mary McLeod.

She often worked together with both Terrell and Barnett. Mary became the president of National Association of Colored Women[5]. Being at the supreme of the organization, she became a good friend of Sara Roosevelt the mother of Franklin Roosevelt mayor of New York. She used the good rapport she had with this politically influential family to continue her struggle for social justice of the black[6]. She was later appointed to be the head of National Youth Council by President Roosevelt. Eleanor Roosevelt took the same path after being inspired by Terrell and Mary McLeod.

After her husband was elected as the 32nd president Eleanor became instrumental in fighting injustice by calling for international and national attention to the effects of oppression and racial discrimination. She took a bold step and resigned from the Daughter of American Revolution since they had differed in ideologies. Ella Baker was another activist who dedicated her time to speak out against oppression. She was regarded as the leader behind the scenes. She struggled to study due to the fact that her family was not well off. She graduated and became a teacher.

She relocated to New York and quit her profession to engage in social change. She got involved with NAACP in the grassroots level in recruiting more people to the organization. She also was instrumental in the formation of other small organizations such as Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. These movements later were used by Martin Luther King Jr. to organize his boycott and nonviolent movement. The wave of women participation in the civil movement was unstoppable. Rosa Park, who was famously regarded as the mother of the civil rights movement, was also contributed in this struggle.

She is believed to have started the main struggle of these civil rights movement. She experienced difficulty in completing her education due to the strict regulations for the black children. The black children were meant to study for only five months in a year and the rest of the year they spent time in the cotton fields as laborers. Rosa graduated from high school after she got married to Raymond Parks [7]. This sparked her efforts to fight racial injustice. She joined National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Montgomery chapter as the only woman. She was very instrumental member of this organization and was elected secretary.

Her active involvement in National Association of Advanced Colored People led to her arrest on 1955 [8]. Rosa's life as an African American continued to face challenges. The mistreatment she received from the whites while she was in a bus made her to launch a huge boycott of using Montgomery buses by the Afro-Americans. She decided to organize this boycott after she got arrested for refusing to give out her seat to a white passenger in the bus. The boycott lasted for 381 days prompting her to be absorbed by the

Montgomery Improvement Association which was formed by Martin Luther King Jr[9].

This act of boycott was followed by a series of escalating protest, movements and insurgencies by African Americans. During the time for boycott Rosa coordinated for the blacks to get rides from car pool ups and other whites who offered to help. They used the slogan ' don't use the bus today. Don't use it for freedom. ' The boycotters together with Mrs. Rosa Park took the case to court disputing the segregation in buses[10]. They later won the case after the court ruled on their favor. After the successful boycott Rosa and her families were not secure in Montgomery. They relocated to Detroit where she worked for congressman John Conyers.

She continued to raise her voice and incited the youth to take up the struggle for African American Social and American progress. After the women political council had initiated the boycott in Montgomery, Martin Luther king came to the limelight taking all the credit as the leader for the nonviolent resistance. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X traversed different sections of the country giving powerful speeches and mobilizing nonviolent movements. Sparks of non violent movements were seen in other parts of the country[11]. These nonviolent movements escalated to violent racial rebellion in major cities in the U. S. as the movement went militant it provoked the whites against pro-black policies and the police. The success of events of this decade was at the peak when the Supreme Court decides the case of brown v board of education ruling in favor of brown. The court declared that segregation of schools unconstitutional. In the 1960's many women rights group were established to continue the fight against

racial injustice and oppression. This was the decade that saw progressive women rights movement in the United States and world Wide. Most of these groups comprised of female students who advocated for equal employment opportunity for both men and women.

They also lobbied for enforcement of equal rights laws. Later that decade national organization for women was formed to replace women commission and it continued with the fight against sexual discrimination. The commission was disbanded due to lack of funds. The women equity action league founded in 1968, sought to investigate inequalities in faculty pay and promotions of both men and women in education workforce. These remarkable women played an important role in inspiring other activists and grassroots leaders who in turn mobilized more and more people to join the struggle.

These women also helped millions of women to gain their fundamental rights as women. They were mostly motivated by the mass followers they had. Motivational also came from the cases they had in courts which ended up favoring the blacks and declaring most of the segregation unconstitutional. They drew their inspiration from civil rights movement they had organized. The organizations they were involved with had a lot of confidence in them hence they elected these women to high posts which favored their situation and gave them an upper hand in organizing the struggle[12].

To overcome the problems they encountered they formed organizations such as national Organization for women. National Organization of Women key mandate was to enlighten the women to fully participate in mainstreaming of American society. These organizations brought them together in unity and <https://assignbuster.com/women-organizers-in-the-civil-rights-movement/>

increased their awareness on critical issues that affect them. This enabled them to have a strong voice over the oppression and neglect they were facing and forced the federal government to enforce the law. The ideologies fomented by certain black power movement were destructive and fostered cultural conflict.

This posed a challenge to the efforts of the women who organized movements before. The other major challenge that affected these courageous women is the fact that most of the influential leaders, who had followed suit to lead mass movement, ended up being arrested or assassinated[13]. A good example is the cases of Malcolm x and Martin Luther King. The women's morale was undermined by these acts. The supremacy of the white also undermined their efforts in the sense that they seemed to bend the law on their favor and oppressed the blacks in all sectors.

The civil war escalated by the Ku Klux Klan and the lynch mob in the south were meant to threaten the activists from pursuing further with their quest[14]. The vocal contribution of Martin Luther King Jr. was faced with bomb attacks to his church and residence. The mass movements in America were a vital process to transform America to its current state. The vibrant voices of these women led to signing of the civil rights act to law. The law protects all minorities and women from discrimination in voting employment and use of public areas. They were also rendered freedom of choice.

This was viewed as victory for both blacks and women. The revival of the African American militancy was an exceptional progress to the realization of democratic ideals[15]. The shared commitment to take the risk and highlight

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injustice and press the course for change resulted to the change in attitude of many American citizens. They tore down the oppressive racial and segregation system that had dominated the country for a long time thus bringing a remarkable transformation of American life. Bibliography

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