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History in the Making

Her-Story: The Forgotten Part of the Civil Rights Movement

By Elizabeth Guzman

Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, the March on Washington, and the infamous “I Have a Dream Speech” is what many remember when the Civil Rights Movement is recalled. When we limit such an impactful movement in history to a small number of people and moments, other activists, groups, and leaders are often left out or forgotten. More than once, history has rearranged, limited, or left out Her-story, and by doing so has left out a very important view of history. People need to know that the Civil Rights Movement was partly a product of a socio-political struggle of black women to protect their bodies from abusive white men. This innovative analytical frame has remained largely unacknowledged in American society due to general misinformation about the Civil Rights Movement caused by patriarchy and ongoing sexism in America. History will give validation to the work that thousands of men and women put into bringing about the Civil Rights Movement when all their stories can be included in The Movement’s history. The experiences of African American women, though largely ignored or not included, can help us better understand the true motives and the results it helped bring.

Tired of being victimized by white men while riding a bus, on their way home, and in their workplaces, African American women decided to change the way they were being treated. Many women launched their careers in political activism due to the continued dismissal of their legal cases and the lack of protection while using public transportation. One example is Mary Fair Burks, who took the fight against racial injustices into her own

hands by encouraging the women she knew to meet and discuss the brutality they experienced while riding the buses. In 1946, Fair Burks, along with forty other women met for the first time and formed the Women's Political Council.¹ After successfully registering to vote, the Women's Political Council (WPC) set up voting registration workshops throughout Montgomery where they taught others how to fill out the registration forms and basic literacy tests.² As grassroots organization of the WPC grew, so did their political presence. In 1953, Jo Ann Robinson led the group to fight the mistreatment and abuse while riding buses. They "stormed in the City Commission, where Jo Ann Robinson railed against the abuses heaped upon black female bus riders...the WPC demanded that black riders be treated with dignity and respect."³ Then in 1954, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and the continued mistreatment of women on buses, Robinson wrote Mayor W.A. Gayle a letter. Robinson warned about "a city-wide boycott of the buses," and of plans to "ride less or not at all."⁴

By 1955, plans for a boycott seemed to be formulating slowly and losing momentum. However, by March things started to change. It all started when Claudette Colvin, a sophomore in high school, decided not to give up her seat in the colored section of the bus to "preserve segregation."⁵ Her arrest caused the bus boycott to once again be considered. At her trial Judge Wiley C. Hill found Claudette guilty of "assault and battery and charged her with violating the state rather than city segregation laws."⁶ Then, at her appeal, Judge Eugene Carter charged her with "assault and

¹ Mary Fair Burks, "Trailblazers: Women in the Montgomery Bus Boycotts," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1990), 78.

² Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 76.

³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶ *Ibid.*

battery, assessed a small fine, and declared her a juvenile delinquent.”⁷ Jo Ann Robinson and Mary Fair Burks decided not to wait any longer. People were angry and ready to take action after the outcome of Claudette’s case. With the help of E.D. Nixon, the women started to organize a mass bus boycott. Upon discovering that Claudette Colvin was pregnant, Nixon decided not to use her as a symbol for the boycott, arguing that she would be a “liability in certain parts of the black community,” therefore, there was nothing to do but wait for another incident to occur.⁸ In October 1955, Mary Louise Smith, an eighteen-year-old maid, also refused to give up her seat while riding a bus. According to Nixon, Smith was also not the right candidate. Her father was a known alcoholic and “lived in a low type of home.”⁹ They needed someone who was from a respectable family and from the right part of town, who would keep negative black stereotypes from smothering any “movement for change.”¹⁰

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks decided not to give up her seat while riding home on a city bus.¹¹ When news of Parks’ arrest reached Robinson, she did not wait for anyone’s approval. She created a flyer that called for a boycott starting Monday, December 5, 1955, then called her friend John Cannon who worked at Alabama State University and asked to use the mimeographs to make copies of the flyer.¹² That Monday morning, buses in Montgomery had no passengers; and the rest is history. On December 19, “an inter-racial committee” made a “third try at ending” the boycott.¹³ The African American members of the group made three proposals: “more courteous treatment of passengers, the hiring of Negro drivers for predominately Negro

⁷ McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, 89.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹² *Ibid.*, 98.

¹³ *The Jackson Advocate*, December 24, 1955.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn79000083/1955-12-24/ed-1/seq-2/>.

routes, and a 'first come, first served' policy of seating so that members of either race would not have to stand when there were empty seats on a bus."¹⁴ Unfortunately, "bus officials flatly turned down" the request "to hire Negro drivers" and the "first come, first served" proposition.¹⁵ So the boycott continued. The boycott was successful enough to make newspaper headlines in Virginia. *The Tribune*, a newspaper from Roanoke, Virginia, published on their December 24, 1955 issue, explained how the boycott "action was 90 per cent effective because of nearly 250 Negro passengers riding the one bus daily."¹⁶

For almost a year, the African American community worked together and avoided the buses at all cost by figuring out a carpool system. The active members of the Women's Political Council, along with other support groups, know that the plans did not originate with Martin Luther King, as many today believe. The experiences of the women in Montgomery, their long struggle with the right to "ride with dignity" and to sit anywhere on a crowded bus without the fear of being abused verbally and physically, had finally broken through the surface of the deep rooted seeds of Jim Crow.

The Montgomery Bus boycott was only the beginning of what turned out to be a nation-wide event. Though much of the work done focused on the southern most states, African American women around the country organized themselves to push for changes in their own communities. Gloria Richardson is a prime example of one of these local grassroots organizers. In 1962, Gloria Richardson joined the movement after a group of Freedom Riders arrived in Baltimore, Maryland. In June of the same year, Gloria was selected as co-chairman of the newly formed Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee (CNAC). Together with other members, Richardson "sought demands for equal treatment on all scores... Then in addition to segregation itself, the economic

¹⁴ *The Jackson Advocate*, December 24, 1955.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *The Tribune*, December 24, 1955.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn98068351/1955-12-24/ed-1/seq-1/>.

and social system that segregation defended were attacked—housing, employment, working conditions, and education.”¹⁷ In 1962, CNAC began helping community members fill out voting registration forms. Later, in 1963, Cambridge’s only movie theater decided to restrict African American’s to the back part of the balcony when they had originally been allowed to use the entire balcony.¹⁸ CNAC members went to the mayor and demanded integration, but nothing was achieved, in retaliation Richardson and several others started to picket and hold sit-ins at the theater. Arrests followed but Richardson swore they would continue to hold sit-ins at the jail until the theaters were desegregated.¹⁹ The struggle was led by Gloria until 1964 when she moved to New York with her new husband. The fight in Cambridge continued without her and even then, full desegregation was not achieved until seven years later.²⁰

Women across the United States found their voice and their calling while pushing for change within the Civil Rights Movement; women like Daisy Bates, a Civil Rights leader who deserves recognition. The Little Rock Nine, as they are known, and their entrance to Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas is partly due to the efforts, hard work, and dedication of Daisy Bates. She was thrust into the forefront of the desegregation fight in the city of Little Rock. Her life changed completely overnight. From the start, Daisy knew she belonged in the fight. In her memoir, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, Bates shares:

As the state President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People I was in the front-line trenches. Was I ready for war? Was I

¹⁷ Annette K. Brock, “Gloria Richardson and the Cambridge Movement,” in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1990), 126.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 128.

²⁰ Ibid., 141.

ready to risk everything that L.C. and I had built? Who was I really and what did I stand for? Long after I had gone to bed my mind raced over these questions and over the whole course of my life. Toward dawn I knew I had found the answer. I was ready.²¹

Daisy's peaceful life was over. When paratroopers arrived in Little Rock to protect the teenagers as they entered Central High School, Daisy was relieved but not happy. She expressed to a reporter: "Anytime it takes eleven thousand five hundred soldiers to assure nine Negro children their constitutional right in a democratic society," she could not be happy.²² Bates later had to turn herself in after the "mayor and the city council" ordered her arrest and the arrest of the other NAACP officials.²³ The mayor accused the NAACP leaders of failing to submit paperwork regarding their organization.²⁴ Later, many saw Daisy's release from jail as a sign that she had been given special treatment for having spent such a small amount of time behind bars. In retaliation two burning crosses were put up on her property along with a sign saying "GO BACK TO AFRICA! KKK!"²⁵

Despite this, Bates continued to be the main representative for the nine students and pushed for change in her community. When she recalled the situation, she said "we were determined to help our people and our country to contribute to that great social revolution by removing barriers, based upon race that had stood in our own nation for so many decades."²⁶ Years later, when asked why she had not moved away and taken time to rest, Daisy Bates

²¹ Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987), 4-5.

²² *Ibid.*, 101.

²³ *The Arizona Sun*. December/05/1957.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84021917/1957-12-05/ed-1/seq-3/>.

²⁴ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 4-5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

²⁶ Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*, 221.

answered with great certainty, “none of us, Negro or white, can afford to rest as long as Negroes suffer almost uninterrupted persecution of body and spirit.”²⁷ Daisy Bates’ experience is often lost behind other major events of the Civil Rights Era. Daisy Bates stood up for what she knew was necessary and right even if it meant facing threats and death head on.

Young people and women everywhere, like Bates, encountered and struggled with the dangers that joining a Civil Rights activist group brought them. Anne Moody was born and raised in Mississippi and, from an early age, defied the customs of keeping one’s head down, addressing white men and women as sir and ma’am, and staying quiet. The summer before Anne entered high school, Emmet Till was murdered. Till’s murder made Anne acknowledge “the fear of being killed just because I was black. This was the first of my fears...I didn’t know what one had to do or not do as a Negro not to be killed.”²⁸ But Till’s death was not in vain, for the same day she heard the news of Emmet Till’s death, Anne also first heard of the NAACP.²⁹ When Anne entered college a few years later, her roommate encouraged her to join the NAACP chapter on campus. Later that night Anne could not sleep and later wrote, “The more I remembered the killings, beatings, and intimidations, the more I worried what might possibly happen to me or my family if I joined the NAACP. But I knew I was going to join, anyway. I had wanted to for a long time.”³⁰ Like Bates, Moody clearly understood what it meant to be associated with the NAACP.

The summer before her senior year of college, on their way home after a day of shopping, Anne suggested to her friend Rose that they enter and use the white side of the train station. Rose agreed and both girls walked into the station. They bought their tickets back to Tougaloo and took their seats to wait in the white

²⁷ Ibid., 122.

²⁸ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 107.

²⁹ Ibid., 108.

³⁰ Ibid., 221.

section of the train station. Suddenly, things took a turn for the worse. Anne relates that a drunk white man approached the girls and started cursing and yelling at them. They tried to remain calm but amid the harassment the girls missed their bus and were forced to wait for the next one. As more people joined in the harassment, both girls held their ground, stayed in their seats in the white area of the station, and waited for their bus, only to find out they had once again missed it. Finally, the girls decided to leave after noticing that everyone entering the stations seemed to stop to harass and yell at them.³¹ Thankfully, no physical harm was done to the girls, but Anne was ready for more action. What she did not realize was that it would come at a cost.

The NAACP was planning its annual convention in Jackson. Moody was excited and even extended an invitation to her mother. Three days later Anne received a reply from her mother asking her to not attend the convention, stating that the town sheriff had warned that if he received news of Anne's involvement with the NAACP, she would not be allowed to return home.³² Instead of feeling confused, abandoned, and alone by the possibility of never being able to come home, Anne said it drove her to become "more and more involved in the Movement...I had found something outside of myself that gave meaning to my life."³³

That summer her professor John Salter, who oversaw the NAACP chapter at her campus, asked Anne to be a "spokesperson for a team that would sit-in at Woolworth's lunch counter."³⁴ At 11:15 AM, Anne and two other students, Memphis and Pearlana, entered Woolworth's and sat at the counter. They waited for their orders to be taken and watched the waitress covering the counter walk past them a few times. When she finally approached the students, she notified them that they would be served in the "back counter, which was for Negroes" to which Anne replied, "We

³¹ Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 227-230.

³² *Ibid.*, 233-234.

³³ *Ibid.*, 235.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

would like to be served here.”³⁵ The waitress, realizing what was about to happen, turned the counter lights off and followed the other waitress out the back door. Anne explains that one by one people started leaving and when enough of them left, reporters suddenly appeared. The reporters proceeded to ask them who they were, if they were students, if they were working with an organization, and the reason for their sit-in. Anne answered that they were students at Tougaloo College, they represented no specific organization, and that they would wait until they received service if it meant they were there until the lunch counter closed. While sitting, Anne saw a face she recognized. The drunk man from the bus station happened to be walking into the Woolworth’s counter. She watched as he pulled a knife from his pocket. Nervous for what would come next, Anne, Pearlana, and Memphis bowed their heads to pray. At that moment Anne says, “All hell broke loose.”³⁶ Another man inside the Woolworth’s pulled Memphis off his seat and slapped Anne across the face, then a male store employee threw Anne against another counter and caused her to fall to the floor. A man, who claimed to be a police officer, arrested both Memphis and the man who was attacking him. Suddenly, a white female student who Anne identifies as Joan Trumpauer, joined Pearlana and Anne at the counter. The crowd proceeded to remove Joan from the restaurant by carrying her outside while Anne was dragged by her hair.

Determined to continue their sit-in, both Anne and Joan returned to the counter to find that a white staff member from Tougaloo, Louis Chaffee, had joined Pearlana at the counter, Anne writes, “The mob then started smearing us with ketchup, mustard, sugar, pies, and everything on the counter.”³⁷ Next, John Slater joined the four women, but he was immediately “hit on the jaw with what appeared to be brass knuckles.”³⁸ George Raymond, a field worker for CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), sat in after

³⁵ Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 236.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 237

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 238

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Slater, and then a young high school boy joined them too. They sat at the counter for three hours as the mob of people kept harassing them. When the president of Tougaloo College, Dr. Beittel, ran in and saw what was happening he ran back outside and begged the police officers, who had been watching all along, to come inside and escort the students out. Captain Ray notified Dr. Beittel that he could only enter if the owner invited the officers inside. Dr. Beittel, noticing that the officers would not enter the building to keep the students from harm, demanded that the officers at least provide them with protection as soon as they stepped out the Woolworth's doors.³⁹ On May 28, 1963, Anne Moody, Memphis Norman, and Pearlana Lewis' names appeared on the front page of a Mississippi newspaper. This demonstration made history as the "first sit-in, in Jackson."⁴⁰

A few days later, demonstrations happened all over town. Some sat-in at other restaurants, some picketed, and others squatted in the streets.⁴¹ The demonstrations continued for days and thousands were arrested. The jails were so packed that demonstrators were being held at the fairgrounds. Eventually, Anne got herself arrested and sent to the fairground; she states:

The compounds they put us in were two large buildings used to auction off cattle during the annual state fair. There were about a block long, with large openings about twenty feet wide on both ends where the cattle were driven in. The openings had been closed with wire. It reminded me of a concentration camp. It was hot and sticky.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 239.

⁴⁰ *The Chronicle*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87065526/1963-05-28/ed-1/seq-1/>.

⁴¹ Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, 241.

⁴² Ibid., 251

She could not believe this was happening in America “the land of the free and the home of the brave.”⁴³ Anne continued to work for the movement long after college but her experiences while at Tougaloo had caused her life to change. She was estranged from her family and faced danger more than once. Anne Moody, like Daisy Bates, had found her calling within the Civil Rights Movement and was willing to sacrifice her life to fight for a movement she believed in.

Women were essential to the Civil Rights Movement, yet their personal experiences and stories are not well recognized within the movement’s history. Danielle L. McGuire’s book, *At the Dark End of the Street*,⁴⁴ presents women fighting for control and protection of their bodies and encourages awareness to the lack of their recognition. McGuire’s argument, that the Civil Rights Movement was a product of socio-political struggle of African American women, is supported by examining the lives of women like Mary, Jo Ann, Daisy, Gloria, and Anne. McGuire is not the first to highlight women’s work within the Civil Rights Movement. Various authors have highlighted that many history books ignore the active political roles of women working for civil rights. History has been unfair in leaving out the stories, experiences, and opinions of women and in not analyzing their contributions to the successes the movement achieved. It is understandable to see why viewing the Civil Rights Movement as a product of the struggle for the protection of men and women might be a difficult thing when the evidence has been so well silenced. Jeanne Theoharis’ book, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*,⁴⁵ claims that our “fabled” and “whitewashed” versions of Civil Rights history is to blame for the lack of exposure of women. Theoharis claims that our Civil Rights history is viewed as:

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance-A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

⁴⁵ Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

One of progress and national redemption. Jim Crow was framed as a horrible Southern relic, and the movement to unseat it became a powerful tale of courageous Americans defeating a long-ago evil...A movement that had challenged the very fabric of US politics and society was turned into one that demonstrated how great and expansive the country was—a story of individual bravery, natural evolution, and the long march to a “more perfect union.”⁴⁶

The reality, Theoharis explains, is that this history has “naturalized the civil rights movement as an almost inevitable aspect of American democracy rather than as the outcome of Black organization and intrepid witness,” and she argues that Civil Rights History should be “uncomfortable, sobering histories—that hold a mirror to the nation’s past and offer far-reaching lessons for seeing the injustices of our current moment and the task of justice today.”⁴⁷ While history has made the March on Washington a pivotal event in the Civil Rights Movement, many leaders recall the events of the day differently from what history has made the world believe happened that day.

The March on Washington in 1963 is remembered differently among women activists and leaders who were present on that unforgettable day. Anna Arnold Hedgeman, the woman responsible for the involvement of white Christians present at the march, was part of the “March Organization Committee.”⁴⁸ She pressured the committee to include women in the lineup of speakers after noticing that “not a single woman was slated to speak.”⁴⁹ When Hedgeman asked Bayard Rustin about her observation he simply responded with “Women are included.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, x-xvi, xvii.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Every group has women in it.”⁵⁰ Instead the solution the committee came up with was:

The Chairman would introduce these women, telling of their role in the struggle...as each one is introduced, she would stand for applause, and after the last one has been introduced and the Chairman has called for general applause, they would sit.⁵¹

Surely, women who had fought years for their rights and who had risked their lives to help start a movement so big felt “a general applause” was simply not enough. They wanted to tell the world of their hard work and their accomplishments. History books give the impression that the women were happy to simply be present. Dorothy I. Height’s essay titled “We Wanted the Voice of a Woman to Be Heard”⁵² touches on her feelings of the outcome at the 1963 March on Washington. She states:

We were all seated. In all the March on Washington pictures, we’re right there on the platform...The women represented a cross section of organizations, including labor, religion, and social welfare groups. What actually happened was so disappointing, because actually women were an active part of the whole effect. Indeed, women were the backbone of the movement.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid., 167.

⁵¹ Theoharris, 168.

⁵² Dorothy I. Height, “We Wanted the Voice of a Women to be Heard: Black Women and the 1963 March on Washington,” in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University, 2001). 83-94.

⁵³ Ibid., 87.

At the March on Washington, Daisy Bates read the committee's "Tribute to Women" that was written by another March organizer, John Morsell. The statement read: "The women of this country pledge to you, Mr. Randolph, to Martin Luther King, to Roy Wilkins, and all of you fighting for civil liberties, that we will join hands with you, as women of this country."⁵⁴ The paragraph seems to give full credit for the Civil Rights Movement to the men. Notice too that the pledging is made to the men. Part of the reason for the misinformation of the Civil Rights Movement stems from the patriarchy within the movement and within American culture. Anna Hedgeman picks up on the sexism within King's "I Have a Dream" stating "in front of 250,000 people who had come to Washington because they had a dream, and in the face of all the men and women of the past who had dreamed in vain, I wished very much that Martin had said, 'We have a dream.'"⁵⁵ Dorothy I. Height says there was one thing the March on Washington did do for women: it helped them understand exactly where they stood within the Movement and how they were viewed in their community. The March, she said:

Brought into bold relief the different perspectives of men and women in the whole issue of gender. Though every statistic showed us that a number of our families were headed by women, we were still dominated by the view that if men were given enough, women would be better off. There was not a sense of equal partnership.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 170.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁶ Dorothy I. Height, "We Wanted the Voice of a Women to be Heard: Black Women and the 1963 March on Washington," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University, 2001), 91.

At an event that was supposed to represent the African American community, the March on Washington should have brought awareness to the struggles and efforts made by both male and female leaders, organizers, and civilians. Instead, Martin Luther King's phrase left the women feeling unimportant and excluded.

Though many women understood that men needed to be seen as the coordinators of the movement, others like Heights wanted to make sure that women were not excluded from the civil liberties the movement was trying to achieve. Frances Beale explains it best in her article titled "Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female,"⁵⁷ she states:

Black women are not resentful of the rise to power of black men. We welcome it. We see in it the eventual liberation of all black people from this corrupt system of capitalism. Nevertheless, this does not mean that you have to negate one for the other. This kind of thinking is a product of miseducation; that it's either X or it's Y. It is fallacious reasoning that in order for the black man to be strong, the black women has to be weak⁵⁸.

The liberation of men should not have to come out of the submissiveness of women. Instead, it should be achieved together for the improvement of both male and female experiences. Frances Beale was not the only one to believe male and female should be striving for justice together.

Mary Ann Weathers' essay "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as Revolutionary Force"⁵⁹ states "women's

⁵⁷ Frances Beale, "Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Women Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Cole Beverly, and Johnnetta B. Cole (New York: New Press, 1955), 145-156.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁵⁹ Mary Ann Weathers, "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as Revolutionary Force," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American*

liberation should be considered as a strategy for an eventual tie-up with the entire revolutionary movement consisting of women, men and children.”⁶⁰ She stated that women’s demands for safety while riding the bus meant that men and children would have the same applicable rights in safe and harassment free transportation. Demands for better employment, desegregated schools, and public places would benefit everyone around them and make their communities better for future generations. Weathers concluded, “let it be clearly understood that black women’s liberation is not antimale; any such sentiment or interpretation as such cannot be tolerated. It must be taken clearly for what it is—pro-human for all peoples.”⁶¹

Other movement historians, Patricia Haden, Donna Middleton, and Patricia Robinson describe the situation of African American women in society in their essay “A Historical and Critical Essay for Black Women.”⁶² They state “we are separated from black men in the same way that white women have been separated from white men. But are even less valued by white and black males because we are not white. The American Dream is white and male when examined symbolically. We are the exact opposite—black and female.”⁶³ Their feelings of being left out and of feeling that they were not worthy enough to be considered part of society is partly the reason for their political actions during the Civil Rights period. Women knew that they needed to be recognized as equal members of society, not just by the members of their African American communities, but also amongst the white members of society. Their political activism provided an

Women Feminist Thought,” ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Cole Beverly, and Johnnetta B. Cole (New York: New Press, 1995), 157-162.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 158.

⁶¹ Ibid., 159.

⁶² Patricia Haden, Donna Middleton, and Patricia Robinson, “A Historical and Critical Essay for Black Women,” in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Women Feminist Thought*,” ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Cole Beverly, and Johnnetta B. Cole (New York: New Press, 1995), 175-184.

⁶³ Ibid., 179.

opportunity to demonstrate just how able and capable women were at bringing about drastic changes.

The way Civil Rights history is remembered today is a neat and progressive version of the story. The history most people know is Rosa Parks sat on a bus and Martin Luther King was the mastermind behind everything else. When the true story is there were many women who came before Rosa Parks who worked hard to attain rights they knew every human deserved regardless of race, color, and gender. The experiences of female activists like Anne Moody and Daisy Bates testify that the Civil Rights Movement was a product of the efforts of women who worked so hard in the years leading up to the Civil Rights Era. The fabled, misinformed, progressive and national redemption Civil Rights history we have today helps us understand why the stories of thousands of women are slowly being forgotten. Women deserve to be recognized and their socio-political work included and analyzed as part of the Civil Rights Movement. The misinformation and the patriarchal view that historians have given history must end so that the stories of women may be exposed and brought back into historical discourses. Only then can the unacknowledged stories of thousands of men, women, and young people give a complete understanding of the role everyone played in the past and can play in the future. The history we should be highlighting moving forward is one that tells “why the discomfort is part of the truth we need,” one in “which we know the truth about ourselves collectively, not one in which we tell pleasant lies about ourselves.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), xvii.

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