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some were beaten by policemen and many were thrown against buildings by high pressure water hoses. Yet, the young shouted out, "The police can't stop us now. Even Bull Connor can't stop us now." The brilliant scholar and activist, Vincent Harding, reports that many of the young people enjoyed bathing and wading in the water sprayed at them by "Bull" Connor forces. The young people shouted to the firemen, "We'll be back tomorrow with soap." The segregationists in Birmingham were forced to grant the demands of King and the movement because the jails were full and the merchants were losing money because the young people went into their store, sat down, and sang freedom songs. Dr. King concluded that, "it is clear that the introduction of Birmingham's children into the campaign was one of the wisest moves we made. It brought a new impact to the crusade, and the impetus that we needed to win the struggle."

Challenge for Today's Youth

Young people throughout the black community today need to be aware of what their counterparts did during the 1950s and 1960s. The young people proved that they were capable of engaging in creative protest to free their parents, teachers,

and themselves. In many ways the young led the "grown-ups" during the civil rights movement. By looking back, young people should come to realize that they need not be filled with despair, hope and helplessness. History teaches that young people can still be the masters of their destinies. In the process, they can change the world.

Black Women and the Civil Rights Movement

By Aldon Morris

Black women were crucial to the rise and success of the civil rights movement. This fact has often been overlooked because of the visibility of male leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, Jr., and Malcolm X. Nevertheless, black women assumed both leadership and behind-the-scenes roles in the movement. This is not surprising because black women have always been in the forefront of the black liberation struggle. The brutal oppression of Afro-Americans has always prevented black women from being confined exclusively to the role of housewife. They worked in the fields during slavery and they suffered the sting of the whip. At the same time, women like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth worked fearlessly on the Underground Railroad freeing their brothers and sisters. Following slavery, black women organized campaigns against lynching while they cooked, scrubbed, ironed and mothered for white women. These were the circumstances that produced strong determined women who never knew what it meant to be placed on a "female" pedestal.




Rosa Parks

Like their historical counterparts, contemporary black women were prominent figures of the modern civil rights movement. Some led and organized dangerous demonstrations, making it clear that they were ready to go to jail and even die for liberation. Others worked the typewriters and mimeograph machines, turning out those communications crucial to the mobilization of the grassroots constituency. Many black women risked jobs and the lives of their families by opening their homes to civil rights activists in the heat of battle. Others erected "citizenship" schools and "freedom" schools in beauty shops and backyards where they taught thousands of illiterate people how to read, write and struggle for freedom. There were also black women who challenged the men in the movement to abandon sexism so that total freedom could emerge within the movement, making the struggle against injustice in the larger society even more powerful and effective. As Fred Shuttlesworth, a great leader of the movement, put it, "the women made it real."

To capture the spirit and dedication of the women who propelled the civil rights movement, the following paragraphs will take a brief look at the contributions of Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, Septima Clark and Diane Nash-Bevel. These women, like so many others, played paramount roles in the movement.

Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks is the mother of the modern civil rights movement. Without her actions, the world might not have been privileged to witness the famous year-long bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955-56 and the rise of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s brilliant leadership. On December 1, 1955 Mrs. Parks — a quiet, dignified black resident of Montgomery — defied local laws by refusing to give her bus seat to a white man. Shortly after Mrs. Parks' arrest, the black community of Montgomery organized a mass boycott of the segregated buses. This development is considered to be the starting point of the modern civil rights movement.

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