



## **Invisible but effective African: American female civil rights leaders: A specific focus on Dorothy Irene height and Rosa parks**

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### **Abstract**

Despite the provisions of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the American Constitution following abolition of slavery, meant to give Blacks equal protection under the law, the latter have been kept under a new form of domination by their former white masters; the situation became lawfully dramatic with Jim Crow which openly set the freed Blacks as separate citizens in the United States of America. The then segregation laws have generated frustrations in the black communities which lead black Americans, men and women, to join and fight for equal opportunities, better job opportunities, for good education and housing, in short, for civil rights. But in the process, men have been more visible as it was not conceivable having women (even whites) leading any social or political movement. Although men held the majority of leadership positions in the civil rights organizations, African American women were also active leaders at all levels of the Civil Rights Movement. Only recently have historians sought to explore the contributions of women during the civil rights struggle. Though there were hundreds of black women who devoted themselves to securing rights for African-Americans, a few of them have been considered in the frame of the present study; they include Ella Baker, Dorothy Irene Height, Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer.

**Keywords:** Dorothy, Irene, Fifteenth, amendments, slavery

## **1. Introduction: Theoretical framework of the study**

### **1.1. Historical context**

The Civil Rights Movement was a struggle for social justice that took place mainly during the 1950s and early 1960s for blacks to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. The Civil War had officially abolished slavery, but it didn't end discrimination against blacks, they continued to endure the devastating effects of racism especially in the south. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, African Americans had had enough of prejudice and violence against them and, they along with many whites, mobilized and began an unprecedented fight for equality. During the reconstruction period, many blacks took on leadership roles like never before, they held public office and sought legislative changes for equality and the right to vote. To marginalized Blacks and keep them separate from White and erase the progress they had made during the reconstruction, the Jim Crow laws were established in the south beginning in the late century. Blacks couldn't use the same public facilities as whites; nor could they live in the same areas, go to the same schools, get married with whites. Most blacks couldn't vote because they were unable to pass voter literacy tests.

On December 1, 1955, a 42-year-old woman named Rosa Parks found a seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus after work. Segregation laws at the time stated blacks must sit in designated seats at the back of the bus, and Parks had complied. When a white man got on the bus and couldn't find a seat in the white section at the front of the bus, the bus driver instructed Parks and three other blacks to give up their seats. Parks refused and was arrested. Shocked by the arrestment of Rosa Parks, a boycott of

the Montgomery buses was started, thanks to some women organized under the "Women's Political Council", led by Jo Ann Robinson, that gathered all the black community against segregation in public buses. On Monday December 5, more than 95 % of blacks refused to take public buses, that evening, 6000 blacks gathered near to Holt Street's Baptist church and formed the "Montgomery Improvement Association" (MIA) and a young pastor, Martin Luther King Jr had been chosen as leader. From then, many initiatives were taken which included Blacks and Whites, but more specifically men and women. Although Martin Luther King jr and other blacks men were on front lines of the movements, many invisible black women played substantial roles in the gains that soon came out.

### **1.2 Objective, method and literary theory**

African American women played significant roles at all levels of the Civil Rights Movements; yet they have remained for long mostly invisible to the larger public. Beyond Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, and Daisy Bates, most women, black and white alike, it would be hard-pressed to name other women leaders, though there were many at the community local and national levels. The purpose of this study is to give recognition to those women in general through a sample representative of them, and lift up the voices of African American women leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. Through the narrative inquiry method, information has been gathered by reading books, documents, articles. The websites like goggle and Wikipedia have also been referred to, while combining history, sociology, and biography to describe

the key characteristics of those African American women leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. The literary theory adapted to the present study is feminist criticism. The Feminist literary theory focuses on society's beliefs about the nature and function of women in the world. These critics consider gender aspects such as: sexual stereotypes including men as oppressors and women in subservient positions, women overcoming oppression, patriarchal versus. matriarch systems, intimacy in relationships, independence and dependence, images of women's bodies, language differences between women and men, the psyches of women, and the culture that shapes women (Moore 119). A feminist interpretation of "Hansel and Gretel" might claim that both the stepmother and the witch wanted to destroy the children because they were rescuing them from a society that demeaned females. They might note the even though Hansel is considered the clever one, he ends up with a trail of bread crumbs, lives in a cage, and has to be saved by a sister who is "man enough" to push the witch in the oven. Among many, five main focus Questions of the feminist theory have been essential in the present study: How are female characters portrayed? Do the portrayals reinforce or undermine sexual stereotypes? How important are the female characters and how individual in their own right? In their relationships with men, how are they treated? Are they given equal status, or ignored, or patronized, or demeaned? Considering these above questions, has helped grasped the overall position and role of black women in the gains from the Civil Rights Movements.

### 1.3 literature review

This section focuses on the published documents by and about African American women leaders during the Civil Rights Movements. This review then explores what is known about black women's literary contributions in the Civil Rights Movement. The rich history of women involved in the Civil Rights Movement indicates that there are many stories that remain to be told and to be told again from different perspectives<sup>[1]</sup>, Among the biographies and memoirs of individual women that have enriched the scholarly study in the area of black women's leadership are Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power* (1992), Dorothy I. Height's *Open Wide the Freedom Gates: A Memoir* (2003), Charlayne Hunter-Gault's *In My Place* (1992), and Winson Hudson and Constance Curry's *Mississippi Harmony: Memoirs of a Freedom Fighter* (2002). In addition to the stories of individuals, there are books about groups of activists, such as those about Spelman (Lefever, 2005) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Holsaert *et al.*, 2010) and those of community engagement (e.g., Morris, 2000)<sup>[2]</sup>. Charles Payne presents in *Men Led, but Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta*<sup>[3]</sup>. "an argument on why black female activists were not on the forefront of the struggle. He noted that "Women created the movement, made people feel a part of it, and did the everyday work upon which

most things depended, while men made the public announcements, and negotiated with management." Women performed more psychological, cultural or social roles, like mobilizing existing social networks around the organizing goals, mediating conflicts, coordinating activity, and conveying information. Although his study on movement participation of women in the Mississippi Delta demonstrated an over participation of black women in the organization, they all performed the social, cultural and psychological roles behind the scenes of the organization. This point of view is also shared by Janet Dewart Bell in her dissertation entitled: "*African American Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: A Narrative Inquiry*"; in her study, she argues that African American women were active leaders at all levels of the Civil Rights Movement, though the larger society, the civil rights establishment, and sometimes even the women themselves failed to acknowledge their significant leadership contributions<sup>[4]</sup>. Yvette Marie Alex-Assensoh says in *Black and Multiracial Politics in America* (2000) that African American women received little recognition due to the fact that African American women remained "marginal and peripheral to the political and social order."<sup>[5]</sup> Black women were then confronted by both a gender and a race problem in the American society. In addition, Martha Lott in "The Relationship Between the "Invisibility" of African American Women in the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s and Their Portrayal in Modern Film" says

This article contends that the media's scant but negative coverage of women activists along with male leaders, such as Malcolm X's attitude toward African American women during the period of the movement, is the reason why ultimately African American women activists received lack of recognition for their involvement in the movement.

Through this above quote, it appears that if African American males have given more importance to their women during the Civil Rights Movement, the latter would have been more visible as leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Hole and Levine in *Rebirth of feminist*, speaking to SNCC women, have said: "you are allowed to participate and speak, only, the men stop listening when you do"<sup>[6]</sup>.

## 2. Global challenges for women activists during the civil rights movement

### 2.1 The global gender issue

#### 2.1.1 Gender consideration in global American

Womanhood in the American society during the 1950s and 1960s is characterized by the stereotypical view of the quintessential white middle-class housewife who moved to the suburbs and stayed at home to take care of the family<sup>[7]</sup>. The man was expected to work out for family survival while the woman took care of the household and the children. This was the same in the African American community. Even though African American women have historically worked both in- and outside the home

<sup>1</sup> Bell, Janet Dewart, (2015). "African American Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: A Narrative Inquiry" Dissertations & Theses. 59

<sup>2</sup> Bell, Janet Dewart, "African American Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: A Narrative Inquiry" (2015). Dissertations & Theses. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Crawford, Vicki L., Rouse, Jacqueline Anne, and Woods, Barbara (ed.), (1990) "Men Led, but Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965* (Indiana University Press, 1990)

<sup>4</sup> Bell, Janet Dewart, (2015). "African American Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: A Narrative Inquiry" Dissertations & Theses. 110

<sup>5</sup> Alex-Assensoh, Yvette Marie and J. Hanks, Lawrence, *Black and Multiracial Politics in America* (New York University Press, 2000) 377.

<sup>6</sup> Hole, Judith and Levine, Ellen (1971) *Rebirth of feminist*. New York.

<sup>7</sup> Meyerowitz, Joanne, Jay, (1994) *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, Temple University Press.

and engaged in public and political activities, the primacy of women's domestic roles was also emphasized among the black middle class. A traditional gender relationship ensured stability after the troubled years of the Second World War. Elaine Tyler May's study of families in the 1950s, *Homeward Bound*, affirmed that white middle-class Americans' families were secured when women were domesticated and subordinated<sup>[8]</sup>. Moreover, the cult of domesticity, a term invented by feminist scholars in the late 1960s, restricted many American women to a life defined by their role as homemakers, mothers, and wives. So, in the 1960s American women learned that truly feminine women did not admire careers, higher educations or political rights. They had to give up the independence and the opportunities that feminists fought for years before. However, while many women fitted the stereotype of traditional homemaker, many others did not. Not all were white, middleclass, married, and suburban, neither were they wholly domestic. Thus, besides the popular assumption that women had to stay home and take care of the family, a subtle shift in government policy encouraged women to take jobs during the 1950s.

### 2.1.2 The gender issue in the black community

African American women, like White women, faced many societal difficulties that prevented them from living as freely as they hoped. Particularly in the South, patriarchy structured white and black women's experiences. Due to the strict traditional gender stratification within the black community, "women obeyed and supported their husbands, looked up to them as leaders, and did not even take credit even if it was offered<sup>[9]</sup>." However, during their participation in social movements, black women have always expressed their hope in the possibility of progress. They have been active in the fight for racial, and gender equality but often "found themselves positioned between the two struggles<sup>[10]</sup>."

## 2.2. Gender inequality in the civil rights movement

### 2.2.1 Sexism within the civil rights organizations

During the Civil Rights manifestations, African American women faced a double burden: first for being Blacks, then for being women; therefore they had to confront many barriers to achieve first-class citizenship. Men had a higher status in society, making them the ultimate threat for power. Women were less viewed as threats; therefore men overshadowed them particularly in political roles and events. The sexism that was present in the Civil Rights Movement was a continuation of the oppressive mentality that existed in the larger American culture, which was a white male dominated culture. Therefore, to safeguard the political, educational, social, and economic rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination, Moorfield Storey, Mary White Ovington, and W. E. B. Du Bois formed the NAACP in 1909. The female members eventually founded groups such as the National Woman's Suffrage Association, and National Association of Colored Women. Another civil rights organization that was relatively open for women was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

(SNCC). African-American women activists played a major role in its founding and development despite the traditional definitions of sex roles.

### 2.2.2 Class conflicts in the civil rights movement

Women's positions and power in the Civil Rights Movement depended for a large part on class, and the region they grew up in. Most black grew up in the plantation economy with its sharecropping system and repressive mechanisms of social control. "Those who grew up in the South experienced exploitation at a very young age<sup>[11]</sup>. The oppressive share cropping system was designed to maintain economic imbalance in favor of white people. The system kept Blacks poor and whites economically secure. The sharecropping system kept blacks tied to the land they worked thus this influenced female participation in the Civil Rights Movements. Due to sexism and patriarchy in the black community, the women had to devote the rest of the time to social roles that were expected of them, such as taking care of the family and the household, and being active in church or social organizations. This meant that all the civil rights activities, such as networking, building cooperatives, maintaining social contacts, and the registration of voters, had to take place within these confines. This situation was even truer when black women got into conflict with the dangerous and violent white Southern society. Anyone who joined the Civil Rights Movement had to be aware that participation could place him or herself, and every adult in his or her family at risk. Female activists often had to endure severe reprisals like beatings and sexual harassments in jail.

Finally, class also played an important role within the black community since social values were associated with class. Most black women came from a lower socio-economic class. Those from the middleclass were more likely to be pushed into the traditional visible role, since political respectability required middle-class dignity.

## 3. Engagement of the two African: American women in the civil rights movement

### 3.1 Dorothy Irene Height: Godmother of the Civil Rights Movement

Dorothy Irene Height was known as the "Godmother of the Civil Rights Movement" because of her early vision about confronting segregation, and also for her extensive involvement in the fight for civil rights since the 1930s. She was born on March 24th, 1912 in Richmond, Virginia. When she was five years old, she moved with her family to Rankin, Pennsylvania, a steel town in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, where she graduated from Rankin High School in 1929. While in Rankin, she attended racially integrated schools. In high school, Height showed great talent as an orator. While in high school, Height became socially and politically active by participating in anti-lynching campaigns<sup>[12]</sup>. On one instance when Height was participating in class, a white principal denied Height the right to conduct her class in a song they were being taught. However, Height's fellow students supported and

<sup>8</sup>- Meyerowitz, Joanne, Jay, Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960 (Temple University Press, 1994)

<sup>9</sup>- McNair Barnett, Bernice, (1993) "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class" in *Gender and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 2 175.

<sup>10</sup>- Robnett Belinda, (1997) *How Long? How Long?* Page 8.

<sup>11</sup>- Cha-Jua,(2007) "The "Long Movement" as Vampire," 281

<sup>12</sup>- <https://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkID=219472&clcid=0x409>

upheld her through the situation<sup>[13]</sup>. When Height was a teenager, she marched alongside many other individuals who were involved in protesting and radicalization in Times Square who were proclaiming the statement "stop the lynching"<sup>[16]</sup>. While progressing in her skills as an orator, it took her to the national oratory competition. Heights won the event, and in return she was awarded a college scholarship. Height received a scholarship from the Elks, which helped her to attend college<sup>[14]</sup>. She was admitted to Barnard College in 1929, but upon arrival was denied entrance because the school had an unwritten policy of admitting only two black students per year. She enrolled instead at New York University, earning an undergraduate degree in 1932 and a master's degree in educational psychology the following year. She pursued further postgraduate work at Columbia University and the New York School of Social Work (the predecessor of the Columbia University School of Social Work)<sup>[15]</sup>. While Height began her career in New York, she took up a position as a social worker and assistant executive director for the Harlem YWCA. In the YWCA, Height worked by raising public awareness for the victimization of many colored female domestic workers that helped change the climate of that profession among women<sup>[16]</sup>. Height is openly acknowledged as the first person and woman who was a leader during the civil rights movement to recognize inequality for women and African Americans concurrently, as the two concerns had been viewed separately prior to Height's revitalization. Height's career operations touched base on involving the African American mission globally to connect the movement in the United States to other places around the world. Height took part in multiple global activities such as conferences, official delegations, and leadership training sessions. Height participated in the Liberia Watch Program and worked within the ranks of leadership. Height began working for Liberia in 1955<sup>[17]</sup>. In 1957, Height was named president of the National Council of Negro Women, a position she held until 1997. During the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, she organized "Wednesdays in Mississippi"<sup>[18]</sup>, which brought together black and white women from the North and South to create a dialogue of understanding. Height's background of being a prize winning orator allowed her to serve as an effective middleman through creating a dialogue of understanding between unfamiliar parties.

Starting in 1963, Height assembled a team representing the NCNW which would journey to Selma, Alabama and would assess the state of the area's conditions. The group Height had put together was made up of two colored women, Height along with Dr. Dorothy Ferebee, and two white women, Cowen and Shirley Smith who served as an executive director for the National Women's Committee for civil rights. Even though an act like this proved to be risky at the time, the caravan of four women rode together racially integrated and arrived at a colored First Baptist Church. In Height's time there, her and her group would congregate with the adolescents and talk at a church rally aimed at the civil rights movement. Height's prominence in the Civil

Rights Movement and unmatched knowledge in organizing, meant she was regularly called to give advice on political issues. Eleanor Roosevelt, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Lyndon B. Johnson often sought her counsel.

### 3.2. Rosa Parks: The mother of the civil rights movement

Activist Rosa Parks became a symbol of the mass movement against racism when she broke the segregation law by refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. Her arrest triggered civil rights actions in the United States, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott that lasted 381 days. This event is generally seen as the beginning of a decade-long battle against segregation that mobilized millions and won the support of workers all over the world. Her action fundamentally changed America's view of the rights of black people and is considered as the start of years of successful nonviolent resistance to southern Jim Crow. Although she was not a political leader, strategist or thinker, Rosa Parks was an activist who played an important symbolic role in the early years of the Civil Rights Movement<sup>[19]</sup>. Parks was born as Rosa Louise McCauley in Tuskegee, Alabama on February 4, 1913, to Leona Edwards, a teacher, and James McCauley, a carpenter, and grew up in a world in which oppression of blacks was still a regular occurrence. Her family exposed her to a sense of black pride so that Parks was aware that "we were not free"<sup>[20]</sup>. Rosa McCauley attended rural schools until the age of eleven. As a student at the Industrial School for Girls in Montgomery, she took academic and vocational courses. Parks went on to a laboratory school set up by the Alabama State Teachers College for Negroes for secondary education, but dropped out in order to care for her grandmother and later her mother, after they became ill<sup>[21]</sup>.

In 1932, Rosa married Raymond Parks, a barber from Montgomery. He was a member of the NAACP, which at the time was collecting money to support the defense of the Scottsboro Boys, a group of black men falsely accused of raping two white women. Rosa took numerous jobs, ranging from domestic worker to hospital aide. At her husband's urging, she finished her high school studies in 1933, at a time when less than 7% of African Americans had a high-school diploma. In December 1943, Parks became active in the civil rights movement, joined the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP, and was elected secretary at a time when this was considered a woman's job. She continued as secretary until 1957.

After working all day, Parks boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus, a General Motors Old Look bus belonging to the Montgomery City Lines<sup>[22]</sup>, around 6 p.m., Thursday, December 1, 1955, in downtown Montgomery. She paid her fare and sat in an empty seat in the first row of back seats reserved for blacks in the "colored" section. Near the middle of the bus, her row was directly behind the ten seats reserved for white passengers. The driver noted that two or three white passengers were standing, as the front of the bus had filled to capacity. He moved the "colored"

<sup>13</sup>- Skutch, Jan, "Civil rights leaders, beacon for blacks' women Dorothy Height dies" Savannah Morning News. Retrieved November 10, 2019.

<sup>14</sup>- Hine Darlene Clark, Hine William C., and Harrold Stanley, "Chapter 21" *The African American Odyssey* Combined Edition. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2010. 596.

<sup>15</sup>- Dorothy I Height: Chair and President Emerita, National Council of Negro women, Archived, June 18, 2012, at the wayback Machine, NCNW.75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Retrieved November 19, 2019.

<sup>16</sup>- "Obituaries: Dorothy Height". Fellowship New York

<sup>17</sup>- <https://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkID=219472&clcid=0x409>

<sup>18</sup>- Evans, Ben (April 20, 2010). "Dorothy Height, civil rights activist, dies at 98 associated press". Retrieved November 20, 2019.

<sup>19</sup>- Stroud, 1997

<sup>20</sup>- Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, page 4.

<sup>21</sup>- Shraff, Anne, *Rosa Parks: Tired of giving in*, Enslow. P. 23-27.

<sup>22</sup>- "Archived copy" (pdf) on September 6, 2015

Section sign behind Parks and demanded that four black people give up their seats in the middle section so that the white passengers could sit. And the other three people moved, but Rosa didn't. Parks moved, but toward the window seat; she did not get up to move to the Redesignated colored section. So the driver called the police to arrest Parks. Parks was charged with a violation of Chapter 6, Section 11 segregation law of the Montgomery City code, although technically she had not taken a white-only seat; she had been in a colored section. Edgar Nixon, president of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP and leader of the Pullman Porters Union, and her friend Clifford Durr bailed Parks out of jail that evening. Parks played an important part in raising international awareness of the plight of African Americans and the civil rights struggle. In 1957, Raymond and Rosa Parks left Montgomery for Hampton, Virginia; mostly because she was unable to find work. Parks died of natural causes on October 24, 2005, at the age of 92, in her apartment on the east side of Detroit.

#### **4. Gains from the civil rights movement**

##### **4.1. Social: economic gains of African: American women from the civil rights movement**

One of the most important gains from the Civil Rights Movement for women, either blacks or whites was the full equality of the sexes. In 1968 NOW issued a Bill of Rights <sup>[23]</sup>, which they had adopted at their 1967 national conference, advocating the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, enforcement of the prohibitions against sex discrimination in employment under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, maternity leave rights in employment and in Social Security benefits, tax deduction for home and child care expenses for working parents, equal pay for equal work, child day care centers, equal and non-gender-segregated education, equal job training opportunities and allowances for women in poverty, and the right of women to control their reproductive lives <sup>[24]</sup>. Advocacy of the Equal Rights Amendment was also an important issue to NOW. The amendment had three primary objectives, which were:

"Section 1. Equality of Rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex. Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article. Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification." <sup>[25]</sup>. Abortion being an individual woman's choice has come into the forefront since the Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. The decision of the court was that it ultimately was the woman's choice in reproduction. However, according to the National Organization for Women, decisions following the 1973 landmark case had substantially limited this right, abortion methods are banned after 12 weeks of pregnancy.

##### **4.2. Political gains of African: American women from the civil rights movement**

Before the fight for Civil Rights, Women had always been relegated to the second place and were never associated in

decision making; they were excluded from political life. The exclusion of women from political arena was based on culture and even laws. Early women movement started in 1840 with Elizabeth Cady. Then feminist movement spread all over the world. After the abolishment of slavery in 1865, while African-American obtained the right to vote in 1870, African-American women were still unable to participate in political elections. It was during the 1890s that women's suffrage efforts began. During the period, African-American women were widely minimized or ignored due to racism from white suffragists or general sexism. Though women obtained the right to vote in the United States in 1920, women of color still ran into obstacles. Some faced tests that required them to interpret the constitution in order to vote <sup>[26]</sup>. Others were threatened with physical violence, false charges and other extreme danger to prevent voting. Women leaders such as like Sojourner Truth, Ella Baker, Dorothy Height, Fannie Lou Hamer and Rosa Parks, were involved in the civil rights movement to fight not only against blacks' segregation but also fight for gender equity, for women integration into the government decisions making. Thanks to their fight, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was put into place. It outlawed any discriminatory acts to prevent people from voting.

However, despite the 14<sup>th</sup>, the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> amendments, discrimination against women did not stop in whether education, jobs, or politics. Although women could vote, they rarely ran for or held public offices and they continued to be underrepresented in political fields. For this, the civil rights act of 1964 prohibited discrimination against women.

There is no doubt that women have made great progress in several domains including politic since the abolishment of slavery. According to the center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, currently 13 African-American women serve in the 112<sup>th</sup> congress, with 239 state legislators serving nationwide. The paths to public office for women in the African-American community have differed from men and others groups, such as women's organizations, rallies, and fundraisers. Tough African-American women have run for presidential nomination in several campaigns, many have been labeled "non-viable" due partly to their party affiliation, i.e., Charlene Mitchell in 1968; Lenora Fulani in 1988 and Cynthia Mckinney in 2008.

In 1993, Carol Moseley Braun became the first African-American woman to be elected to the senate, Condoleezza Rice became the first African-American women in 2005 to serve as Secretary of State and nowadays, we can see African-American women serving in every fields of activities.

#### **Discussion and conclusion**

Black women from all layers of society were involved in the Civil Rights Movement. The so called 'sisters in struggle' consisted of sharecroppers, domestic and service workers, school teachers, college professors, housewives, beauticians, students, and office secretaries. They shared their resources, talents and skills, such as courage, strength, and patience to form a strong sisterhood for their work in the movement. They crossed all barriers and classes.

<sup>23</sup>- "N.O.W. Bill of Rights, 1968". National Organization for Women. Archived from the original on 2012-11-14. Retrieved 2020-01-5 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Organization\\_for\\_Women](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Organization_for_Women)

<sup>24</sup>- "N.O.W. Bill of Rights, 1968". National Organization for Women. Archived from the original on 2012-11-14. Retrieved 2020-01-5 from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Organization\\_for\\_Women](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Organization_for_Women)

<sup>25</sup> Napikoski, Linda. "Equal Rights Amendment: Constitutional Equality and Justice for All?". About.com. Archived from the original on 2013-11-04. Retrieved 5<sup>th</sup> January 2020 from

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Organization\\_for\\_Women](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Organization_for_Women)

<sup>26</sup> African-American women in the struggle for the vote: 1850-1920, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. P 8.

Black women did not just fulfill traditional female roles of nurturing and caretaking; their contributions were not just limited to music, art and literature either. For example, Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat to a White person, Dorothy Height's influence on leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis and others, are so many examples of those black women's shares in the final gains from the Civil Rights Movements. Daisy Bates's struggle to integrate Little Rock Central High School, and JoAnn Robinson and the Women's Political Council's call for a citywide bus boycott and many more, all motivated and inspired the Civil Rights Movement. The two women considered here in the present study are then to be taken as a case study. There were so many women engaged in the claiming for equality, and they were major leaders, organizers, and strategists who helped to mold and shape the direction that the Movement would take. These African American women leaders used vision, grit, and fierce intelligence to take on tremendous challenges and develop leadership skills that fueled the Civil Rights Movement. They are history makers and transformative figures. Their actions have helped to make America the democratic and representative country it stands to be today.

It is then clear, black women in general, and Dorothy Irene Height and Rosa Parks in particular, have really contributed to the main civil rights organizations, but they were often forced to play invisible roles and suffered from a lack of recognition.

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