

Civil Rights Women: Seventy-three years predating Rosa Parks, a refined teacher sat in the first-class ladies' car on a train in Tennessee. When told to move to the smoker for niggers, she politely refused. She had a first-class ticket, was a lady, and planned to stay. Dragged to the dirty smoker as white passengers cheered, she got off at the next stop. Ida B. Wells was well within her rights. The Civil Rights Act of 1875 banned discrimination on public transportation. Wells filed a law suit and won. She sued in a repeat situation, won, and inspired others. Her disclosures about lynching began the nation's anti-lynching campaign.

The NAACP began as an interracial organization in 1908 when Mary Ovington, a white woman, hosted a dinner in New York organized and funded by whites. Ovington saw that over a third in positions were women, one was Ida B. Wells. The NAACP ceased being interracial in the 1930's, excluding Ovington from her civil rights work.

Pauli Murray attempted to break the color line in education at the University of North Carolina Law School in 1938, but was denied admission. As a Howard University Law School student in Washington, D. C., she organized a cafeteria sit-in. After four hours of orderly protest, the demonstrators were served. Civil rights were gained. But in 1944 people did not talk about this. The press ignored the story. Those courageous young blacks sitting-in at lunch counters in the 1960's were ahead of their time. Murray was two decades ahead of them.

In 1949, Jo Ann Robinson, who recently moved to Montgomery to accept a teaching position at Alabama State University, sat on a nearly empty bus. Ignoring the driver's order to move, she fled in terror as he came at her. The horror of that experience never left her and caused her to advocate for bus desegregation. Robinson wrote of a bus boycott to Montgomery's mayor in 1954 if abuse towards black passengers continued. The night of Parks' arrest in 1955, Robinson printed 52,500 flyers calling for a boycott urging blacks to stay off the busses. Whites joined blacks and shut down the public transit system. Thirteen months later racial segregation on public transportation throughout all of the South was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. Parks and Robinson's initial actions ignited the organized Civil Rights movement.

Daisy Bates and her husband started a black newspaper in the 1940's addressing issues as slums, police brutality, legal injustices, hiring discrimination, and school desegregation. In 1957, as president of the Arkansas NAACP, Bates accompanied nine teenagers to the entrance of Central High School to desegregate Little Rock's school system. They were blocked by the National Guard called out by Governor Orval Faubus. Faubus was cited for contempt and federal troops were ordered to escort the students into school. A white woman representing "Southern Christian women" warned Bates to withdraw from the students or be destroyed. Bates stayed. Her paper's advertisers, threatened with attack, canceled their ads and forced Bates to shut down her paper but not her activism.

Fannie Lou Hamer began her civil rights work in 1962 when, at age 45, she attended her first political rally and learned she had the right to vote. Transformed into a leader, she was bused with other blacks to try to register. Afterwards, she was fired from her job of eighteen years, her boss angry she tried to register. Her husband and daughter lost their jobs and were arrested, she was shot at, police entered her house without a warrant, but she didn't stop her activism. Because blacks were barred from the Democratic Party she helped form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. They established a Washington office and were endorsed by several states. Hamer co-chaired a MFDP delegation to the 1964 Democratic National Convention and spoke before the Credentials Committee on national TV challenging the all-white Mississippi delegation. They had covert support from Lyndon Johnson, but, to preserve his presidential nomination, overtly worked against their convention participation. She met with Hubert Humphrey who supported them in his heart, but could not jeopardize a chance to be on the ticket with Johnson. She questioned his position verses the lives of 400,000 black citizens. Unsuccessful

at being seated, she succeeded when the party pledged not to seat delegations at the 1968 convention that excluded black Americans.

In the 1963 March on Washington, not one activist woman marched down Constitution Avenue with the men. Not one woman spoke. Not one woman went to the White House with the men to meet President Kennedy. Black civil rights activist women faced double discrimination, fighting for racial rights with whites and for gender justice with men in the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered ardent speeches as he spoke the voice given to the Civil Rights Movement by Ida B. Wells, Mary Ovington, Pauli Murray, Rosa Parks, Jo Ann Robinson, Daisy Bates, Fannie Lou Hamer, and countless unheralded women of the Civil Rights Movement.

Sources: *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson; *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970*, Lynne Olson; *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-1965*, Eds. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods; and *Pauli Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet*, Pauli Murray.