

The Role of Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement

Women were detrimental to the success of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, but have mostly received only scant attention. Some of them will be introduced on this handout. Many others (including white women who fought for civil rights) will unfortunately have to be left out.

Rosa Louise McCauley Parks "The mother of the freedom movement"¹ *1913 † 2005

- 1913** Born in Tuskegee, AL, to James (carpenter) and Leona (teacher) McCauley
 - 1925** Attends Montgomery Industrial School for Girls, Booker T. Washington High School and the laboratory school at Alabama State Teachers College for Negroes → drops out after 10th grade for family reasons (went back to school for her high school degree in 1933)
 - 1926** Joins the African Methodist Episcopal Church which would remain an important part of her life
 - 1932** Marries Raymond Parks, a Montgomery barber
 - 1944** Starts to work at integrated Maxwell Field Air Base
 - 1943** Joins *NAACP*² becoming secretary (in 1949 Youth Group Advisor), and the Montgomery Voters League
 - 1955** Attends workshops at *Highlander Folk School* (HFS) in Monteagle, Tennessee
 - 1955** Is placed in police custody after having refused give up her seat to a white man in a bus. This set in motion the Montgomery Bus Boycott, propelling young Martin Luther King Jr. to national fame
 - 1956** Looses her job and receives death threats → moves to Detroit with her husband in 1957
 - 1965** Staff assistant in the Detroit office of U.S. Representative John Coyers; retires in 1988
 - 1977** Founds the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development (still active today)
 - 2005** After her death at 92 her casket is placed at the U.S. Capitol's rotunda for 2 days; flags flown half-staff
- Selected Awards and Honors:** Martin Luther King Jr. Award (1980); Presidential Medal of Freedom (1996); Congressional Gold Medal (1999); Rosa Parks Library and Museum (2000); Statue at National Statuary Hall (2005)



3

Jo Ann Gibson Robinson *1912 † 1992

- 1912** Robinson is born as the youngest of twelve children in Culloden, GA
- 1934** Graduates from Fort Valley State College to become a teacher, marries Wilbur Robinson
- ????** Receives an M.A. in English from Atlanta University and works on a doctoral program
- 1949** Moves to Montgomery, AL to work at English Department of Alabama State College
- 1950** Joins Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and the *Women's Political Council* (WPC; founded in 1946 by Mary Fair Burks) becoming its president in 1951
- 1955** Initiates and sustains the Montgomery Bus Boycott with the *WPC*
- 1960** Resigns from teaching post at Alabama State College, moves to Louisiana to teach
- 1961** Moves to Los Angeles to teach at public schools; retires in 1976
- 1992** Dies at 79; has been involved in several women's organizations in her later years



4

Septima Poinsette Clark *1898 † 1987

- 1908** Born to Peter (born a slave) and Victoria (raised in Haiti) Poinsette in Charleston, SC
- 1916** Graduates from Avery Institute in Charleston, takes state examination for teachers
Becomes teacher on John's Island; fights for equalization of teachers' salaries
- 1919** Becomes teacher at Avery Institute, joins the *NAACP*
- 1920** Marries Nerie Clark (sailor), move to Dayton, OH with their two children (one dies)
- 1925** Nerie dies, Clark moves to Columbia, SC where she remains until 1947
- 1935** Sends her son to live with his grandparents for financial reasons
- 1937** Enrolls at Atlanta University (taking a class by W.E.B. Du Bois) and Columbia University
- 1942** Receives a B.A. from Benedict College and an M.A. from Hampton Institute (1945)
- 1947** Works with Charleston's *YWCA*⁶, attends workshops at *HFS*, serves as membership chair of *NAACP*
- 1956** Fired as teacher due to affiliation with civil rights → recruited as director of workshops at *HFS*
- 1961** Becomes the *SCLC*'s⁷ Director of Education and Training (recruited by Martin Luther King Jr.)
- 1971** Leaves *SCLC* but remains active in civil rights
- 1975** Elected member of the Charleston School Board (that had fired her in 1956)
- 1979** Awarded the Living Legacy Award by Jimmy Carter



5

¹ U.S. Congress. *Public Law 106-26* (1999), <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-106publ26/pdf/PLAW-106publ26.pdf> (accessed September 3, 2011), 1.

² *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*

³ http://www.myclassiclyrics.com/artist_biographies/images/Rosa-Parks-Biography.jpg (accessed September 1, 2011).

⁴ http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/media_content/m-5148.jpg (accessed August 30, 2011).

⁵ <http://talesfromthelaboratory.typepad.com/.a/6a00d8341c62a953ef0133f520000a970b-800wi> (accessed September 1, 2011).

⁶ *Young Women's Christian Association*

⁷ *Southern Christian Leadership Conference*

Ella Josephine Baker “*My theory is, strong people don’t need strong leaders.*”⁸ *1903 † 1986

- 1903** Born in Norfolk, VA, to Georgianna (teacher & church worker) and Blake (waiter) Baker
- 1927** Graduates from Shaw University in Raleigh, NC; moves to New York City to work for NAACP’s newspaper *The Crisis* and the *Negro National News*
- 1930** Helps form *Young Negroes Cooperative League*, becomes National Director
- 1935** Director of the *Works Progress Administration*’s Consumer Education Project (New Deal Program)
- 1938** Field organizer with NAACP, travels all over the South organizing new chapters
- 1942** Assistant Field Secretary and National Director of Branches (1943) of the NAACP
- 1946** Resigns as National Director of Branches, becomes councilor of youth program and president of New York branch of NAACP, works with *National Urban League* (NUL)
- 1954** Founds *In Friendship* with Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison
- 1947** Helps to found the SCLC, becomes Interim Executive Director, creates and edits its newsletter *THE CRUSADE*
- 1958** Organizes the SCLC’s ‘Crusade for Citizenship’
- 1960** Helps to found SNCC¹⁰, leaves SCLC to work for SNCC
- 1962** Works with *Southern Conference Education Fund* until 1967
- 1986** Until her death she remained an activist, e.g. fighting for Angela Davis and against Apartheid



Afro-German activism started off in the 1980s with the so-called *Neue Schwarze Bewegung* (New Black Movement). Local initiatives were founded under the name of *Initiative Schwarze Deutsche* (Initiative Black Germans; www.isdonline.de) to make Afro-Germans more visible and protest against Germany’s latent racism. As a result of working on a book (*Farbe Bekennen*, see bibliography) about Afro-German women, the association ADEFRA (Afrodeutsche Frauen/Afro-German Women; www.adepra.de) was founded in 1986 with the help of African-American activist Audre Lorde.

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⁸ Carol Mueller, “Ella Baker and the Origins of “Participatory Democracy,”” in *Women in the Civil Rights movement: Trailblazers and torchbearers, 1941-1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, 51–70 (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2005), 51.

⁹ <http://www.ellabakercenter.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/EllaBakerSpeaks.jpg> (accessed September 4, 2011).

¹⁰ *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*