Unsung African American Women Leaders During the Civil Rights Movement

Introduction

- Empirical literature shows how gender prevents women from participating in formal leadership roles in the workplace and in social movements.
- Majority of research covering the civil rights movement focuses on male leaders and their work.
- Lack of public recognition of the contributions of African American women to the civil rights movements.

Purpose: Explore the leadership roles women held and explore how their contributions significantly impacted the success of the civil rights movement in southern states.

Data Analysis

Methods

- Content analysis of archival data, qualitative research studies, websites, oral histories and historical photos. N=10
- Selection Criteria
  - Time Frame: 1955-1968
  - Location: Southern region of the United States of America
  - Involvement with various groups associated with the Civil Rights movement
  - Documented contributions and accomplishments related to the Civil Rights Movement

Coding

- Recruitment
- Community Engagement
- Formal Leadership
- Organization/Implementation
- Significance of role/duties

Meet The Women

- Daisy Bates
- Fanny Lou Hamer
- Diane Nash
- Septima Clark
- Dorothy Height
- Ella Baker
- Daisy Lambkins
- Georgia Gilmore
- Amelia Boynton
- Jo-Ann Richardson

Results

Key Stages of a Social Movement:

Initial unrest and agitation: All ten (10) women emerged as leaders to verbalize people's feelings and develop the issues.

- Fannie Lou Hamer: Mississippi regarding voter registration
- Amelia Boynton: Organized protests in Selma prior to Dr. King
- Daisy Lambkin: Anti lynching and other issues within the south

Resource Mobilization: All ten (10) women played crucial parts in gathering resources to further develop the civil rights movement.

- Jo-Ann Richardson: Organized Montgomery, Al boycotts
- Georgia Gilmore: Started the “club from nowhere”
- Septima Clark: started Citizen Schools to teach literacy skills
- Diane Nash: Organized the Freedom Riders activities and sit ins

Organization: Six (6) of the women held formal leadership roles during the civil rights movement.

- Ella Baker: Executive Director of the SCLC and NAACP
- Daisy Bates: Organized, recruited and supported the Little Rock Nine
- Dorothy Height: Integrated the YMCA's and is considered one of the “Big Six” leaders of the movement

Institutionalization: The civil rights movement became increasingly popular.

- Men in leadership roles gained more attention and were well known as the faces of the movement.
- Little recognition given to the women and the success of the movement continuing many women moved onto other pressing issues.

Organizational decline and possible resurgence: Almost all of the women moved on to work with other social movements in particular the women's movement.

- Women in leadership roles and highly involved in the civil rights movement were forced to walk on an opposite street during the March on Washington.

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