

## *Explorations in Sights and Sounds*

**Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Ann Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds.**  
***Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941–1965.*** (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).  
290 pp.

Many chronicles of the Civil Rights Movements seem to depict the activities of men such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Kwame Toure (Stokely Carmichael), Bobby Seale, and other important persons. Though they merit the attention they receive, it is quite apparent that the central role of women has been omitted. Sexism among historians and those involved in the movement have concealed their centrality. This work attempts to address that situation by recounting the importance of women such as Ella Baker, Mary Fair Burks, Septima Clark, Doris Derby, Fannie Lou Hamer, Zilphia Horton, Dr. Lillian Johnson, Denise Nicholas, Rosa Parks, Gloria Richardson, Bernice Robinson, Jo Ann Robinson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Modjeska Simkins, plus the Woman's Division of the Christian Service of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church and the Boston YWCA.

These writings emphasize that women were in the vanguard of planning and leading various civil rights actions. For instance, Mary Fair Burks and Jo Ann Robinson were only waiting for the appropriate moment to act in Montgomery. Structures were already in place to support the action of Rosa Parks. Schoolteacher Septima Clark and beautician Bernice Robinson created the citizenship classes that enfranchised over 200 Blacks to vote, almost all for the first time in their lives. The SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) took over that existing project in 1961, enfranchising 50,000 others. Doris Derby and Denise Nicholas organized the remarkable Free Summer Theater (FST) to empower themselves and other African American women activists. The YWCAs, usually not considered the "hot bed" of radicalism and like the YMCAs at the time, were segregated. This did not prevent African American women in Boston from initiating a variety of projects to develop activist strategies that promoted more positive race relations.

The book also recounts the critical role played by the Highlander Folk School, the institution formerly located in Monteagle, Tennessee. It was at Highlander that a great many of the civil rights leaders received education and training in civil rights strategies and tactics. Women were key in the creation of Highlander and developed its social, cultural, and educational programs. Rosa Parks, for instance, initiated the Montgomery bus boycott two months after her training at Highlander.

Though this book can not provide ample depth in so many spheres, it is still a very good general work from which one might gain considerable insights. It is a good supplementary work for those teaching the Civil Rights Movement and who want to address issues of sexism and empowerment.

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