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Terrible Terrell: Black Women's Activism The Forgotten Story of Carolyn Daniels

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HIS 490 History Honors Thesis

by

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Dedication

To my father and mother.

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Historiography of Black Women Activism

When we speak about the Civil Rights Movement, more often or not, idolized leaders, like that of Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., come to mind. While these men and women activists made extraordinary achievements in the fight for freedom, they do not, and should not, solely represent the triumph of the Black freedom struggle. While the contributions of these activists are the most circulated tales, they account for a small percentage of activism. Solely looking at the accomplishments of the leaders neglects the real source of fuel to the Civil Rights Movement. The stories of the masses, or ordinary people, especially that of black women activists, were a source of significant power behind the movement. Within their communities, ordinary people sparked the origins of the largest and most significant grassroots movement in the history of the United States: The Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement, a fight for authentic representation and freedom, is not the story of singular individual or leader, but rather a shared story of defiance from an entire community. Resistance by ordinary individuals, more specifically black women, is what defines the Civil Rights Movement and, arguably, is what made the cause so successful.

The scholarship on black women activists has provided a fascinating story of not only women's involvement, but their pinnacle roles, within the movement. Black women activists were not all seasoned activists like that of Ella Baker and Rosa Parks.[1] For example, the story of Jo Ann Robinson, a member of the Women's Political Council of Montgomery, who was largely responsible for the Montgomery bus boycott following Rosa Parks' arrest. As a result of her

[1] Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, *A Black Women's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020), 168.

actions, “fifty thousand African Americans, mostly masses of Black women, heeded the call to walk rather than ride, impelled by righteous indignation and guided by the tireless grassroots activism of Jo Ann Robinson and WPC.”[2] The women who joined the call to action were “everyday Black women who had endured physical assaults, loss of work and wages, and daily threats and harassment.”[3] They were not “season[ed] activists” like Rosa Parks herself.[4] As argued by historians, Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, “whether challenging segregation in education or in public spaces, Black women and Black girls were on the front lines where new laws were transformed into changed daily practices.”[5] Women’s contributions made direct change in their local communities. Accounts of brave roles by ordinary women, like that of Jo Ann Robinson, occurred all over the nation, even in small countries like that of Terrell County.

One of the primary societal injustice black women faced and actively combatted within their activism was sexual violence: “Scholars of Black urban history and Black labor history agree that Black women faced greater economic discrimination and had fewer employment opportunities than did Black men.”[6] Moreover, sexual assault was a regular fear Southern black woman lived with. Between 1915 and 1945, hundreds of thousands of black women left the South because their treatment was so horrific.[7] Even though women faced daily sexual assault violence, this “did not reduce their determination to acquire power to protect themselves and to

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid, 169.

[6] Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West,” *The University of Chicago Press* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 913.

[7] Ibid, 920.

become agents of social change once they settled in midwestern communities."[8] Furthermore, according to historian Danielle L. McGuire, women spoke out about their experiences with sexual assault. Their stories brought the community together in solidarity to fight for freedom even if it meant physical harm.

Women were vital in bringing together the community especially through their role in the church, as pinnacle individuals advocating and fighting for social justice. As stated by Dorothy I. Height, an activist herself, speaking upon the role of women: "They are the backbone of the churches. The evidence of their work can be seen everywhere."[9] Not only in direct action within the church, but parallel transformation within their local communities. The churches were vital places of gathering for Civil Rights activists and black individuals as a whole, as this institution was the center for modern civil rights movement.[10] It was a place for them to not only express their opinions and be their own person but organize their activism. According to historian, Aldon Morris, "Churches provided the movement with an organized mass base; a leadership of clergymen largely economically independent of the larger white society and skilled in the art of managing people and resources; an institutionalized financial base through which protest was financed; and meeting places where the masses planned tactics and strategies and collectively committed themselves to the struggle."[11] So, the organization of these sacred places was important in continuing the fight for freedom.

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[8] Ibid, 915.

[9] Dorothy Height, "'We Wanted the Voice of a Woman to Be Heard': Black Women and the 1963 March on Washington," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P Franklin (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2001), 90.

[10] Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, New York: The Free Press, 1984), 4.

[11] Ibid, 4.

Black women activists were also essential figures in breaking gender stereotypes, particularly within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which was formed in 1960 by student's intent to participation in the larger movement. According to historian Tanisha C. Ford, SNCC women played a powerful role in eliminating the expected societal norms towards black women with the use of clothing. In American society, black women had to wear makeup, dress modestly, and straighten their hair to fit the societal stereotypes of traditional womanhood. This notion of respectability also played into how middle-class black activists combatted racism. The SNCC uniform consisted primarily of denim, such as denim overalls. Not only was the unform represented through their physical clothing but embracing their natural hair. Within SNCC, though, "women used the uniform consciously to transgress a black middle-class worldview that marginalized certain types of women and particular displays of blackness and black culture"[12] These "changes in SNCC women's clothing represented an ideo-logical metamorphosis articulated through the embrace and projection
of real and imagined southern, working-class, and African American cultures."[13] The uniform represented a sense of sisterhood: "SNCC women developed their sisterhood through the creation of shared aesthetic that involved cutting one another's hair, wearing little or no makeup, and espousing the clothing of laboring class."[14] The symbolic uniform represented not only a message but also a story. A story that all black women could understand personally. They were no longer bound to white individuals' societal norms and expectations. Their uniform

[12] Tanisha C. Ford, "SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress," *The Journal of Southern History* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 626.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid, 627.

represented their identity, culture, and freedom as citizens of not only the United States, but within their communities.

Another way black women activists played a role in the movement was through the creation of registration projects in Southern communities. In his book *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1965 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy,* historian Bruce Watson explores the role of black women teachers in the Mississippi Freedom Project, a voting registration project in Mississippi. According to Watson, to join the Project down in the particularly violent state of Mississippi, volunteers had to go through a screening. Once the volunteer had properly gone through the interview screening, he or she was assigned to one of two groups. As stated by Watson, "once accepted, volunteers were divided into two groups: Freedom School teachers, who would show up for training the following week, and these first arrivals, whose summer would take them from shack-to-shack registering voters."[15] The role of teachers, which were usually women, was especially important. They prepped the volunteers for the potential violence they would face in Mississippi. They taught individuals how to act, walk, and speak in the South. Not only did they teach them how to act, but how to pass their voting registration and literacy tests. Through the power of education, the community was not fearful of death, but ready for authentic representation within the United States of America. Much like how woman's s central roles within the church played a significant part in bringing together the masses, so too did their role as educators.

The scholarship on black women's activism within the Civil Rights Movement is widespread; yet it is far from complete. For several decades now, historians have revealed stories of the Civil Rights Movement by focusing on specific, centralized locations and the contributions

[15] Bruce Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964 That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* (New York, New York: Penguin Group, 2010), 18.

of that place's community. This work has helped forged new, in-depth accounts of the local activism. Yet, scholars have yet to focus on the stories made by ordinary black women activists within specific borderlines, specifically that of Terrell County, Georgia. Tracking a singular unstudied, specific story of black women activism in the South will not only provide a personal understanding of the Movement, but an authentic representation of women's contributions in the region. As historians, we owe it to the ordinary women to find their stories. Although recognizing everyone's contributions to the cause will take time, we ought to start now with the untold story of Carolyn Daniels from Dawson, Georgia.

Chapter 1

Southwest Georgia: *"Terrible Terrell"*

> "We are a little fed up with this voter registration business. We want our colored people to go on living like they have for the past 100 years."' [1]
>
> —Sheriff Z.T Matthews

During the Civil Rights Movement, Terrell County, also known as "Terrible Terrell," was an exceedingly racist community, much like most communities in the South, that made the lives of Black citizens miserable and unjust. Acts of lynching and mob violence were regular practices in "Terrible Terrell." The terror on the streets continued when the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a well-known student-led Civil Rights organization, came to town to expand and pursue a new voter registration program. Understanding the discriminatory, racially motivated treatment of the black citizens of Terrell County, their daily hardships, and their avid fight for freedom highlights the contributions and sacrifices ordinary people took to fight for their freedom not only in this county but all of Southwest Georgia. Their contributions, buttressed by SNCC's guidance, highlight the widespread resistance amongst commonplace citizens seeking freedom from Jim Crow.

The New Racial Order

On December 6, 1865, the United States of America ratified the 13th Amendment, stating "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their

[1] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "Press Release; Nightriders Bomb, Shoot Registration Worker," December 8, 1963, SAVF-Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Wisconsin Historical Society.

jurisdiction."[2] Although enslavement was legally terminated, the fundamental, dehumanizing principles of slavery were still deeply rooted in American society through a new racial order: violence and segregation. As described by Aldon D. Morris in *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*: these systems "of domination protected the privileges of white society and generated tremendous human suffering for blacks."[3] Black Americans were controlled economically, politically, and personally. Regarding economic control, black individuals were not given equal opportunities to white Americans preventing them from receiving equal jobs, pay, and housing. Politically, they were criminalized and victimized; personally, their basic human rights were controlled. At the end of the day, black Americans' right to democracy and freedom was determined entirely by white Americans.

While white Georgians considered how to maintain their supremacy over the black community, newly freedmen and women questioned how they were they were going to transition into free laborers and equal citizens.[4] In Georgia, racism prevailed because it was embedded into the state's society and black citizens were treated as inferior to the white community. As newly freedmen began to inhabit previously all-white communities, white Georgians, as did most white Southerners, started to panic, fearing black uprising and violence. As a result of the alarm, white people began viewing black citizens as menacing and dangerous.[5] Not only were there civil concerns, but economic distress as the freedmen had no land or homes of their own. The

[2] U.S. Constitution. art. IV, section 2, Amendment 13.

[3] Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, New York: The Free Press, 1984), 1.

[4] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1864-1877* (New York: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), xxiii.

[5] Ibid, 28.

potential of assimilation frightened the state of Georgia, so lawmakers quickly began to establish their own racist social order to further control the lives of black citizens.

In response to their fears, white Georgians instituted black codes "to establish another system of forced labor."[6] Mississippi and South Carolina were the first two states to enact the codes in the fall of 1865, and the Georgian black codes emulated their social order. One of the principal punishments listed in the Black Codes states that freedmen or freedwomen are beholden to receive jail time or large fines if they are found unemployed.[7] Yet, freedmen and freedwomen were not given employment to fulfill their new social responsibility outside of tenant farming or sharecropping. This is just one way in which black citizens were controlled and managed after the institution of slavery.

Accordingly, "The Codes spoke for themselves… [no one] can read them without being convinced they meant nothing more nor less than slavery."[8] The Blacks Codes essentially continued to promote racism and segregation within southern societies. More so, the laws were passed in hopes to "codify the subordinate treatment of formerly-enslaved Black Georgians and maintain a pool of cheap Black labor."[9] The ratification of these laws "maintained a racist social system by restricting their ability to speak freely, own property, travel, and conduct business."[10] Not only were black Americans restricted from speaking freely, but were banned from voting, a fundamental right for all citizens in the United States.

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[6] Ibid.

[7] The Mississippi Black Codes 1865, Vagrancy Law Section 2.

[8] Foner, *Reconstruction,* 28.

[9] Alex Camardelle, "Telling the Unvarnished Truth About Georgia," Georgia Budget & Policy Institute, February 26, 2020.

[10] "14th Amendment Discussion Starter: Black Codes," National Constitution Center.

History of Lynching and Mob Violence in Terrell County

While the ratification of the Reconstruction Amendments, that of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendment, sought to successfully integrate newly freed black people into American society, discrimination and racial violence raged on in Southern Georgia, particularly lynchings and mob violence.[11] Lynchings were a form of extralegal violence that deprived its victims of any form of due process.[12] According to historian Christopher C. Meyers, "Hangings were often accompanied by beatings, shootings, burnings, and sadistic torture that included dismemberment and mutilation."[13] The white mobs justified their acts of violence through criminal accusations, such as sexual assault by Black men against white women.[14] Not only were Black Americans accused of sexual transgressions, but they were also wrongfully accused of accounts of murder and robbery. These acts of horror were not intended to target a single individual, but rather the entirety of the Black community.[15] Lynching, therefore, served as a means of control through violence and fear.

Lynching was not a secret affair, but a pre-planned event, publicized in the local and neighboring newspapers. Local white citizens, even political officials, would meet at the designated location for the act. Sometimes "vendors selling food, printers producing postcards featuring photographs of the lynching and corpse, and the victim's body parts collected as souvenirs" were present at lynching sites.[16] These horrific events only stimulated and maintained

[11] Christopher C. Meyers, "'Killing Them by the Wholesale': A Lynching Rampage in South Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (2006), 214.

[12] "History of Lynching in America," NAACP.

[13] Meyers, "'Killing Them by the Wholesale,'" 216.

[14] Ibid.

[15] "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror," Equal Justice Initiative, Third Edition.

[16] Ibid.

the message that Black Americans were "sub-human."[17] The white vigilantes who carried out these acts of brutality almost always faced zero legal repercussions.[18]

Racial violence in Georgia became even more prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[19] According to historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage, author of *Lynchings in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930,* "Between 1880 and 1894, mobs in Georgia claimed the lives of one hundred and eleven people."[20] Furthermore, "the annual toll of mob violence rose from two lynchings in 1882 to fifteen at the end of the period, leaving virtually no region of the state [of Georgia] unscarred."[21] Brundage continues, "In the South and border states, in contrast [to that of non-Southern states], the overwhelming majority of victims - 85 percent - were black."[22] Mob violence was not only accepted in Southwest Georgian culture but became a regular means to preserve racial control in the South.[23]

Lynching and mob violence had been normalized in everyday life of Georgia by the late 19th century, making the state the second highest in the United States with lynching activity, behind Mississippi.[24]

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Meyers, "'Killing Them by the Wholesale,'" 214.

[20] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 192.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid, 8.

[23]"Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror," Equal Justice Initiative, Third Edition.

[24] Ibid.

TABLE 1.1: HIGHEST LYNCHING ACTIVITY BY STATE, 1877-1950

State	Total Lynchings
Mississippi	654
Georgia	**589**
Louisiana	549
Arkansas	492
Alabama	361
Texas	335
Florida	311
Tennessee	233
South Carolina	185
Kentucky	168
North Carolina	123
Virginia	84

Source: "Hundred more were lynched in the South than previously known: report," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 14, 2017.

In tandem with the reality of Jim Crow in the everyday lives of black Georgians, the data (Table 1.1) suggests the need for social and political change in the lives of the state's black population. To date, historians continue to gather statistical data regarding the number of lynching activities in order to grasp the violence in Southern states. Correlating the violence with a precise number allows scholars to pinpoint counties with higher violence, and more so, better articulate the movement's activist ambitions in selecting various regions in the South for their activism.

TABLE 1.2: HIGHEST LYNCHING ACTIVITY BY GEORGIA COUNTY'S, 1877-1950

County	Total Lynchings
Fulton	35
Early	24
Brooks	20
Mitchell	11
Decatur	10
Baker	10
Jasper	10
Oconee	10
Bleckley	10
Montgomery	10
Miller	9

Source: "Hundred more were lynched in the South than previously known: report," The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, June 14, 2017.

The data reveals that the highest lynching activity was mostly clustered in the Southwest region of the state of Georgia, where Terrell is located (Table 1.2).[25] Though specific data from Terrell County is difficult to locate, the county's placement nearby others with high incidents of racial violence suggest it experienced not only large number of lynchings but contains a highly racist culture.

While the number of brutalities increased, Georgia state authorities did not attempt to halt the violence. The lack of initiative angered black Americans. As Brundage explains, "The growing incidence of mob violence and the failure of the state authorities to suppress mobs incensed blacks."[26] Yet, even though the black community eagerly sought change, they did not know how to combat the brutalities: "Black leaders in Georgia loudly denounced lynching, but, like their counterparts elsewhere in the South, had great difficulty devising an effective strategy to combat mob violence."[27]

Lynching was not the only principal form of violence used. As seen in the case of George Clark, the accusations of violence against white womanhood were commonly used as a means to pursue legal cases. A man by the name of George Clarke, who lived in Terrell county in Georgia, was sentenced to hang in July 1884. Clarke was accused of assaulting a woman by the last name of Jennings, "a wife of a prominent citizen of Terrell County, in her house, and after beating her in a brutal manner, ravished her."[28] A group of white farmers went after Clarke,

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[25] "Hundred more were lynched in the South than previously known: report," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* June 14, 2017.

[26] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia,* 193.

[27] "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror," Equal Justice Initiative, Third Edition.

[28] "Dark and Bloody. The Prospect of This Morning in Terrell County, Georgia. Revolt of the Negroes Against the Law Which Seeks to Hang a Colored Man Who Makes Bastardly Assault Upon a White Women – A Town in Hands of the Mob." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* August 25, 1884.

and a "mob refused to surrender him to the law except on promise from the officials that a special term of court should be called immediately to try him."[29] According to the article, "it was called and he was convicted and sentenced to be hanged."[30] There is zero record in the newspaper about how long the court took to prosecute Mr. Clark, but considering the racist environment and common unlawful convictions and hangings, the court probably did not take long to convict him. Due to the outrage from the black citizens in Terrell County, the militia was called in for backup. Despite the act of resistance by the local black community, the hanging proceeded as planned. His story not only illustrates another account of common violence against the black community but serves as a principal example of unfair and unjust use of the death sentence, a reality for black southern citizens.

Understanding and then acknowledging the history of violence and racism in Georgia is without a doubt essential in comprehending not only the state of the nation at the time of the Civil Rights Movement, but also how difficult it was for black Americans to agree to resist the sheer hatred within the South. The racism and pain inflicted on Black individuals, whether male or female, did not lessen. By contrast, the violence got worse during the Civil Rights Movement while Black Americans began to fight for authentic representation and freedom as American citizens, and even more so, as simply human beings.

Georgia, especially Southern Georgia, became a hot spot for the Civil Rights Movement because of the state's racism. The Movement began its most challenging work down South when the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee moved their headquarters to Atlanta, just a single county over from Terrell County.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

The Formation of The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee was formed following the Greensboro, North Carolina sit-in. On February 1, 1960, four college men – Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, David Richmond, and Ezell Blair Jr – refused to leave the segregated lunch counter where they were denied service. According to *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, "The four took up stools at the Woolworth's lunch counter, a popular eating place at the main crossroads in town, where blacks could order take out but were not permitted to sit down and eat alongside whites."[31] By Wednesday of that week, "there were more than 80 participants, and by the end of the first week, there were 200."[32] This sit-in grew into a national movement. Following their demonstrations, there were others like it in college towns throughout the country as "the Greensboro sit-in was being copied in many communities.[33] The impact of these demonstrations forced Woolworth's and other establishments to change their segregationist policies.

Ella Baker was inspired by these young brave men participating in non-violent resistance and sought to bring them together so they could focus their energies. As a young girl, her mother's activist work in the Baptist women's missionary movement had an impact on her. As she explains, '"I was young when I became active in things and I became active in things largely because my mother was very active in the field of religion.'"[34] Before her momentous role in helping to form SNCC, Baker worked under Martin Luther King in his organization Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

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[31] "Clarence Harris; allowed N.C. lunch counter sit-in," *Santa Cruz Sentinel,* July 15, 1999.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2005), 44.

The creation of SCLC occurred after Rosa Parks's arrest in 1955. In December of that year, the Montgomery Bus Boycotts began as a result of her being taken into custody. The boycotts went on for almost a year before the buses were finally desegregated. These bus demonstrations were executed by the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), with Martin Luther King, Jr. as its president. During the boycotts, the members of the MIA and other leaders met in Atlanta to discuss and organize other protest actions. At this conference, the committee established and announced the establishment of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration.[35] The black church became the backbone of Martin Luther King's organization and leadership. Baker had a different, radical approach to activism, however. Baker remarked in an interview with John Britton in 1968: "…the movement made Martin rather than Martin making the movement."[36] She saw the potential and strength within students and youths to make change and fight for their liberties, not just one single leader.

In 1960, after three years working with the organization, Baker left SCLC. She had a radically special approach to achieving freedom and democracy for the African American citizens of the United States. She saw the powerful potential of young activists. According to Barbara Ransby, "Ella Baker was instrumental in the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, an organization that would become a pivotal and catalytic force within the growing liberation movement."[37] Before SNCC, the students and youth never had their own organization to plan and execute their activism on a large scale. Ella Baker brought together the student activists to allow them to organize themselves, so they could form a plan of action and

[35] "SCLC History," Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

[36] Ella Baker interviewed by John Britton. The Civil Rights Documentary Project, 1968.

[37] Ransby, *Ella Baker,* 44.

execute. Baker served as their mentor, organizing the meetings, but did not instruct them on what they could or could not do. The students held the power, and that was the beauty of the organization. This new manner of activism, student activism, began engulfing the southern movement.[38] More so, *"*Ella Baker was a physical and psychological anchor for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, even though she was not a student, and only partially subscribed to its professed commitment to non-violence."[39]

Baker believed in helping these young and fearless protestors contribute to the movement, by giving them a platform and voice to do so. Ultimately, Baker "wanted to help emerging young activists like those of the sit-ins develop their own leadership."[40] Upon learning of the sit-ins, she recognized the power, persistence, and fight within the college students. She truly believed in the change the youth could make in the country, which prompted her to bring the students together and give them a platform to create their own committee.

Ella Baker had a particular manner in which she saw how SNCC students world organize their organization. Firstly, she hoped SNCC would maintain and continue the Greensboro sit-in actions, specifically the student participation. Historian Barbara Ransby explains that "Baker wanted to bring the sit-in participants together in a way that would sustain the momentum of their actions, provide them with much needed skills and resources, and create space for them to coalesce into a new … democratic political force."[41] Secondly, Baker wanted the organization to also develop a radically new vision and strategy for implementing change that relied on the student's collective goals and desires. Ella Baker's approach can be summed up by SNCC's first

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[38] Charles E. Cobb Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 155.

[39] Ibid, 43.

[40] Ella Baker interviewed by John Britton. The Civil Rights Documentary Project, 1968.

[41] Ransby, *Ella Baker,* 239.

promotional poster with the slogan: "Come Let Us Build a New World Together."[42] Baker saw the power in the collective. The unity of the people could change the world in Baker's eyes. Ella Baker never wanted to lead an organization, but rather she desired to work alongside the students and youth who inspired her. Ordinary students and individuals in local communities around the nation led SNCC, which is what made the organization's success during the Civil Rights Movement so dominant and impactful.

SNCC began with zero money or resources.[43] At the start of the organization, Baker was still working at the headquarters of SCLC and she provided SNCC a desk in a corner of the SCLC office in Atlanta at 208 Auburn Avenue.[44] When the organization raised enough money of their own in the coming months, "SNCC was able to move across the street to a $20-a month shoebox at 197 ½ Auburn."[45] On the very first day, James Forman, the executive secretary of SNCC, "walked into the office on August 1, 1961, [and] found Edward King [the administrative secretary] and a U.S. map stuck with red pins to show where student protests had happened."[46] Even though there was one office, SNCC headquarters networked all student activism around the country. While the organization purchased an office, the internal organization and efficiency had yet to be formed, which made "emerging community organizing efforts" difficult.[47]

Momentum and visibility of the organization commenced in the fall of 1961 as a result

[42] "Come Let Us Build A New World Together," National Museum of American History.

[43] "Creating an Office," SNCC Digital Gateway. https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/establishing-sncc/creating-an-office/.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

of James Forman's undertakings in the Atlantic headquarters. From the start, Forman portrayed the organization as "an independent student group with its own agenda," meaning the group was not led by a single leader like SCLC.[48] Further, Forman launched various projects in "rural communities in Mississippi and Southwest Georgia," and the organization as a whole "began coordinating how to meet those project needs with the central Atlanta office."[49] Most of these projects regarded voting registration, a primary focus of SNCC activists, especially that of women.

While the headquarters in Atlanta served as a base for communication and meetings, SNCC continued to focus its attention on activism in the streets and within the communities. The organization's main focus was meeting activists and encouraging them to contribute to the struggle: the fight against racial discrimination and a fight for authentic liberty. The attention to churches, communities, social meetings, lunchrooms, and nightclubs allowed SNCC, by 1962, to have "twelve full-time field secretaries in rural counties in the Georgia Black Belt," one of them being in Terrell County.[50]

Terrell County – SNCC's Arrival

According to "a SNCC survey of Terrell County, there [was] 8, 209 Negroes living there, [and only 51 of them could vote.]"[51] As a result, in the summer of 1962, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activists, both black and white, from all over the country gathered in rural Terrell County to increase voter registration.[52]

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] "Night Riders Shoot Worker," *The Student Voice,* December 9, 1963.

[52] "Church Burned, Nightriders Attach SNCC Staff in Southwest Georgia Voter Registration Drive," *The Student Voice,* October 1962.

Half of SNCC's summer project in Georgia committed to increasing voter registration, specifically in "Terrible Terrell."[53] The county was a hot spot for not only severe violence, but racial inequalities, especially that of voting rights, making the province a key location for necessary activism. SNCC's Voter Program in Terrell County was composed of twelve black and white field secretaries. The group of students worked under a field secretary, Charles Sherrod, who was well-known for his contributions to the Albany Movement. The Albany Campaign formed in 1961 and aimed to end segregation in the city. By 1962, the campaign had failed, and as a result, Martin Luther King, who had initially come to help, left the city. The summer was full of threats, beatings, and arrests, yet the student activists used the terror as inspiration to continue their activism.[54]

Struggling to Survive

On July 25th, 1962, Terrell County received national attention. County Shield Z. T. Williams and 12 other "armed, cigar smoking white men broke into a voter meeting in a Sasser church." Once the men had entered the meeting, the officer proceeded to tell the broadcasters, he was over the SNCC registration project, and declared: "'We want our colored people to go on living like they have for the past 100 years."' [55] Following this, violence became even more prevalent in hopes to maintain racial control in Terrell County.

There were three layers to the violence: (1) physical violence against activists, (2) unlawful charges, and (3) acts of terror in black communities, specifically targeted at homes and

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

[55] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "Press Release; Nightriders Bomb, Shoot Registration Worker," December 8, 1963, SAVF-Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Wisconsin Historical Society.

churches. During the summer of 1962, and into the fall, the *Student Voice* newspaper, SNCC's central media platform, was filled with stories of physical assaults towards student activists.

In October 1962, a white student by the name of Ralph Allen from Massachusetts "and Joseph Pitts, a young man from Albany, were beaten by whites as they went to speak to Negroes in Dawson, Ga. about registering."[56] SNCC activists often faced violence and discrimination more than once. This was not Allen's first brush with violence, for he "was arrested for vagrancy along with Sherrod when the two [men] brought a group of Negros to the Terrell County Courthouse to register."[57] Unfortunately, yet not surprisingly, Allen was unable to receive proper warrants from police to press official charges. Jack Chatfield, a student from Connecticut, was shot in the arm twice. On another occasion, Christopher Allen and Prathia Hall were grazed by bullets. All three activists survived. No one was safe. In Terrell County, activists had a metaphorical bounty on their backs. The local officials, police, and white citizens were out to prevent their resistance and activism towards change.

On another occasion, James Mays, an educator, was fired from his position for participating in the voter drive. This was not uncommon amongst activists. At the end of the day, the white community did everything in its power to try to not only decrease participation but to put an end to the entire movement. Mays was also met with violence when twenty-four bullets were shot into his home. This was not uncommon as by the end of September 1962, night riders started to shoot into the homes of Terrell locals involved in the voter registration drive. These accounts of terror by white Georgian citizens did not discourage Mays from continuing, rather it fueled his activism, as it did for other citizens, like that of Carolyn Daniels.

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[56] "Church Burned, Nightriders Attach SNCC Staff in Southwest Georgia Voter Registration Drive," *The Student Voice,* October 1962.

[57] Ibid.

According to the *Alabama Tribune,* on February 9, 1962, seventeen-year-old Rochester Patterson from Terrell Georgia, "was kicked and slapped at the [local] courthouse when he accompanied a Negro woman who was attempting to register to vote."[58] Patterson was at the courthouse helping a young woman register to vote. SNCC headquarters "had talked with the Justice Department [that] Monday concerning the attack on" Patterson to no avail."[59] Before this attack, Patterson was "recently expelled from a Carver High School in the area for participating in voter registration efforts, and for spearheading a drive for better facilities for the Negro schools."[60] Further, he and his mother, an activist, herself, had "been the target of harassment and intimidation from whites" before.[61] These violent acts were certainly meant as a means to stop activists from contributing to the cause, yet in Terrell County, their efforts were not successful.

Instead of allowing the violence to halt or diminish their strides in activism, SNCC went through with legal challenges against local authorities. The organization began filing proper legal ramifications through lawsuits. For example, after Deputy Marshal D.E. Short tried to run three SNCC activists out of town at gunpoint, the organization filed suit against the officer, who was accused of violating the individual's civil rights. [62] Not surprisingly, because of the way racism was embedded into Georgian society, Short was later acquitted by an all-white jury after just thirty-three minutes.[63] SNCC continued despite legal losses and continued acts of violence.

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[58] "Justice Dept. May Prob Terrell Kicking of Youth," *Alabama Tribune,* February 9, 1962.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "Press Release; Nightriders Bomb, Shoot Registration Worker," December 8, 1963, SAVF-Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Wisconsin Historical Society.

[63] "S.W. Georgia Voter Program Continues Despite Legal Losses," *The Student Voice*, April 1963.

The violence in Terrell County was not solely targeted at single activists, but the whole community. At the height of the summer, "four Negro Churches in the area were burned to the ground, including the Mt. Olive Church." In the fall of 1962 on Sunday, September 9, Mt. Olive Baptist Church, the central meeting ground for SNCC members, other local civil rights activists, and the local black community, was set on fire. Black churches were central institutions within the Civil Rights Movement. The church was an independent black institution, one in which black congregants held complete jurisdiction to say and do as they please. Churches served as key locations where the black community could meet, discuss, and plan their activism freely. More importantly, churches allowed SNCC members and activists to reach a larger network of individuals within the communities they were canvassing. While the building was a central spot for meetings and gatherings, its primary purpose was to serve the Lord. It was a place for the community to come together for prayer and to be as one, a community grounded upon God. The institution symbolized freedom, not only one in which the black citizens of Terrell County fought and dreamed to have but one which the community temporarily received when they stepped into the church doors.

On the outside of those church doors, whether male or female, activist or non-activist, black people often feared for their lives. Their liberty was in the hands of white men. Understanding the meaning of the church, its role in Black Americans' lives, and the symbolism of freedom that the space offered highlights the detrimental impact that the burning of Mt. Olive Church had on the community and the activists. The fight, power, strength, and sense of home within this institution threatened white Terrell County residents, as the institution was essential in the local movement's fight for liberty and authentic representation within the United States.

Black members of Terrell County stood around the burning church with no firetrucks or help in sight to put out the flames. The assault of buildings, homes, churches, and black-owned businesses was not unusual. Rather it was customary in Terrell County, especially after the arrival of SNCC.

In addition to threats of violence, the students struggled to find housing and food on an everyday basis. SNCC students wrote a special issue of the *Student Voice* vocalizing their need for community support in the Albany-Terrell-Lee communities:

> We do not have the money to pay for gas or wear and tear. We can see no other way out then to attempt to raise money by washing cars, dishes, floors, windows, cutting grass, or any other chore around the house. We do not have money for transportation in general, into and from these counties. Then there is the problem of room and board for about twelve people as summer progresses.[64]

While the activists were fighting racial oppression and violence in the deep South, they were also struggling to survive. The students announced to their local community members: "We are not supermen. We are only young people with a determination to be FREE and to be FREE NOW!"[65] Through the horrific conditions the students reminded their readers that they were merely kids and commonplace people fighting for justice. They did this not for themselves, but for all black Americans.

Conclusion

In order to understand where we are in the United States today, we need to understand how we got here and the answers lies in the Civil Rights Movement. The tale of Terrell County, "Terrible Terrell," a Southern Georgia province, illustrates not only the role violence played in black Americans lives on a daily basis, but the violence in which they faced through their

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

activism. but the resists by a community. By understanding the contributions of a community, like that of Terrell County in Southwest Georgia, we can see how small communities contributed to the larger movement, whether or not they succeeded on a local level. Resistance by commonplace individuals, like that of student activists, fueled the movement.

However, the story of Terrell does not end there. These student activists could not have completed their political and social actions without the help of the local community, especially women. Women were an important part of facilitating and networking within the community. Although Carolyn Daniels' activism is documented in SNCC newspapers and records, her tale has been mainly been forgotten, more so untold. Yet, her narrative is important as it illustrates the ways that women were central in combatting local struggles for equality and freedom. Everyone's story matters as they did not only have impact on their direct community, but the movement as a whole.

Chapter 2

Terrell County: Black Women Activism

"We just kept going, we just kept going."
- Carolyn Daniels

In the city of Dawson, Georgia lived a feisty, businesswoman named Carolyn Daniels, who was a key figure in the success of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's voter registration program in the spring of 1962. When SNCC arrived in April of that year, Daniels, a 33-year-old mother to a young Carver high school student named Roy, was not necessarily an activist. Aside from her motherly responsibilities, Daniels owned a well-known beauty and hair salon in the middle of the city. In this small city, everyone knew everyone, especially Carolyn Daniels. Daniels was an inspiration to the local black community, not just because of her successful business acumen but because of her eventual involvement in the fight for civil rights. Despite multiple attacks on her house, Daniels continued her activism. Although local in focus, the story of Carolyn Daniels highlights the essential role of local community members within the Civil Rights Movement, especially black women activists.

The History of Black Women in America:

The 'Othering' and Sexual Exploitation of Black Women

To appreciate the untold story of Carolyn Daniels and the significance of her activism as a black woman, it is vital to acknowledge the hindrances black women faced in American society, dating back to colonial America but which continued into the Jim Crow era.[1] As defined by Ibram X Kendi and Keisha N. Blain in their book, *Four Hundred Souls,* the "othering" of

[1] Danielle L. McGuire, "'It Was like All of Us Had Been Raped': Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle." *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 3 (2004): 908.

black women is "the legal designation of Black women as fundamentally different, in body and character, from other women in colonial society."[2] All black women, but especially those who were enslaved, were seen and treated as inherently inferior, which made it easy for individuals, more specifically men, to take advantage of them.

In colonial America, enslaved Black women's bodies became the domain of not only the white men who considered them property but also of black enslaved men who raped them too.[3] From the beginning of slavery, white male masters would brutally rape their enslaved women as their "bodies served as signposts of the social order."[4] The mistreatment of black women's bodies illustrated not their inferior status in society but emphasized and empowered the social status of men. Ultimately, "white men used rape and rumors of rape not only to justify violence against black men but to remind black women that their bodies were not their own."[5] As described by the historian Kali N. Gross, "Enslavement reduced black women to the level of human breeders, in addition to heightening their vulnerability to sexual assault, but society held black women accountable for their victimization."[6] Black women were nothing more than just objects to colonial men. The rape of black women was not acknowledged in early colonial America due to the lack of clear, authentic legal protection.[7] Instead of protecting black women's humanity, these practices actively promoted injustices.[8] This "othering" of black women

[2] Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain, *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America, 1619-2019* (One World, 2021), 19.

[3] Daina Ramey Berry and Kali Nicole Gross, *A Black Women's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2020), 168.

[4] McGuire, "'It Was like All of Us Had Been Raped,"' 907.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Berry and Gross, *A Black Women's History of the United States,* 23.

[7] Ibid., 22.

[8] Ibid., 38.

included “a distortion of Black woman's physical, emotional, cultural, gendered, and spiritual selves.”[9] Even after the fall of slavery, “former slaveholders and their sympathizers used violence and terror to reassert control over the social, political, and economic agency of freedpeople.”[10] Not only were women raped, but also intimidated. White men, especially bus drivers, employees, and the police, used the tool of intimidation to assert a new role of dominance and control within the era of Jim Crow.[11]

Popular culture also played a role in “othering” black women, especially into the 19th century. The press portrayed black women as harboring “brute strength,” and capable of “excessive violence, hypersexuality, and utter lack of remorse.”[12] Although these portrayals were untrue and exaggerated, they held weight in American society, as this was another way white American society tried to not only dehumanize and control black women but depict how others viewed them.

In addition to the press, advertisements for cultural products or even theatrical productions contained these harmful representations. Aunt Jemima, for instance, is arguably one of the most well-known brands of syrup and pancakes. As a marketing strategy, the company created a figure associated with their brand: a black “mammy” to embody and advertise their products. The figure of Aunt Jemima was placed on every product and advertisement in order for white consumers to associate the product with the mammy type, which is a black woman who worked in the household of a white family as a cook and motherly figure to the children. Aunt Jemima is depicted as a loyal, proud, and happy mammy, content with her position in the white

[9] Kendi and Blain, *Four Hundred Souls,* 19.

[10] McGuire, “‘It Was like All of Us Had Been Raped,”’ 907.

[11] Ibid, 908.

[12] Berry and Gross, *A Black Women’s History of the United States,* 115.

American home and kitchen, untouched from the evils of slavery. The idea was that the syrup and pancake mix would allow white families, especially white mothers, to achieve great quality food as is they had hired help. This depiction of black women as unthreatening, loyal servants to white American families dates back to antebellum plantations. Although the company aimed to alter the reality of mammies, the visual representation of Aunt Jemima aligns perfectly with American society's false stereotypes of black women. In the early advertisements, Aunt Jemima was not painted as a feminine figure, but rather as a woman with masculine, almost monstrous features.[13] Due to the long history of sexual exploitation, black women's bodies were degraded as white men attempted to dominate their bodies and minds.

Black Women's Activism before the Civil Rights Movement

Even before the Civil Rights Movement and the brave work of women like Daniels, black women set about to combat the social, economic, and political limitations on their lives. Dating back to the nineteenth century, black women were highly involved in civil rights campaigns. One of the largest organizations founded by black women was the National Association of Colored Women. The organization was founded in 1896 and was formed to provide women with a space to discuss issues throughout the country, such as sexual exploitation, fair education, segregation, etc.

According to a NACW pamphlet in 1951, the purpose of this organization was to build a community for black women around the country to come together: "The coming together of our women from all over the country for consultation, for conference, for the personal exchange of greetings, which means so much in the way of encouragement and inspiration, has been a

[13] 1916. Ref.: Advertisement for Aunt Jemima's Pancake Flour. https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822003286299.

burning desire in the breasts of the colored women in every section of the United States."[14] The group not only allowed women to address issues, but discuss their personal experiences. The stories from women around the country, allowed these brave souls to fight for universal suffrage of black women around the country. At the end of the day, the women of this organization recognized the need for racial uplift.[15] Racial uplift attempted to improve conditions and provide authentic representation for African Americans race in this country, mainly through an adherence to a middle-class lifestyle and comportment. The importance of this organization was their ability to dissect the common inequalities placed on black women around the nation, and then collaborate on how to actively combat the issues.[16] The formation of this organization "represented no psycho-social shift in the woman's personal identities or in their social, political, and economic agenda."[17] Yet, it did, more importantly, provide a new voice for black women.[18] A place where black women could continue to "improve their personal lives and the general standard of life in the ever-broadening communities of which they were a part."[19]

In November 1947, a committee of NACW members created a "Ten-Point Program," demanding direct action on a number of issues plaguing the lives of black women and African Americans more generally.[20] This Ten-Point Program highlights the common injustices found from black women around the country. The women demanded members of Congress "(1) to

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[14]"Historical Records of Conventions of 1895-96 of the Colored Women of America," University of Chicago Library, 1906: 3.

[15] Ruby M. Kendrick, "'THEY ALSO SERVE': THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORED WOMEN, INC," *Negro History Bulletin,* 1954: 171. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44214997.

[16] Ibid, 171.

[17] Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed, *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible* (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 442.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights - Black Power Movement,* (New York University Press, 2001), 35.

remove all restrictions on voting in elections and primaries, (2) to end restrictive covenants and similar devices to maintain segregation in housing, (3) to make lynching a federal crime, (4) to provide increased federal funding for education on a nondiscriminatory basis, and (5) to outlaw discrimination in employment on the basis of race, creed, color, or national origin."[21] These ten demands were publicized throughout the nation all over black press.[22] The "Ten Point Program" illustrates the broad range of issues black women began to combat, not only for themselves, but all black Americans.

These women set a precedent for the Civil Rights Movement, which is why their role was so influential. The women mastered the art of networking, working together as a community, more so a nation, to racially uplift others. Not only did they organize the committee, but the events and programs for which they would fight for. For example, many of the black women organizations "mobilized to support voter registration campaigns."[23] These black women activists put into the spotlight the injustices set upon black Americans in the United States.

Black women did not just form organizations to challenge social, political, and economic issues, they also built businesses. The most successful businesses created by black women activists were often beauty parlors. Although black women had a difficult time establishing their own businesses due to the black-male domination, black women entrepreneurs used their businesses in a different manner. Rather than working with the sole purpose of social status and gaining money, Black women used their establishments to enhance economic development and highlight racial uplift.[24] More so, black women formed their own political culture in these

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid, 36.

[23] Ibid, 36.

[24] Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women's Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 31.

spaces.[25] The beauty shops were a gathering place where all women shared their beliefs and stories. Just as NACW became a space for women to discuss current matters, so were the beauty shops. They were a safe environment for women to discuss and address their social, political, and economic discrimination. These beauty shops not only "helped black urban women navigate the complex terrain of black modernity and the paradoxes of class and status," but helped organize a united message around the fight for equality.[26] The women in the beauty shops ended up becoming vital recruiters and activists within organizations around the country, including Carolyn Daniels.

While black women engaged in different forms of activism before the Civil Rights era, the movement was fundamentally different. The tactics used by various activists prompted them, women included, to put their bodies on the line with sit-ins, planned protest marches, and even attempt to vote. In direct response to black activism, white people used violence to minimize their accomplishments, no matter how small, and fight for change. As a result, there was hesitation on the part of black women to join the Civil Rights Movement because their action was often met with severe violence from local white community members or even police and government authorities.

Why Were Women Hesitant to Join the Civil Rights Movement?

While some black women possessed an inner drive to participate in the fight, others fought personal, communal, and familial pressures, which consequently withheld them from joining the movement. Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons, a SNCC activist, is a key example of how

[25] Ibid, 33.

[26] Ibid.

certain pressures blurred an individual's vision for joining the cause. She had to make a decision, one that went against her family and institution. According to Simmons: "There was a terrible tension in my life, um, because I had been told by my folks, uh, not to get involved, in no uncertain terms."[27] She was the first member of her family on the path to graduate high school. She had even received a full scholarship to college owed to her extraordinary performance in school. Although her parents' exact concerns have never been recorded, one can only venture to guess that her parents fear was one of all parents, the fear of their child being a target of violence and hate. Another concern is that Simmons' institution would make her drop out due to her involvement, restricting her from continuing her education.

Education is a powerful source of human rights and freedom, which is the reason why enslaved people were not given the privilege. While black individuals did not have basic human rights in the aftermath of Reconstruction and at the height of Jim Crow, education provided Simmons with a bit of freedom of choice. She could get a better-paying job, join the professional class, and enjoy more mobility. Her family was not going to let her give up on reaching for these potential achievements. Another reason why her family was against Simmons' joining was that, at the time, no one knew where the Movement was going. But when Simmons was considering joining in 1964, black Americans knew what participation in the movement meant: discrimination, violence, and sometimes death. While there had been some gains, the brutal violence that activists met was often at the forefront of media reporting.

The fear of joining not only came from the pressure in Simmons' home, but also from her institution. Simmons remarks: "And then, Spelman [College] was adamant that we were not to

[27] "Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons oral history interview." From the Library of Congress, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement.* Script. https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/women-in-the-civil-rights-movement/

get involved and, in fact, had told us in freshman orientation that if they found out we were involved, we could lose our scholarships and be sent home."[28] This was common, especially after college students started to drop out of college to become active in the movement around the country. Institutions, such as Spelman College, used the movement as a bargaining tool, and in the case of Simmons, like many other young adults, it worked, if only briefly.

Everything changed for Simmons when a group of women field staff members from SNCC came to Spelman to promote joining the organization. Simmons recalls what she witnessed when the group came in: "the SNCC field staff from Mississippi, when they would come in – uh, there were women in that group. Uh, these people were so brave it seemed to me."[29] Not only was Simmons blown away by their strength and activism, but she remarks that this was the turning point for her: "And the SNCC folk, who were my own age, many of the people who had already left school to work full time, they made it very clear what they thought about us who were still trying not to get involved. And so, there was a pull."[30] From a sheltered family, who pushed for success, and an institution that prohibited the efforts of the cause, Simmons was shocked when these women walked through the doors of her classroom. These fearless women revealed to Simmons that there was a movement to fight. She could not avoid the reality of the struggle going on around her.

In contrast to Simmons' story, Doris Adelaide Derby had a very different story of joining the movement. According to Derby, "I always did what I wanted to do. I had my own inner

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

drive."[31] While some women like Simmons had to fight the tensions between personal desires and external demands, others like Derby felt that nothing was going to hold them back. Derby was a strong woman, and she saw all women in the Civil Rights Movement the same way: "In the struggle, the women were strong."[32] She felt she was amongst them, someone who could do the same, and so she did.

Everyone found their own reason to join the movement, though societal, familial, and institutional tensions illustrate that it was not always an easy choice. The fact that the women in SNCC chose the movement oftentimes over their education and societal and familial expectations, reveals the importance of the movement not only for themselves but for all black Americans.

The Role of SNCC Women Activists

Women played a vital role in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. This is where women had the privilege to redefine their roles, expectations, and characteristics as citizens of the United States. One of the ways they did so was to highlight their natural hair and particular modes of dress. In American society, black women were expected to dress and appear in the same manner as white women. One aspect of this is the need for straightened hair that was treated with heat or a chemical treatment to achieve the straightened, desired style.[33] Black women also pulled their hair in a low bun, a hat, and a long dress, reflecting the respectable, middle-class attire of the period.

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[31] "Doris Adelaide Derby oral history interview." From the Library of Congress, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement.* Script. https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/women-in-the-civil-rights-movement/

[32] Ibid.

[33] Tanisha C. Ford, "SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress," *The Journal of Southern History* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 626.

SNCC women took a stance against these societal expectations by embracing their natural hair. In doing so, "SNCC women developed their sisterhood through the creation of a shared aesthetic that involved cutting one another's hair, wearing little or no makeup, and espousing the clothing of the laboring class"[34] Not only did they stop straightening their hair, but they began wearing their own, desirable clothing, specifically denim. These women created the new SNCC uniform, also known as the "SNCC skin."[35] Denim had particular significance, as it resembled a shared heritage with the sharecroppers that they were often working with. It was also a means "to desexualize their bodies, not only to protect themselves from sexual assault, but also to blur prescribed gender roles and notions of feminine property."[36] This relates back to the sexual exploitation of black women. This emphasis on desexualizing their body had everything to do with erasing their femineity in the eyes of not only white men, but all men. SNCC provided black women activists a powerful platform to define their own roles in American society. SNCC women not only highlighted their heritage but build a community of strong women ready to define their own citizenship in the United States.

While SNCC provided women a space to be themselves, it was not an escape from the realities of being a black woman in America. The story of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson is a perfect example. Just like Carolyn Daniels, Robinson was a black woman and a mother fighting for social, political, and economic change. These strong woman like Robinson and Daniels "were subjected to negative assessments of their character and accomplishments from the black community as well as from the larger white society."[37] While there were more women "field

[34] Ibid, 627.

[35] Ibid, 626.

[36] Ibid, 627.

[37] Hine, King, and Reed, *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible*, 575.

sectaries, project directors, and local leaders," there was still "a great deal of 'male posturing.'"[38] Much of this arose especially with the arrival of Black Power, a predominately black oriented Civil Rights Movement organization. While Robinson faced the struggles of being a black woman internally within SNCC and externally in society, she was still a seen as "a tough female administrator."[39] While Robinson "wrestled with negative views of who and what she was that were popularized by white society," at the end of the day, she embraced who she was in every decision she made. Even if she second guessed herself, she would go with her gut instinct. So, even though SNCC provided woman a place to participate, it did not shelter them from the realities of being a woman. Yet, arguably, it provided women a place to begin fighting for their rights, freedom, and authentic representation both from white society and the black male community.

Carolyn Daniels

Carolyn Daniels's rise to activism was sparked by her son, Roy, an SNCC activist himself during the summer of 1962.[40] One afternoon, he approached his mother and asked if Charles Sherrod, the director of SNCC's Southwest Georgia project, could stay at their home for a few nights, and Mrs. Daniels agreed.[41] Roy's request was not uncommon for SNCC activists, as finding food, shelter, and money was a struggle. While staying at the Daniels' residence, Sherrod and Roy convinced Daniels to hold a meeting at the town's local church, ATOC African Methodist Church (A.M.E.).[42] Before Daniels's acceptance, there was a point of contention

[38] Ibid, 571.

[39] Ibid.

[40] "Carolyn Daniels," SNCC Digital Getaway, https://snccdigital.org/people/carolyn-daniels/.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

within local churches in Terrell County regarding allowing SNCC members to use their institutions as a location to hold their meetings of recruitment. The trustees of the A.M. E Church threatened to file arrest warrants on SNCC members for breaking and entering if they tried to use their institution to hold their meetings.[43] This situation was "was avoided by the diplomacy of the presiding Bishop, Mr. Dupree."[44] The reason for the churches concerns was due to a fear of a single correlation to the movement, as it brought a direct threat to their church community.

Daniels played a vital role in the local church as a member, organizer of events, and facilitator of news. As emphasized by historian, Vicki Crawfold, "While male leadership dominated at the national and regional levels of the twentieth-century black freedom struggle, women's activism was strongest on the local level where black women extended their roles within church communities and secular organizations to organize for political change."[45] The church gave Daniels, as well as other women, a space to participate in change. Daniels agreed to hold the meeting at her church regarding the arrival of SNCC and their voting registration program. At this very moment, there was zero evidence that Daniels was fully committed to the movement, herself, yet arguably she had committed fully due to the offering of her church and home.

Everything changed for Carolyn Daniels when her son Roy was attacked. One day, Roy "brought a woman to the Terrell County courthouse to try and register, and he was attacked and

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[43] "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee files on Georgia (Jan 01, 1962 - Jan 31, 1962), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972: 12. https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=252253-019-0871&accountid=13320.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Collier-Thomas and Franklin, *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, 121.

beaten by Sheriff Z.T Matthews."[46] SNCC students were often met with violence from local officials, especially police officers when engaging in their activism. Reflecting on the event, Daniels explains "'The thing I couldn't get over was that Roy was just a youngster who didn't bother anybody, yet he couldn't go into the courthouse, a public building without the sheriff slapping and kicking him. And I was a taxpayer.'"[47] Daniels saw firsthand that her contribution to American society as a taxpayer meant nothing in the eyes of white Americans. This cruel beating of her son can be read as a turning point for Daniels and a specific impetus to get more involved in the movement. Black women often fought in the movement to not only gain a better life for themselves, but their children. It was not uncommon that "when young people got involved, their parents and the community followed."[48] This was a trend that SNCC organizers saw in almost every Southern city. Girls' and boys' activism, like Roy's, became vital in recruiting family members and local community, as shown through the acceptance and participation of Carolyn Daniels.

Soon after the attack and her official commitment to the SNCC voting campaign, Daniels began to set up citizenship schools in Dawson to provide potential voters instruction on Georgia's voting registration test.[49] Citizenship training workshops and schools took place in cities around the country. Individuals, such as pastors, students, and trained teachers, went out in communities, more specifically in school classrooms and churches to educate black men and women on not only what it meant to be a citizen, but how to pass their literacy test. The school

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[46] "Carolyn Daniels," SNCC Digital Getaway, https://snccdigital.org/people/carolyn-daniels/.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] "Citizenship school monthly attendance and record sheets," Records of the Citizenship Education Program, 1962-1964 (Jan 01, 1962 – Dec 31, 1964), Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001569-017-0149&accountid=13320

went on for four-week increments. In order for individuals to fight for their rights and be a citizen, it is essential for them to understand their rights. It became vital for individuals like that of Carolyn Daniels to facilitate these workshops as they were pinnacle to individuals' success in passing the voting tests. Daniels instructed citizens on how to fill out voter registration forms and also provided the participants with the proper education on how to pass the voting registration assessment. Carolyn Daniels' activism did not just occur in her workshops, but she actively walked down the streets of Terrell County advocating for individuals to not only vote, but to participate in the workshops.

Except for individuals who were too scared to continue, everyone in Carolyn's classes in 1962 passed their voting registration tests with flying colors. As every teacher did, Carolyn Daniels reported back to SNCC's headquarters about her success in Terrell County. She wrote in her letter that she had added the individual's names to the list. The records also included detailed attendance sheets. Lastly, the sheets detailed how many students passed the test. According to SNCC records, within three years, Daniels was able to "raise the number of Negroes registered to vote from 51 in 1960 to 140 as of August 1963."[50] At the time, the population of black citizens living in Terrell County was 57.2%, and still only 31.1% were registered.[51] However, the tremendous aid of Daniels allowed for the percentage to increase, showing her contributions to the program as a whole.

Records became essential as they not only held value to the activism Daniels and others were completing but to obtaining funds. Daniels along with every other teacher sent detailed

[50] "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Southwest Georgia Project files," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Paper, 1959-1972 (Dec 01, 1961 - Dec 31, 1965): 19. https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=252253-037-0802&accountid=13320

[51] Ibid.

reports and sometimes even photographs to educational directors to enhance their chances of donations. These donations not only benefited Daniels' work but the work of every other school around the country.[52]

Daniels's activism also occurred in her home. Her house became a safe place for SNCC activists to stay while in town organizing. Terrell County, especially the city of Dawson, was small, and word spread fast, especially about individuals' contributions to the SNCC voting registration summer project. Once Daniels joined the movement, her affiliation to the movement was known by everyone. Law enforcement and the local white citizens began targeting specific individuals associated with local activism, especially individuals housing white SNCC activists, like that of Daniels.[53] As a result, Carolyn Daniels was quickly added to their radar.

In 1962, Carolyn Daniels first documented act of terror occurred. According to SNCC papers:

> On Tuesday the 9th, 1962, Mrs. Daniels was accosted by a policeman at another person's home. (She doesn't know how he knew where she was.) He presented her with a bill of $22.84. This was supposed to be the amount of taxes she owed on a car bought in 1957. She asked him what make--he could not tell her. She told him that she had not bought a car in 1957 but he was adamant. He made reference to the three possessions that she had and then said that if the $22.84 was not forthcoming, he would have to levy something. She was afraid. The amount of money was borrowed from the bank and was paid.[54]

While this act of terror had zero physical harm on Daniels, it served as a fear tactic. While it initially scared Daniels, it did not stop her, she kept going.

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[52] "Citizenship school monthly attendance and record sheets, Records of the Citizenship Education Program, 1962-1964 (Jan 01, 1962 – Dec 31, 1964), Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001569-017-0149&accountid=13320

[53] John Perdew and Randy Battle, "A Kitchen Table Conversation: Events in Dawson and Americus, Georgia," October 2005. https://www.crmvet.org/nars/perdew1.htm

[54] "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Southwest Georgia Project files," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972 (Dec 01, 1961 – Dec 31, 1965): 24. https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=252253-037-0802&accountid=13320

This was not the end of Carolyn Daniel's targeting, rather it got more violent. One evening in September 1962, "night riders fired shots into Daniels' two-bedroom home."[55] When the shots had finally stopped, Daniels made a call to the SNCC headquarters in Albany and reported the incident. She declared that numerous shots had been fired into her house with what appeared to be a machine gun.[56] The night riders had "wounded Jack Chatfield, a white northern volunteer, who had been in Southwest Georgia for all of two days."[57] Immediately after the call, John Perdew, a SNCC activist of the time, along with Don Harris, a SNCC leader, hopped into two separate cars and headed to Dawson. Within fifteen minutes, the two SNCC activists had arrived at Carolyn Daniels' home. What they found, shocked them both.[58]

There were bullet holes all over the top of Carolyn Daniels' house. Not only was her home targeted, but so was Daniels's beauty shop, located right next door. Her business establishment had totally destroyed. The nightriders had also show into the house neighboring Daniels's. Considering the night riders and law enforcement had knowledge of individuals involved in the movement, they were very intentional with who they targeted. It is possible that her neighbors were simply attacked due to their knowledge of Daniels's activities or perhaps the shots served as a warning against any possible collaboration.

After examining the holes in the buildings, the two men noticed that some white boys in Carolyn Daniels's neighborhood "had a machine gun mounted on the back of a pickup truck."[59] When shots began to fire, Daniels got down on the floor, so she was unable to see the shooter.

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[55] Perdew and Battle, "A Kitchen Table Conversation: Events in Dawson and Americus, Georgia."

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

Yet, in a small town like Dawson, everyone knows everyone, including who has what weapons. The only man who owned a machine gun in the town was the Sheriff, Z. T. Mathews. Even if the neighbors or anyone nearby saw the culprit, they would never testify. This unwillingness to act as potential witnesses illustrates not only the effect of fear in Terrell County during the movement, but also the power the police authorities held.

Despite this initial act of violence, Daniels continued to welcome SNCC volunteers and continued with her activism.[60] Her home was rebuilt by members of SNCC. Yet, the violence did not end there. Just three months later, almost to the day, "on the night of December 8, 1963, Daniels, while lying in her bed, heard a car door slam and footsteps. Then shots shattered her bedroom windows, and a bomb rolled under the bed but failed to detonate."[61] After escaping her home, and in pursuit of her neighbors' home, Daniels had wounded her foot. While she was gone at the hospital, the bomb had gone off, so when she returned home, Daniels's house was gone yet again. As announced in the SNCC newspaper:

> A 33- year-old woman barely missed death here early Sunday morning December 8, when night riders bombed her house. Mrs. Carolyn Daniels, a Dawson beautician, received a bullet wound in her left foot when shots were fired at her home late Saturday night. While she was at a hospital - waiting for treatment for her injuries - a bomb exploded in her home, making it 'a total wreck.[62]

The Student Voice reported the bombing in another small article that declared to the public that Daniels would continue her activism: "Mrs. Carolyn Daniels, whose Dawson, Georgia home was bombed last week after shots were fired at her house… had indicated she will continue trying to register voters in Southern Georgia."[63] According to Daniels, herself, "Sherrod

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[60] "Carolyn Daniels," SNCC Digital Getaway, https://snccdigital.org/people/carolyn-daniels/.

[61] Ibid.

[62] "Night Riders Shoot Worker," *The Student Voice*, December 9, 1963: 1.

[63] "Raleigh Vote Drive Begins," *The Student Voice,* December 16, 1963: 2.

and the SNCC workers continued to use my house and we just kept going, we just kept going."[64] Part of continuing her activism was rebuilding her home after the attack. SNCC was not the only organization that helped get Daniels back on her feet financially. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by Martin Luther King, helped support Daniels through the tragedy. According to SCLC records and a newsletter from February of 1964, Daniels was provided four hundred dollars from the organization to help aid her son Roy in completing his education.[65] The fund was provided through by America's Conscience Fund, which was created to aid individuals like Daniels in these scenarios. The fact that Carolyn Daniels activism was being seen by the SCLC, shows her outreach and impact on the community and the movement as a whole.

[64] "Carolyn Daniels," SNCC Digital Getaway, https://snccdigital.org/people/carolyn-daniels/.

[65] "Field Foundation grants, SCLC expenses and United Church of Christ, Records of Andrew Young, Program Director, January-June 1964," Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970 (Jan 01, 1964 - Jun 30, 1964): 15. https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001569-002-0644&accountid=13320

Conclusion

When we study the Civil Rights Movement at a national level, we lose the beauty of individual stories. The stories of not only individual people but communities coming together to make change, like that of the story of Terrell County. The story of the student activists, local citizens, and more importantly women like Carolyn Daniels. The significance of the story of Carolyn Daniels lies in the fact that she was just an ordinary woman and a mother trying to make ends meet in a country that did not see her as equal. There are women like Daniels that contributed all over the country, and while their activism may differ, their struggles are universal. We ought to acknowledge the stories of those like Daniels who fought and made significant change in their community. There are more stories to tell; Carolyn Daniels and the story of "Terrible Terrell" is just one.

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