

came not from ministers but from laypeople. Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus was not the action of a mere seamstress with sore feet. Her action made a statement for the entire black community, and the NAACP for which she had served as secretary for a number of years. It was not until December 5, 1955, the day after the Montgomery bus boycott began, that Martin Luther King, Jr. became president of the boycott organization. The Montgomery Improvement Association voted Dr. King into the position because, as one of the women activists put it, "the ministers who didn't want the presidency of the MIA... were just chicken, passing the buck to Dr. King."<sup>23</sup> In fact, most preachers in Montgomery were skeptical about the boycott's chances for success. Nevertheless, the formation of the MIA brought the preachers into the forefront and there they remained for the duration. The appearance of black church leadership in movements against segregation reflected a shift in black attitudes rather than a bold initiative by black preachers.<sup>24</sup>

Granted, from the beginning, it may not have been ministers or church groups at the helm of the movement, but without their sustenance early on, the civil rights movement as it is now known, would have fizzled to nothing. Without the church instilling motivation, providing leadership, and a usable meeting space, fewer individuals would have been reached, and the movement would have been severely hampered. It is possible that the African-Americans' ultimate goal of whole freedom would have been reached. The African-American church in the South played such a role in the civil rights movement, that had it not been for the manpower it provided or its support financially and spiritually, the movement would have been changed immensely—for the worse. Many citizens of the South who would have otherwise allowed the "white machine" to roll right over them, stood strong with the backing of their faith and their friends against the cruelty and injustice in which they were forced to live. They had the courage and the will to change their situation, and the power to do so with the support of their peers and their church.

<sup>23</sup> Fairclough, 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

## The Success of Gender in the Civil Rights Movement:

A Study of Jo Ann Robinson, Rosa Parks,  
Fannie Lou Hamer, and Anne Moody

Lisa Grierson

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The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s brought many people to national attention. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. went from a locally known Baptist preacher to a national hero. More tragically, the nation mourned the deaths of young Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, and the three workers during Freedom Summer. Although many women participated in the movement, few had national roles; however, no explanation has been given that completely answers why this is so. Some historians have recently argued that the Women's Rights movement was the reason some women attained national attention and others did not. For example, the press did not recognize the women of the early Civil Rights movement because of the secondary role women played in everyday society. Similarly, historians claim women attained more attention because the Women's Liberation Movement had set the groundwork. This conclusion is not completely true. More accurate is the conclusion of historian Janice Hamlet. She presents ethos and image as the reasons why some women were able to rise into the public spotlight. Ethos is produced through character, intelligence, goodwill, and charisma. It is important to note that in this instance

intelligence is defined as knowledge of a subject matter.<sup>1</sup> The personalities of the female civil rights workers and their ability to articulate the goals of the movement played a role more important to their success in gaining national attention than did the growing movement for women's rights.

In the civil rights era, the Women's Political Council (WPC) played a central role in brewing up support for the movement from local blacks. The organization launched the hugely successful Montgomery Bus Boycott. Dr. Mary Fair Burks founded this organization for black women in 1946. Dr. Burks, a member of Alabama State College's English department, presided as the organization's first president, and it was she who "organized the women who would work together as leaders and followers, giving and taking suggestions, and who would never reveal the secrets of the WPC."<sup>2</sup> Motivated by her own suffering, Dr. Burks created the organization so it would be ready when the inevitable fight for civil rights began. Many of the early members of the WPC were educated and professional women such as teachers, nurses, and supervisors.

Jo Ann Robinson was one of these women, and she became the head of the WPC in 1950.<sup>3</sup> As with Burks, Jo Ann Robinson taught in the English department at Alabama State College. Robinson, the youngest of twelve children, was born in Colloden, Georgia, in 1916. After moving to Macon, she graduated as valedictorian of her high school class. Robinson subsequently received her Bachelor's degree from Georgia State College and her Master's degree in English literature from Atlanta University. In 1949, she moved to Montgomery where she taught at Alabama State College.<sup>4</sup>

As the head of WPC, she worked in negotiations with Mayor

W.A. Gayle and the City Commissioners of Montgomery in the hopes of solving some of the "nuisance problems" that involved the numerous blacks of the city.<sup>5</sup> Also, at this time, the organization gained support from the black community. After numerous complaints to the WPC about the bus system, the organization visited the City Commission at which the Commission promised to look into the problem. Not long after that meeting, the bus companies requested the right to raise bus fees because of declining numbers of riders. The WPC protested this "because [they] objected to the type of service, coupled with inhuman indignities, that was being given black people."<sup>6</sup>

In response to failed attempts to convince the bus companies to change their policies and to the arrest of Rosa Parks, the civil rights organizations in Montgomery decided to boycott the buses. Jo Ann Robinson wrote the notice to the boycott that the WPC distributed to the black people of Montgomery. The notice stated that the WPC asked blacks to stay off buses in protest of Rosa Parks's arrest.<sup>7</sup> With help of students and WPC members, Robinson distributed tens of thousands of leaflets. Robinson took credit, and rightfully so, for the boycott's success. When the boycott began on December 2, 1955, she said, "I was pleased that I had such support for my involvement in the planning...of the Montgomery Bus Boycott."<sup>8</sup>

According to Robinson's own memoirs, she credits the Women's Political Council with, not only organizing, but instigating the boycott. While preparing the boycott, she wrote that "On December 2, 1955, the women of Montgomery will call for a boycott, to take place on Monday, December 5."<sup>9</sup> If the WPC was responsible for organizing and instigating the Montgomery Bus Boycott, it is reasonable to suspect that Robinson would have enjoyed some level of national attention; however, she did not attain any significant measure of fame until after her book was

<sup>1</sup> Janice Hamlet, "Fannie Lou Hamer the Unquenchable Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 26 (1996): 561.

<sup>2</sup> Jo Ann Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson*, ed. David J. Garrow (Knoxville, 1987), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, *Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Anne Standley, "The Role of Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, vol. 16, *Troublemakers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (New York, 1990), 187.

<sup>5</sup> Robinson, *Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

published. The President of Alabama State College provides part of the explanation for this. Dr. Trenholm asked Jo Ann Robinson "to work behind the scenes, not to involve the college...."<sup>10</sup> So it is not unreasonable to assume that, due to Robinson's love of teaching and respect for her boss, she followed his wishes. This does not completely answer the question, though. Robinson also made it clear that if her work at the college interfered with her own participation in the Civil Rights Movement and with her system of beliefs, she would have left her job.<sup>11</sup>

Some have argued that women of the early Civil Rights Movement did not attain national attention because of sexism.<sup>12</sup> Denying sexism's role in the Civil Rights Movement would be incorrect. The movement toward women's rights was still in its earliest stages when Jo Ann Robinson worked with the Montgomery Bus Boycott. She did not enjoy its benefits as later women did; however, sexism alone did not deny Robinson national attention because other women of the early movement did have national roles. Although Robinson played an integral role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott she lacked the charisma that helped the women attain national attention. The personalities of the female civil rights workers played the greatest part in determining their success in front of the national forum.

Unlike Jo Ann Robinson, whose fame came after the publication of her book, Rosa Park emerged as one of the most recognizable figures of the Civil Rights Movement. Rosa Park's trial and arrest during the Montgomery Buss Boycott thrust her into the national spotlight. In the 1950s, Rosa Parks was working with the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For several years, the NAACP had considered filing a lawsuit against the city of Montgomery because of bus segregation; however, they wanted an ideal plaintiff. As Rosa Parks explains, "The best plaintiff

would be a woman, because a woman would get more sympathy than a man. And the woman would have to be above reproach, have a good reputation, and have done nothing wrong but refuse to give up her seat."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, E.D. Nixon looked for a person who could gain fame for the movement. A teenage girl, Claudette Colvin, was originally going to be the plaintiff; however, she became pregnant, and since she was unmarried, the NAACP feared that if the press found out the case would be over. E.D. Nixon, a prominent black lawyer in Montgomery, decided to wait for a better plaintiff. Thursday, December 1, 1955, the NAACP and E.D. Nixon found their plaintiff in the person of Rosa Parks.

The police arrested Parks after she refused to give up her seat. Rosa Parks was the perfect plaintiff and also able to handle the fame that could be expected, according to E.D. Nixon, because "[he] knew she'd stand on her feet. She was honest, she was clean, she had integrity. The press couldn't go out and dig up something she did last year, or last month, or five years ago. They couldn't go hang nothing like that on Rosa Parks."<sup>14</sup> Rosa Parks describes herself as the perfect plaintiff because she had "worked all my life... wasn't pregnant with an illegitimate child... The white people couldn't point to me and say that there was anything I had done to deserve such treatment except to be born black."<sup>15</sup> Rosa Parks represented all the movement was meant to be. She fit perfectly into the picture that E.D. Nixon and other leaders wanted to paint of the movement. The trial and boycott that followed attained vast attention, locally and nationally. The local paper of Montgomery, *The Montgomery Advisor*, ran a copy of the leaflet Jo Ann Robinson had written.<sup>16</sup> Nationally, *The New York Times* covered the story. Unlike Jo Ann Robinson, Rosa Parks received coverage in *The New York Times* several times. If the sole explanation for women not attaining national attention was sexism, women such as Rosa Parks would

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Robinson, *Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women*, 49.

<sup>12</sup> William H. Chafe, "The End of One Struggle, The Beginning of Another" in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Charles W. Eagles (Jackson, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Rosa Parks, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (New York, 1992), 110-11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times* (New York), 6 December 1955, p. 38.

attained national recognition.

Historians could argue, and have, that Rosa Parks was the exception from the rule of sexism. Although it is true, to some degree, that Rosa Parks was the exception, it was more than a fluke set of events or her some how avoiding sexism that allowed her to succeed. Rosa Parks's personality and ethos, along with society's beliefs, helped bring her national attention. In fact, in some ways, the sexist views of society allowed Rosa Parks to succeed. In the 1950s, the fight for civil rights was still a new movement. The nation felt uncertainty toward the movement and its leaders. With the exception of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks was among the first people, male or female, to receive any national attention for participating in a function of the Civil Rights Movement. Petite, soft-spoken, and educated, Rosa Parks broke many of the stereotypes the county had toward blacks, and more specifically, black women. In 1955, women in the United States did not have leadership roles in any field. Even though Jo Ann Robinson played a far more extensive role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, she played a far less national role in the boycott. The fact that a black woman seemed to start an entire boycott shocked the county. These seemingly extraordinary acts of an ordinary person captured the nation's attention and thrust Rosa Parks into the national spotlight.

Fannie Lou Hamer, a civil rights worker beginning in the early 1960s, also attained national fame for her work with the movement and is the clearest example of the importance of ethos. She attained the national spotlight and took a leadership role during this time. When she spoke at the Democratic Convention in 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer became a national symbol of the Civil Rights Movement; however, without the struggles and triumphs of her early life, she may not have been able to achieve the fame that she did.

October 6, 1917, in Montgomery County, Mississippi, Fannie Lou was born to Jim and Ella Townsend. The youngest of twenty children, Fannie Lou's birth "helped her family survive one more

winter."<sup>18</sup> After several years, the family moved to Sunflower County in Mississippi where they worked on a plantation. As a child, Fannie Lou Hamer's mother protected her children and taught them to live according to biblical teachings. In 1944, Fannie Lou married Perry "Pap" Hamer. They lived on a plantation outside of Ruleville owned by the Marlow family. Even before she became active in the Civil Rights Movement, Fannie Lou stood out. Many blacks had grown up under conditions of extreme poverty, racism, and violence that she had. Journalist Kay Mills defined five aspects in which she was different. These aspects, her mother, her faith, her patriotism, her ability to sing, and her anger over her unknown sterilization, made her the person she was.

Fannie Lou's mother endured a great deal of suffering in her lifetime, and Fannie Lou Hamer looked to her mother for inspiration. Further, Hamer's faith was highly important to her life. She was baptized in the Quiver River and joined the Strangers Home Baptist Church at the age of twelve. Fannie Lou could quote Bible scripture naturally and often used the Bible's teachings in her speeches. She considered her work in the Civil Rights Movement her 'calling' and 'mission'.<sup>19</sup> Her faith taught her that "hating made one as weak as those filled with hatred."<sup>20</sup> Andrew Young, an aide to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., describes her as an "instinctively an extremely nonviolent person."<sup>21</sup> This nonviolent personality and seemingly unshakable belief in God would become central to her success in the Civil Rights Movement. Despite the atrocities to which she fell victim to because of legal racism, Fannie Lou Hamer loved the United States. John Lewis, chairman of SNCC in 1963, recalled that Hamer "really believed in America and she wanted to make it real."<sup>22</sup>

The fourth aspect of Fannie Lou Hamer that made her different among the impoverished of the Mississippi Delta was her

<sup>18</sup> Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: the Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York, 1993), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Mills, *Little Light of Mine*, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Mills, *Little Light of Mine*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

ability to sing. Singing was Hamer's tool to overcome fear and endure the suffering of life as a sharecropper. In fact, it was her singing ability that provided Fannie Lou Hamer with the opportunity to participate in her first civil rights rally. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leader James Farmer heard her singing and asked her to lead the singing at an upcoming rally. Entertainer Harry Belafonte said that Fannie Lou "always sang with a mission."<sup>23</sup>

The final aspect that helped to make Fannie Lou Hamer an extraordinary person was the anger and sorrow of being sterilized. In 1961, Hamer was in her middle forties and needed to have surgery to have "a small uterine tumor removed...She was recuperating" when she found out the truth about the operation: she had been given a hysterectomy.<sup>24</sup> Unknown sterilization of black women was unfathomably common during the 1960s and would become a national issue during the 1970s. These five aspects of her life worked in combination with each other to give Fannie Lou Hamer the strength and perseverance that would become her greatest power as a leader of the Civil Rights Movement as she made reference to them in her numerous speeches.

Fannie Lou Hamer's first personal experience with civil rights was her attempt to register to vote. In 1962, James Bevel, a minister with Southern Christian Leadership Conference, preached at a meeting that Hamer attended. At the end of the service, Bevel asked if anyone wanted to try to become a registered voter. Hamer raised her hand, and on August 31, she and seventeen other women went to Indianola to register to vote.<sup>25</sup> On the way home from the courthouse, a police officer arrested the driver of the bus because the bus was too yellow and looked too much like a school bus. To calm the fears of everyone on the bus, Fannie Lou Hamer began singing. As Kay Mills states, "It was the first time that Fannie Lou Hamer drew upon this well of talent in public service...the power of her voice would remain stamped in the

mind of many a Mississippian, many an American in the coming years."<sup>26</sup> When Hamer returned to the plantation, her boss threatened that if she tried again to register he would fire her. In response to this threat, Fannie Lou Hamer left the plantation. Eventually, in 1963, she passed the voting test and became a registered voter.

The major turning point in Hamer's life came in Winona, the county seat of Montgomery County, on June 9, 1963. The events that follow became the core of her powerful story about the evils of a black person trying to become a first-class citizen.<sup>27</sup> A bus carrying black passengers returning from a voter registration training session stopped in Winona so the passengers could use the restroom or eat at the restaurant; however, when they tried, local police and sheriffs stopped them. After several hours in the jail, two black inmates beat Fannie Lou Hamer at the request of the guards.<sup>28</sup>

As stated earlier, Fannie Lou Hamer became a national symbol of the Civil Rights Movement in 1964. When John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as President in 1961, the National Democratic Party was anything but national. As Marie Lockie explains, "Many Mississippians and Southern whites had excommunicated themselves from the national Democratic Party...Mississippi Democrats resented the attack by the national party on their belief in segregation, and felt that...a strain had been placed on their Democratic identification."<sup>29</sup> In response to the Mississippi Democrats' attempts to keep blacks from voting, Fannie Lou Hamer co-founded the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party (MDFP). Mills states, "The Freedom Democrats had an immediate goal—unseating the all-white Mississippi delegation of the Regular

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 60; Bernice Johnson Renyon, "Women as Culture Carriers in the Civil Rights Movement: Fannie Lou Hamer," 207-8; Fannie Lou Hamer, "Fannie Lou Hamer" in Howell Raines, *My Soul is Rested: movement days in the Deep South remembered* (New York, 1983), 252-254.

<sup>29</sup> Mamie B. Lockie, "Is This America? Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party," *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, vol. 16, *Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (New York, 1990), 28.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), 30 May 1976, sec. B.1.

<sup>25</sup> Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 36.

Democratic Party at the 1964 convention."<sup>30</sup> Hamer and several other black Mississippians were on the regular Democratic ballot for the U.S. Congress. After the failed attempt to work within the framework of the Democratic Party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party held its own election. The Second District elected Fannie Lou Hamer as its representative. Thirty-five hundred people participated in the Freedom Democrat's precinct meeting against the regular Democrats. In all, sixty-eight people were chosen to represent the MFDP at the national Democratic Convention in Atlantic City.<sup>31</sup> While in Atlantic City, Hamer spoke on the first day of the convention. Asking "Is this America?", Hamer told the horrors blacks faced in the South, and after her speech, she wept before the Credentials Committee and "before the millions of Americans watching the proceedings on television."<sup>32</sup> This dramatic moment thrust Fannie Lou Hamer in to the national spotlight. The MFDP's challenge to the regular Democratic Party at the Atlantic City Convention provided a turning point for the Civil Rights Movement. The publicity of the event caused people to act. Vice-presidential nominee Herbert Humphrey "proposed a series of changes."<sup>33</sup> Numerous newspapers covering the Democratic Convention turned their attention to Fannie Lou Hamer and the MFDP.<sup>34</sup> *The New Republic* questioned the "Conscience of a Convention" and called Johnson the "keeper of a disorderly house."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, *The Nation* devoted four pages to telling the story of Fannie Lou Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.<sup>36</sup>

Why was Fannie Lou Hamer able to succeed in gaining national attention when people such as Jo Ann Robinson were not? As shown earlier, historian Janice Hamlet presents ethos and

<sup>30</sup>Mills, *Little Light of Mine*, 105.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 108-9.

<sup>32</sup>Lockie, "Is This America?", 32.

<sup>33</sup>John Dittmer, "The Politics of the Mississippi Movement, 1954-1964" in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Charles W. Eagles (Jackson, 1986), 84.

<sup>34</sup>*New York Times*, 23 August 1964, p. 1; 3 July 1965, p. 6; 1 Jan 1965, p. 24; 24 August 1964, p. 17; 29 December 1964, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup>Murray Kempton, "Conscience of a Convention," *The New Republic*, 5 September 1964, 5, 7.

<sup>36</sup>Jerry DeMuth, "Tired of Being Sick and Tired," *The Nation*, 1 June 1964, 548-551.

image in public address as the reason some women succeeded. Fannie Lou Hamer's personality and very spirit filled all of the aspects of ethos. In *The Nation*, Jerry DeMuth painted a vivid portrait of Hamer: "Although she lacked a formal education, she was more intelligent than most about the evils of American society," but more importantly according to Hamlet, "she embodied a strong sense of character, intelligence, goodwill, and charisma, components that governed her life and the work she felt compelled to do."<sup>37</sup> Also, like Rosa Parks, the oddity of Fannie Lou Hamer helped her attain national attention. The typical civil rights worker during the 1960s was well-educated and young. Hamer only had a sixth grade education because she helped her family in the fields. Furthermore, when she gave her speech at the Democratic Convention, she was forty-six years old. Therefore, she was neither well-educated nor young.<sup>38</sup> Finally, it was not common place to have such a demonstration at a national convention. Moreover, it was probably quite a sight to see a two hundred pound black woman from Mississippi weeping on a national television. The extraordinary personality of Fannie Lou Hamer and her extraordinary actions at the Democratic National Convention played critical roles in her gaining national attention.

It is important to look at the effects of the movement for women's rights on Fannie Lou Hamer. Fannie Lou Hamer is more responsible for helping to further the Women's Rights Movement than the movement is for furthering Fannie Lou Hamer. Fannie Lou helped in founding the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). Fannie Lou Hamer gathered in Washington D.C. with Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Myrlie Evers, and other activists to discuss placing "more women in elective and appointive offices to make the political system more responsive to the concerns of women."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, if Fannie Lou Hamer was helped by the emerging Women's Rights Movement, it was far more helped by her.

Some historians argue that, as shown earlier, the fight for

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 575.

<sup>38</sup>Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 12 and 115.

<sup>39</sup>Mills, *This Little Light of Mine*, 275.

Women's Rights played a major part in determining the amount of fame a civil rights worker would attain. They conclude that women during the earlier days of the movement attained less fame because women played a supportive role in everyday society. The press and nation were not ready for a woman to lead a social movement, especially on the size of the Civil Rights Movement. Unfortunately, this argument ignores key pieces of information. The first of these pieces of information being Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer, who were both able to attain national attention before the Women's Rights Movement had a hold on the country. If one assumes that the women did not gain attention because of the secondary role women played in society at the time, one could conclude that as times progressed so did the numbers of women gaining recognition for their work with the Civil Rights Movement. This did not happen. Probably one of the clearest examples of the error in this argument is Anne Moody.

Anne Moody worked with the Civil Rights Movement during a time when the Women's Rights Movement was just making substantial steps forward. The U.S. State Department and the United Nations had been discussing the status of women for as long as a decade.<sup>40</sup> Also Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* published in 1963, advocated equal pay for equal work, improved day care arrangements, and preservation of abortion rights.<sup>41</sup> Friedan also helped found the National Organization for Women in the middle 1960s. Furthermore, President Kennedy appointed the Commission on the Status of Women which proposed the 1963 Equal Pay Act. The fight for women's rights began to take hold of the country; however, Moody still did not attain national attention before the publication of her book, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, in 1968. When she worked in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s, Anne Moody was young, well-educated,

<sup>40</sup>Lorena B. Hahn, "The United Nations and Equality for Women: Ninth Session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women," *The Department of State Bulletin* August 1, 1955, 206-208; "Discrimination on Grounds of Sex," International Conciliation March 1956, 311-317; Gladys A. Tillett, "A Progress Report on the Status of Women: Sixteenth Session of U.N. Commission on the Status of Women," *The Department of State Bulletin* July 30, 1962, 197-99.

<sup>41</sup>Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1974).

and dedicated to the cause of civil rights. She worked in some of the most dangerous areas of the South for many years. If the Women's Rights Movement was going to help anyone attain national attention, it would have been Anne Moody; however, it did not.

Anne Moody grew up in one of the most segregated and violent areas of the Deep South: Centreville, Mississippi. In 1963 after her junior year at Tougaloo College, she began working with the SNCC in Mississippi. Later she worked with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Canton, Mississippi. At that time SNCC and CORE worked to register black people eligible to vote. Like Jo Ann Robinson, Anne Moody played a critical role in the organization of activities for the Civil Rights Movement. In Anne Moody's case, she was one of many organizing voter registration drives. She also played an active role in searching out blacks to register.<sup>42</sup>

As with Jo Ann Robinson, Anne Moody's personality did not capture the nation's attention. As stated earlier, Rosa Parks was extraordinary because of her accomplishments. Her normalcy made her extraordinary in the eyes of a public that was uncertain about the Civil Rights Movement. By the time Anne Moody came onto the scene, the Civil Rights Movement had established itself in the country. To become a leader of the movement in the 1960s took an extraordinary person, male or female. The nation still viewed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as the leader of the national movement. Few men took on leadership roles during this period. Although several smaller, more militant organizations, such as the Black Panthers and Black Muslims, developed during the 1960s, their leaders, excepting Malcolm X, never attained the level of national recognition that Dr. King and his SCLC did. For a woman to have gained this public attention, she would have had to be extraordinary. This is not to say that Anne Moody was not; however, she did fit the typical profile of the civil rights worker in the 1960s. She was black, educated, and young.

The Civil Rights Movement affected tens of thousands of

<sup>42</sup>Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York, 1968), 291-292.

## Moll Flanders and the "Bloody Code's" Moral

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he early eighteenth century marked a period of remarkable evolution in English criminal law. While the "bloody code" and other similar pieces of legislation created more felonies, fewer people in fact were executed. There was a greater concern about the pervasiveness of crime, especially in London. The literature of the time reflects a fascination in crime and punishment in works such as *Moll Flanders* and *The Newgate Calendar*. Historians have argued over the causes and affects crimes have on many periods, but the debate centered on the early eighteenth-century is particularly interesting, precisely because these were watershed years in English law.

E.P. Thompson and his followers, such as John Beattie, analyzed efforts to curb crime in the 1700's employing a Marxist view of class struggle. During the 1960's and early 1970's these historians classified nearly everything in terms of a proletariat struggle against a small elite upper class. They failed to explain the "bloody code" completely because they ignored the eighteenth-century moral view of crime. Most people, not just the elite, viewed crime as resulting from poverty and moral failure. The eighteenth-century English legislative efforts to curb crime

people. Some were affected directly because they were workers and leaders during the movement. Others paid with their lives for the cause of civil rights. Men and women both contributed to the movement. More men had positions of leadership; however, this in no way means that women did not play critical roles in the success of the Civil Rights Movement. The question of why women did not have more leadership roles resounds in recent studies of the movement. Many historians have speculated that because women, before the fight for women's rights, did not have positions of leadership in society, they did not have these positions in the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, they present the latter Women's Rights Movement as the reason women, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, were able to attain success nationally. This conclusion is too narrow. It cannot be denied that the women's liberation had a role in the position of women in the Civil Rights Movement; however, that role has been exaggerated. The personalities and accomplishments of the civil rights workers, and their ethos, played a role more important to their success in gaining national attention that the movement for women's rights did. More important to determining a woman's national attention was her personality and extraordinary accomplishments.

<sup>1</sup>John Beattie, "London Crime and the Making of the 'Bloody Code,' 1689-1718," *Sitting the Grumbling Hive: The Response to Social and Economic Problems in England, 1689-1750*, eds. Lee Davison, (New York, 1992), 49.