



Women Heroes Behind Martin Luther King's Civil Disobedience As One Of Major Moments In American History

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Abstract

Women in America has long history and journey towards their independent and rights, especially black women or African-American women. Their struggle for justice and equality has faced many challenges and turmoils ever since its movement begun. One of the movements was The Civil Rights movements by the mid of 20th century. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an African-American who vocalized in initiating and fighting for Civil Rights from black people community. His dedication for liberty and equality without segregation and racism is acknowledged to American and also has been used for references for many scholars in different fields of study globally. This paper is qualitative descriptive which focuses on describing the Women Heroes and their contributions behind Martin Luther King, Jr's journey to struggle for Civil Rights in America. The findings shows that there are at least three heroes; Rosa Louise McCauley a.k.a Rosa Parks, Constance Baker Motley, and Coretta Scott King who did not only show their courage but also bring huge impacts to legalize the Civil Rights Movement. Rosa Parks acted as symbol of civil rights movements supported by Montley as their legal supporter, and also Coreta who had given her many intellectual thoughts to King. Their dedications were undeniable and became spirit for African-American rights up until now. This paper contributes to further readings about civil rights movement and its features, especially women heroes behind the movement.

Keywords: Women Heroes, Women suffrage to Civil Rights, Martin Luther King, Jr Women Heroes, Black People Movement.

I. INTRODUCTION

The civil rights movement in America is one of the most historic moments and one of major events in American history, it was initiated by Black people in America or African-Americans in struggling, attaining, and gaining social justice which happened or took place by the mid of 20th century, approximately 1950s-1960s to reach equality under The United States law. The slavery did end by the Civil War but the racism and discrimination still

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continued against Black People in America, moreover it happened massively in the South of America. In this era, Black people had many prejudice and racial discrimination, also experienced violence throughout the countries. Black people started to mobilize fight that had never been before to struggle for equality and justice. This fight was not only vocalized by Black people, but also White Americans.

In American history, the civil rights story depicts one of the greatest struggles that actually still continues to this day. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as the nation's founding documents provide and serve equal justice and everybody is equal before the law. However, a huge number of racism and discrimination of Black People in America still happens. For example, the case of George Floyd that was killed by white police officers by pinning his head to the ground until he could not breathe. This case triggered anger not only for American but also the globe. The next case happened in 2020, the case of Ahmaud Arbery who was shot by white American for doing jogging near the shooter house who also actually they live in the same neighborhood. This case broke heart Americans and they conducted march to protest how slow the government treat this case. Also the case of Breonna Taylor who was killed by some white police officers in her apartment five times until she collapsed and died five minutes after the shoots. These cases show how tremendous of prejudice own by white Americans towards Black people in America. They question about the human rights, justice, and equality promised by the government.

The movement of civil right brings victories for not only men, but women and all minorities in America. The economic sector increased and changed the nation into wider and bigger transformation. In its history, the movement also left stage for women to participate in the action. Therefore, this paper aims at finding the women heroes behind the civil rights movement.

One of the important and prominent people in the Civil Rights movement is Martin Luther King, Jr. an African-American and Black people in America. In the early pages of *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Biography* by Roger Bruns, King attributed for the intellectual development that shaped his leadership of the boycott in Montgomery bus and several growing movements of black people in America. King was born from the generations of fiery black preachers who helped him shape his ability in speaking in front of public. He learned how to be a good oratory from his father and his grandfather A.D. William, and he saw how they delivered their speech in Ebenezer Baptist Church then decided to be a minister to help black people with the discriminations around them. Firstly, he experienced the insult and vicious treatment of his family and others that live in hard scrabble (poor quality of land), frustration, and full of anger. He later studied at Bryant Preparatory School and dedicated himself as pastor for some small churches in Atlanta. After his works at Bryant, he continued his degree program at Morehouse School of Religion in 1926. He replaced his father's position

as pastor of Ebenezer and became the influential preacher in his town. He proposed the racial issues and issues of color that black people face all the time. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, he delivered his non-violent movement to deliver their aspirations to the government. King's philosophy highlights the positive effects of "creative tension" as a desirable corollary of direct non-violent action (Karunakaran, 95).

He then involved in many boycotts and movements toward Civil Rights to erase segregation between black and white people. He saw that the government's regulations tended to side white supremacy and increasingly cornered black rights. He was gifted by God with his dynamic oratory, great energy, sense of imagination and mission. During his march, he faced legal impediments, violence, and hatred. Even though King faced many obstacles during the movement, he finally overcame the issues that he brought. The human rights and liberties were achieved by black people finally. Instead of King who became a hero in Civil Rights acts, there were also some women heroes behind King's civil disobedient toward Civil Rights' movements; they were Rosa Louise McCauley a.k.a Rosa Parks, Constance Baker Motley, and Coretta Scott King. They had important role in helping and supporting King to fight for Civil Rights; human rights and liberty. Here this paper aims at describing who are the women heroes behind Martin Luther King Jr. and what are their major roles in this movement.

II. DISCUSSION

The Civil Rights Movement by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was social activist who had important part in the American civil rights movement by the mid of 20th century. He was assassinated in 1968 by tons of bullets during his speech in front of many people. He was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi to advocate nonviolence and peace protest to fight for equality for Black people or African American, improve the economy, and defend all victims from injustice (Bruns, 2006, 19-20). King was the major figure behind the boycotts and protest events which brought landmark legislation as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

When Martin Luther King was young, black American still had a long journey and struggle toward equality. There were still found much discrimination from white supremacy toward black people; isolated, segregated, no opportunities both work and education, even for most talented and energetic one. King remembered when he had to be patient when he could not go swimming just like what he wanted because he needed to swim in different pool with white people, their pools were segregated into white pools only and black pools only. If he broke the rule, he would get punishment by the government. Moreover, he could not

attend his dream school, he could not eat at the restaurant with the sign “whites only” in it, and even public transportations and toilets were segregated. He later be remembered with his phenomenal speech “I have a dream” where he dreamt the nation with peaceful mind and equality for all men and women, no discriminations, and a great brotherhood among all people in America.

In 1953, King married to Coretta Scott (1927-2006) and decided to live in Montgomery, Alabama. Here in this place, King became pastor in Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. There was a case in Montgomery where an African-American woman refused to give her seat to white people passanger on the bus and got arrested by the police. Her name was Rosa Parks, she was the secreatary for the local *National Association for the Advanced of Colored People Chapter* or usually called as NAACP. This case called activists to conduct boycotts knows as Montgomery bus boycott which would last for the next 381 days after she was arrested. This boycott did not only vocalize Rosa Parks case, but also to protest the transportation system which treated black people severely and also for the business owners downtown who differentiate people of color. These people chose Martin Luther King Jr. to represent them as spokesperson who would vocalize their aspiration. Starting from here, he began his journey as his first civil rights movements, one of them was the Montgomery buss boycott. During his fight, he and his family experinced violence and arrest by the police, he even got his house bombed by unkown people. Although, by the end of the fight, the segregation of transportation including bus was stated unconstitutional.

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, King became the national attention who got spotlight from media and all people in America on November 1956. He was known as inspirational supporter for non-violent opposition which was well organized. Encouraged by his success in moving the boycott, he established and funded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with other activist members to gain equality at whole using non-violence actions. During his role as the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), he went travel to many countries around the world. He also gave lectures about what is civil right and also how to conduct act of protest in non-violence way. He met many religious leaders, activists, and also political leaders around the world.

King moved to Atlanta in 1960 with his family and joined his father serving as pastor at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, initially he served as co-pastor. His position as religious figure kept pushing him becoming key players for many important events in fighting for civil rights in 1960s. He of course was supported by his coleagues in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Their struggle about nonviolence philosophy of protest experienced severe test duing Birmingham campaign held on 1963 where all the activists doing boycotts and march about the segregation, the shady recruitment and hiring process to work, and many other injustices happening in one of the most racial cities in America. On April 12,

he was arrested for all the charges for the protests, he later wrote a civil rights manifesto which globally known as Letter from Birmingham Jail addressed to all white clergymen who accused his non-violence way of protest as wrong doing.

Couple years later, King together with activists for civil rights and also supported by religious activists conducted march on Washington to fight for jobs opportunities and freedom. This march was held peacefully as one of the political rallies to obtain justice for all African-American faced through out the countries. This event was attended by two hundreds until three hundreds people and widely regarded as the most important movements in civil rights history in America and used as factor in the Civil Rights Act passage in 1964.

The *I have a Dream* speech was the climax of the march which marked King's most famous address as a call for peace and equality, people called this as masterpiece of rhetoric ever spoken about discrimination and racism. The speech was held in Lincoln Memorial where King said that American nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed, he preached that all men are equal. The Time Magazine crown him as Man of the Year. Furthermore, King received Nobel Peace in 1964; the youngest people ever received the award.

By the year of 1965, the international world recognize King high and intense profile about violence which took place in Selma, Alabama, conducted by white segregationist and also peaceful protestors where the SCLC and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) had conducted campaign for voter registration. The media took important role in airing the protest scene about many brutal angers by Americans to across the countries. The President Lyndon Johnson supported what King did where all the participants gathered in Selma taking part in Montgomery. The president also send federal troops to keep the protest peace. Finally, the Congress legalized and passed the Voting Rights Act on August which promised and guaranteed that everybody had rights to vote, and this later became the first awarded by the 15th Amandement for all black people or African-Americans.

Behind all protesters and participants in the boycotts and roads to civil rights, there are at least three major figures in helping Martin Luther King Jr. vocalized his voices. There are Rosa Rosa Louise McCauley a.k.a Rosa Parks (1913-2005), Constance Baker Motley (1921-2005), and King's wife Coretta Scott King (1927-2006). Their parts and also dedication for the movement were undeniable, here below we can know deeper about the women heroes and their roles towards civil rights.

Rosa Louise McCauley a.k.a Rosa Parks (1913-2005)

One of the giant steps from King toward desegregation between black and white people in America was the Montgomery bus boycott. It was Rosa Parks who became the hero to start to give action toward discrimination in segregating public transportation; in this case was bus transportation. The chronology happened on December 1, when she boarded from Cleveland Avenue bus; she entered the bus and sat down using the chair for colored people in the first row back in the bus. The front seats were filled with white people. What became the problem was there was standing a white people without seats because all of white people seats were occupied, the bus driver then asked Rosa Parks to give her seat and move back on the back row. According to the law, black people and white people cannot occupy and seat in the same row. The three black people agreed to go back and give their seats, but Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to the white people. Rosa Parks refused because she believed that she was on the right place, she then said to the driver that she wanted to be treated fairly as individuals and as a people (Burns, 37-39). The bus driver then called the police officers with the charge of violating the city and state ordinances. Rosa Parks then released on \$100 bond (Burns, 37-39).

At this momentum of Rosa Parks arrest, all black leaders, led by Nixon, King, and other civil rights workers, spot perfect opportunity to vocalize the civil rights and challenge the segregated bus system applied in the city. King later wrote about Rosa Parks which applauded her for her tireless action and mentioned her as a woman who did help actively in every protests more than anyone in every level (Burns, 38). With King powerful orator, he led the Montgomery city buses boycott on the day where Rosa Parks was scheduled trial on Monday, December 5.

Before that, on Sunday, King preached a sermon and told his congregations not taking ride on city buses. He then got up from bed earlier before dawn on Monday morning just to see from his window that there were busses across his house running without passengers in it. Montgomery was a city with approximately 75% citizen was blacks and the rest was whites and it allowed the bus company faced terribly bankruptcy. The boycott lasted for 381 days and during the boycott, King got many terrors from unknown group, his house was bombed and also the other civil rights workers' house. The government even established regulation for black people to prohibit them for doing protest. Moreover, the black churches also bombed from unknown group; however the government had done nothing for further investigation.

In 1956, The U.S. Supreme Court declaring that segregation on transportation or buses unconstitutional, this upheld the federal court's ruling on November 13. This important movement started by Rosa Parks who was remained as a hero was the new beginning for later King or other civil rights workers to fight against black people's rights and it was also

marked by King's statement that *We got our heads up now and we won't ever bow down again-no, sir- except before God* (Bruns, 45). There King started to think that the power of boycott was amazing, especially non-violent movement, and he planned to do another boycott for black people freedom for Voting Rights Act in 1965.

Constance Baker Motley (1921-2005)

The woman hero behind Rosa Parks arrest for Montgomery bus case was Constance Baker Motley. She was there to help Parks with her legal problem. Motley was one of the attorneys who supported and helped black people's movements toward the Civil Rights Act happened in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act taken place on 1965. Moreover, Motley was also the first black women accepted at Columbia University Law School and also was the first African-American judge that served the largest federal trial bench in America, the New York Southern District, also marked as the first African American woman working as judge in the district. She participated in fighting the discrimination of black people and later joined NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. In her career, she accentuated on housing discrimination and brought all segregation cases into fair trial, she believed that everybody should be equal, she wanted equal rights for all.

After her succession in helping Rosa Parks with Montgomery bus case, Motley also participated in helping activist during their sit-in movement happened in North Carolina. She help Martin Luther King Jr. with all the legal problems. The chronology of the sit-in movement happened when there were four students from black people studied at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College bought items in a store called Woolworth, they sat down at the lunch corner. The waitress asked them to leave the counter because it was for "whites only" but the four black students refused to leave. They argued to the waitress that by buying items from the store, they deserved to take a seat, not just standing.

From this mistreatment by the waitress in the store, the four students came back to Woolworth's store in the next morning brought along their friends who were more than 20 all black people, all dressed in black and took pray as the protest. They wanted to boycott stores with segregated lunch counters. By the end of the year, the boycott spread not only in North Carolina but hundred cities through the South. In other part of the city, Nashville, there were over one hundred protesters and activist led form the lunch couter to jail. King later joined this sit-in movement in Atlanta, headed to Rich's Department Store on October 20, 1960. King and thirteen black people protesters were arressted and jailed for this action. During the court, Motley helped King and other protesters to defend their rights and freed them from all judges. The result was that the Supreme Court run in *Boynnton v. Virginia* declared that segregation within interstate travel was illegal in 1960. By this decision, therefore there

was no longer segregation in public space such as transportation, restaurants, toilets/rest rooms, swimming pools, and other interstate travel facilities, the segregation was declared as unconstitutional.

Motley's service to black people still continued in helping Dr. King when he jailed in Birmingham for his biggest and most historical movement in civil rights. Whenever King or other black workers protesters conducted movement, Motley was always there to help them to fight against discrimination. Even Motley mentioned that the figure of Rosa Parks for her heroic action in Montgomery and Martin Luther King, Jr. for his also heroic contribution to civil rights as heroes. She adored them in her speech in August, 9, 1965. She said "We do honor Mrs. Parks, the freedom fighter whose proud refusal in giving her seat to keep her rights to white people in Montgomery bus, Alabama, and it is, of course, always a great pleasure to see Martin King. He is an American hero of authentic distinction who has achieved an unprecedented position of respect and prestige throughout the world." Even though she mentioned Rosa Parks along with Martin Luther King, Jr as American hero, actually she also deserves to be called as American Woman hero in her contribution to support black people rights in fighting for the Civil Rights Act taken place on the year of 1964 and also the Voting Rights Act happened in 1965.

Coretta Scott King (1927-2006)

Another woman who brought huge contribution to civil rights was Coretta Scott King. She played a significant part in the civil rights movement and accompanied her husband throughout 1950s and 1960s; she was a great partner to Dr. King. She took part in every movements or boycotts from his husband, King, started from the boycott of Montgomery bus and most significantly, she participated really active to support the Civil Rights Act 1964 to pass until Birmingham boycott. King stated how important Coretta to him, he said to public that if he had not had a wife like Coretta who had fortitude, strength and composure, he could not stand amid the trials and strains during the Montgomery protest. King and Coretta were blessed with four children, they were Yolanda Denise, Martin Luther III, Dexter Scott, and Bernice Albertine. She was such great wife to King and great mother of four with intelligent thought and wide skills.

During King held the boycotts, King's family got many terrors, especially from white supremacy, from KKK (Ku Klux Klan), and also from FBI. Coretta kept supporting her husband to continue his struggle along with Constance Baker Motley and other women activists. Even though their life was in danger, with her strong believe and dream to reach human rights, she never saw that the terrors were about to stop their struggle. Moreover, she kept balancing her duty as a mother and movement work.

What makes her become a hero is that during the struggle, she was actively involved in giving her intellectual opinion to King, she also involved herself behind the scene in planning marches and boycotts and giving speeches across the country, occasionally defending her husband. Wise man said that there will always a great woman behind a great man. Coretta as a wife and also activist was hero for black people for all of her contributions in the forms of planning, strategy, and intellectual thought to achieve civil rights. She and other women activists often captured by the media walking through the street orating the boycotts toward Civil Rights. With her talented skill in music, she took advantage of her creative talents in music and also singing skills to hold Freedom Concerts across the country, which raised large sums of money to fund the protests.

After her husband died and assassinated in 1968, Coretta threw herself into celebrating her husband's life and keeping his legacy alive. In the process she transformed into a worldwide human rights leader including women's rights, LGBT rights, economic issues, world peace, and various other causes. "I'm more determined than ever that my husband's dream will become a reality," the young widow said soon after her husband's murder. Coretta immersed herself in celebrating her husband's life, and also keeping his legacy alive. By the time, she has turned into a leader in human rights around the world for issues such as women's rights, discrimination and racism, LGBT rights, economic, peace, and many other cases. She said that she was more determined than ever, hoping that his husband's dream would come true. She said this soon after her husband was murdered and became young widow.

Despite raising four young children by herself, she served as president of The King Center until she gave her position to Dexter, her son. During her tenure she dedicated herself providing national and international programs that have trained tens of thousands of people in Dr. King's non-violence philosophy. During her retirement, she dedicated herself to provide program about non-violence philosophy legacy from her husband to national and international audiences. The King Center is for Non-violent Social Change, this program served various aspects such as voter educations and registration, literacy and reading, art performance, the education for early childhood, and also programs for apprentice for people around the world who wanted to learn about how to make peace way and effective way to social protest, or non-violence actions. Therefore America enthrones her as a hero in America and also as one of the lifetime American inspirations women.

III. CONCLUSION

For decades, women has struggled many challenges to reach equality and freedom for rights. The civil rights in America by the mid 20th century gave stage for women to perform their abilities and intellectuals which brings huge impacts for Americans up until now. The

women heroes such as Rosa Louise McCauley a.k.a Rosa Parks, Constance Baker Motley, and Coretta Scott King have shown epic history of how racism and discrimination against Black People and African-American was unhuman, and that the act of segregation was not only hurting Black People and African-American but also humanity at a whole. Rosa Parks crown as women hero for fighting her rights and initiated for civil rights movement by rejecting her seat to white people in Montgomery bus. Her action helped across the country to initiate the movement. Although she arrested for this action, she then succeed in making this movement known for worldwild that discrimination and racism were wrong, that black people in Amarica still got mistreat by the government. Rosa Parks became symbol of black people suffrage and crown as the mother of civil rights movement in America. The next women hero was Constance Baker Motley who helped Rosa Parks with Montgomery bus case. After her succession in helping Rosa Parks with Montgomery bus case, Motley also participated in helping activist during their sit-in movement happened in North Caroline. Motley did have many supports and stood for Black People community. The last woman hero was Coretta Scott King who took part in every movements or boycotts from his husband and was actively involved in giving her intellectual opinion to King, she also involved herself behind the scene in planning marches and boycotts and giving speeches across the country, occasionally defending her husband. These strong women are heroes for American Civil Rights which still remembered by generations and also become symbol of feminism in fighting for freedom for the sake of humanity.

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