

Unsung Women of the Civil Rights Movement

Accompanying PowerPoint for “Unsung Women” lesson plan, available in Carolina K-12’s Database of K-12 Resources.

To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”

Teachers are encouraged to edit the PPT’s information to best meet their particular learning objectives. For an editable version of the PPT, email Carolina K-12 at CarolinaK12@unc.edu with the title of the PowerPoint in the subject line.

The lesson procedure notes alternatives for conveying the information in the PPT to students



1. Take 3 minutes to jot down thoughts to this question:

What comes to mind when you consider the Civil Rights Movement?

2. When given the signal to do so, you will partner up and discuss – creating a master list of everything that comes to mind.

Why did women who participated in civil rights activism go unrecognized in the history of the Civil Rights Movement?

“Tens of thousands of women participated in the March on Washington on Aug. 28, 1963. But none of the female civil rights leaders marched in the procession with Dr. King, nor were any of them invited to speak to the enormous crowd. Instead, these women were asked to march on an adjacent street with the wives of the male leaders and to stay in the background.”

*“The Invisible Women of the Civil Rights Movement”
Beth Olanoff for Newsworks, January 20, 2015*

- **Oral History** is the recording (in interview form) of personal narratives from people with first-hand knowledge of historical or current events
- Oral Histories are **primary sources**
- Oral Histories personalize events in history



SEPTIMA POINSETTE CLARK

1898 – 1987



Ciana Pullen

Portrait of Septima Poinsette Clark by Ciana Pullen, 2015. Oil on canvas.

To get started, watch the 2 min. video overview about Septima Clark at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEnFNbJrfmY>

Discuss:

1. Why do you think Septima Clark valued education so much?
2. What was unique about the Highlander Folk School where she taught and why did this make it a target?
3. What were Citizenship Schools?
4. What impact did the subsequent Citizenship Education Program's impact?
5. What does D. Michael Clark mean when he says "Without Septima Poinsette, you have no Martin Luther King - you have no Rosa Parks - you don't have a President Obama..."?
6. Based on this overview, what are your first impressions of Clark?

Review the following six slides which will provide some highlights about Septima Poinsette Clark. As you go through the slides, think about:

- What important contributions to the fight for civil rights did Septima Clark make?
- Why do you think Septima Clark valued education so much?



Septima Poinsette Clark

- Born May 3, 1898 in Charleston, SC ; her father was a former slave.
- Clark would become an activist in securing voting rights for African-Americans.



Septima Poinsette Clark

- In 1919, Clark became an active member of the Charleston NAACP.
- In 1920 she became active in the fight to allow African-Americans to become principals in Charleston public schools and for white and black teachers to be paid equally.

Septima Poinsette Clark

- Clark worked with Thurgood Marshall on a legal case that advocated equal pay for white and black teachers (1945).
- In 1956, Clark was elected vice president of the Charleston chapter of the NAACP.

Septima Poinsette Clark

- In 1956 , South Carolina passed a law that banned state employees from being involved in civil rights organizations, which included the NAACP.
- Clark refused to relinquish her membership & was fired.
- Clark was hired to teach at the Highlander Folk School.

Septima Poinsette Clark

- At Highlander, Clark taught literacy classes and directed workshops.
- She taught African-Americans how to prepare for driver's license exams, how to fill out voter registration forms, and how to sign checks.
- Clark developed **Citizenship Schools** to assist African-Americans in passing the literacy test.
- Clark said that within a week, she could “turn sharecroppers and other unschooled Negroes into voters”.

1. Which of the following is a right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights?
____ Public Education
____ Employment
____ Trial by Jury
____ Voting

2. The federal census of population is taken every five years.
____ True ____ False

3. If a person is indicted for a crime, name two rights which he has.

4. A U.S. senator elected at the general election in November takes office the following year on what date?

5. A President elected at the general election in November takes office the following year on what date?

6. Which definition applies to the word "amendment?"
____ Proposed change, as in a Constitution
____ Make of peace between nationals at war
____ A part of the government

7. A person appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court is appointed for a term of _____.

8. When the Constitution was approved by the original colonies, how many states had to ratify it in order for it to be in effect?

9. Does enumeration affect the income tax levied on citizens in various states? _____

10. A person opposed to swearing in an oath may say, instead: I (solemnly) _____

11. To serve as President of the United States, a person must have attained:
____ 25 years of age
____ 35 years of age
____ 40 years of age
____ 45 years of age

12. What words are required by law to be on all coins and paper currency of the U.S.? _____

13. The Supreme Court is the chief lawmaking body of the state.
____ True ____ False

Septima Poinsette Clark

- Clark is often referred to as the **“Grandmother of the Civil Rights Movement”**.
- She believed that education was an important component in achieving civil rights.
- **“Knowledge could empower marginalized groups in ways that formal legal equality could not.”**



Septima Poinsette Clark, in her own words

Listen to the one-minute clip in which Septima Poinsette Clark discusses the sexism that existed in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

<https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-1-septima-clark-on-sexism>

Discuss & answer:

- Why does Reverend Abernathy continually question Clark's position on the SCLC board?
- Does her account surprise you? Why or why not?
- What does she mean when she says "We live in a man's made world..."? Do you think this holds true today? Why or why not?

Ella Baker – 1903-1986



“There is no civil rights movement without Ella Baker...”

To peak your interest about Ella Baker, VIEW the 2 minute clip below, in which Dr. Cornell West speaks about Ella Baker.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omyQ6P2SCzo>

Consider:

- Why does Dr. West say there is no civil rights movement without Ella Baker?
- How does he describe her?
- Dr. West says, “People lead in a lot of different ways.” In what ways does Dr. West classify Ella Baker as an incredible leader, despite there not being famous speeches we remember her for? How does this leadership style differ than Dr. Luther King, Jr.?

Review the following four slides which contain some highlights about Ella Baker.

Be prepared to answer:

- What do you think Ella Baker meant when she said “the movement made Martin, and not Martin the movement”? How does this illustrate her belief in collective leadership?
- Based on what you have learned thus far, what words/phrases would you use to describe Ella Baker?

Ella Baker

(December 13, 1903 - December 13, 1986)

- Grew up in Littleton, NC and attended Shaw University in Raleigh, NC
- Civil Rights and Human Rights activist who worked alongside WEB DuBois, Thurgood Marshall, and Martin Luther King, Jr.



Ella Baker

- Baker criticized the professional leadership of the movement and advocated a more grassroots approach - “**participatory democracy**”
- Baker wanted activists to take control of the movement rather than rely on leadership that she described as having “heavy feet of clay”
- Baker advocated for a **collective leadership** within the movement
- She once said, “the movement made Martin, and not Martin the movement”

Ella Baker and SNCC

- Inspired by the sit-in movement, Baker organized a leadership conference for university students at Shaw University in 1960
- It was at this conference that the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** was formed
- Baker became an adviser to SNCC - “Godmother of SNCC”

Ella Baker

- With Baker's encouragement, SNCC had a dual focus on both direct action and voter registration
- For example, SNCC was instrumental in the coordination of the Freedom Rides (1961)
- You can read more about Ella Baker [here](#).



Ella Baker in her own words

LISTEN closely to the 2 minute excerpt below as Ella Baker speaks about women and leadership in the movement.

<https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-2-ella-baker-on-women-in-the-movement>



- How does Ella Baker describe the role of women in the movement?

Ella Baker's View of the Male Leadership (recounted by Septima Clark)

- Listen to the one-minute interview of Septima Clark discussing Ella Baker's view of the male leadership. (Pause after 1:07, "...but no one was going to listen to her.")
- Jot down any words, phrases, or feelings that may have come to mind based on the interview's content while listening. What issues did Ella Baker have with some of the choices SCLC was making and why?

<https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-3-septima-clark-on-ella-baker>

Quotation Analysis

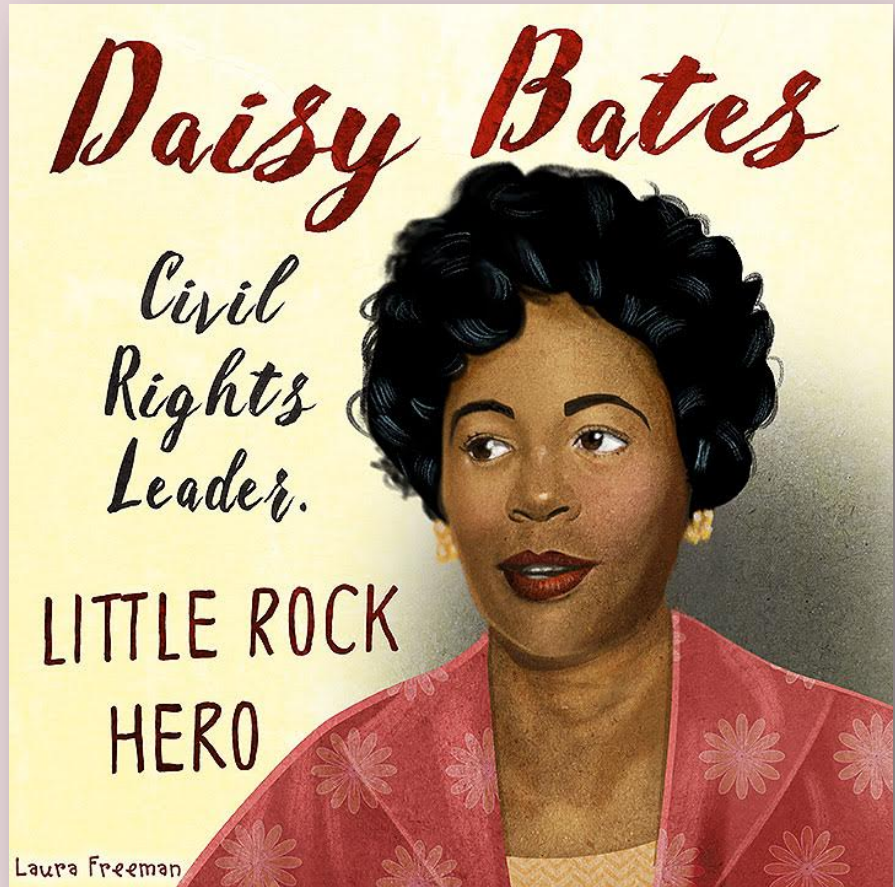
Ella Baker said:

“Strong people don’t need strong leaders.”

- Based on what you’ve now learned about Ella Baker, discuss with your group what this quotation means.
- Rewrite the quotation in your own words without changing its meaning.

Daisy Bates

(1914-1999)



Daisy Bates

- When Bates' was a young girl, her mother was murdered by three white men who were never tried or punished.
- Bates was consumed with anger.
- Bates' adoptive father told her, "You're filled with hate. Hate can destroy you If you hate, make it count for something ... try to do something about it, or your hate won't spell a thing."
- She used this to fuel her participation in the Civil Rights Movement.

As an introduction to Daisy Bates, listen to the 2:23 min. excerpt at

<https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-4-daisy-bates>

Consider:

- What does Bates say prepared her for her participation and activism in the Civil Rights Movement?
- Why does Bates say she's been angry her whole life?
- How does Bates characterize her childhood interactions with white people?
- What does her father encourage Bates to do with her anger?
- How would you describe Bates' tone of voice in the interview? What does this tone reveal to the listener about her life experiences?



Daisy Bates

(November 11, 1914 - November 4, 1999)

- Bates became a publisher and writer of an African-American newspaper - *Arkansas State Press* which advocated for the integration of public schools
- She served as an advisor, mentor, and guide to the “Little Rock Nine”
- Bates served on the SCLC Executive Committee



Read "Daisy Bates and the Little Rock Nine"

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14563865>

Consider:

- What does Ernest Green, one of the Little Rock Nine, mean when he says "Daisy Bates was the poster child of black resistance. She was a quarterback, the coach. We were the players..."?
- What specific examples throughout the article illustrate the ways in which Daisy Bates impacted civil rights?
- What did Daisy Bates risk in her role as a civil rights leader?

Watch the clip one-minute video clip, “A Civil Rights Hero Who Put Her Life on the Line,” at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/videos/a-civil-rights-hero-who-put-her-life-on-the-line/>

Consider:

- The clip opens with Mrs. Bates saying, **“If you are fighting for the rights of man, you are never free from fear. I never know when they are going to pass here and blow this house to bits...we still get threatening telephone calls...the hate mail...but nevertheless, I feel if I’m going to live in this town and live with myself I must oppose hatred and prejudice in any way that I can.”** How would you describe her based on this quote and film clip and everything else you have learned?

Fannie Lou Hamer - 1917-1977



As you prepare to learn about Fannie Lou Hamer, consider this quote from her:

"Sometimes it seem like to tell the truth today is to run the risk of being killed. But if I fall, I'll fall five feet four inches forward in the fight for freedom. I'm not backing off."

What first impressions do these words give you regarding her spirit and character?

Fannie Lou Hamer

- Fannie Lou Hamer was born in 1917 into a Mississippi sharecropping family. She first joined her family in the cotton fields at the age of six.
- In the 1940s, she was still working on a plantation, though eventually as a timekeeper since she'd learned to read and write.
- It was during this time that **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)** was promoting voter registration throughout Mississippi. On August 31, 1962, not long after attending a voting rights meeting organized by SNCC, the Hamer joined 17 of her neighbors on a bus to register.

Find out what happened when Hamer showed up to register & learn about her life's work by reading the article at
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/freedomsummer-hamer/>

Consider:

- Why do you think Hamer sang spirituals on the bus as it was held unjustly by the police?
- Why was Hamer seen as a potential leader among local SNCC organizers?
- Why was poverty an important civil rights issue for Hamer to tackle, alongside voting rights and desegregation?
- What risks and repercussions did Hamer face based on her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement?
- What was Hamer's involvement with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)?
- How did Hamer get the attention of the President at the time, President Lyndon Johnson?

Fannie Lou Hamer's Testimony Before the Credentials Committee, Democratic National Convention

Listen to the testimony and follow along with the transcript at:

<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/flhamer.html>

- This ends with Hamer stating, “All of this is on account of we want to register, to become first-class citizens. And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?”

Why is she questioning America and what in particular is she questioning?

Throughout her activist work, Fannie Lou Hamer became known as the “lady who sings the hymns,” since she would sing Negro spirituals to bolster the resolve of the civil rights activists. Listen to her sing at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxRfT12Sojw>

Consider:

- What images come to mind as you listen to Mrs. Hamer sing? How does the song make you feel?
- Why do you think songs like this were an important part of the Civil Rights Movement?

Listen to the interview with civil rights leader Julian Bond, in which he discusses Fannie Lou Hamer (1:46)

<https://soundcloud.com/sohp/unsung-women-5-julian-bond-on-fannie-hamer>

- As you listen, take notes on how Bond describes Hamer.
- What were her beliefs and how did she differ from other leaders in the Movement?
- Does the particular way Julian Bond describes Hamer (particularly in the beginning of his comments) say anything about the way women were viewed by males in the Movement?

Fannie Lou Hamer

“I guess if I’d had any sense, I’d have been a little scared - but what was the point of being scared? The only thing they could do was kill me, and it kinda seemed like they’d been trying to do that a little bit at a time since I could remember.”



What is Fannie Lou Hamer’s attitude about fear, and what does this attitude tell you about her life experiences?

Women and the Civil Rights Movement

“Most women who (were) sincerely interested in making a difference are not looking for the publicity for it Making a true difference doesn’t always come with fanfare.”

Katherine Kennedy, Director of Boston University’s Howard Thurman Center

“There’s a Chinese saying, ‘Women hold up half the world. In the case of the civil rights movement it’s probably three-quarters of the world.’”

Civil Rights Leader Julian Bond

Final Thoughts

- Being a woman of color meant experiencing not only racism, but sexism as well.
- History has often overlooked these incredibly impactful female leaders.
- We know that women were pivotal within, throughout and to the success of the Civil Rights Movement.

Ella's Song - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Uus--gFrc>

Written by Bernice Johnson Reagon to celebrate Ella Baker in song (1983) & performed by Sweet Honey in the Rock

- Follow along with the lyrics and mark the text as you listen.
- Underline the words or phrases you feel are most powerful.
- Write down any associations, thoughts, or connections to history or to society to day that come time to mind.
- Sketch or describe in writing any images that come to mind as you listen.
- Write down how the song makes you feel.