

# Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement

Mondays, 1:30 to 3:30 pm, Loomis Village, South Hadley  
Moderators: Diane Liebert and Jodi Rafkin

**DESCRIPTION:** The major role that women played in the struggle for civil rights is often unknown or forgotten. This course will examine the reasons why women have been overlooked and the women who played significant roles.

**ROLE OF PARTICIPANTS:** Participants will explore women's roles in the civil rights movement and related issues, and talk about individual contributions. Participants may choose to give a presentation, lead a discussion, show a film, or make another contribution.

## Here are some possible discussion topics:

1. What challenges were faced by women activists? Did Black women face more or different challenges?
2. What was the impact of women's organizing on the movement?
3. How have contemporary movements for racial and gender justice drawn on their legacies?
4. How did the media at the time depict women in the movement compared with modern portrayals?
5. Explore the risks and personal cost of their work.
6. Contrast leadership styles and contributions of women activists with male peers.
7. Explore how the movement's successes depended on diverse approaches to leadership and activism.

## Some notable unsung heroines include (not a complete list):

### 1890s–1930s: Foundations of the Movement

- **Ida B. Wells** (1890s–1930s) – anti-lynching campaigns; early civil rights organizing
- **Mary McLeod Bethune** (1900s–1930s) – political advocacy; advisor to President Roosevelt & Eleanor Roosevelt on minority affairs; started the National Council of Negro Women

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### **1930s–1940s: Bridge to Modern Movement**

- **Ella Baker** (1930s–1960s) – grassroots leadership; strategist and mentor behind major Civil Rights groups; NAACP organizing
- **Pauli Murray** (1940s–1960s) – legal theory; “Jane Crow”; early desegregation arguments; relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt

### **1950s: Early Modern Civil Rights Movement**

- **Septima Poinsette Clark** (1950s–1960s) – pioneer of Citizenship Schools; teaching literacy; voter registration.
- **Rosa Parks** (1950s–1960s) – the complete story
- **Jo Ann Robinson** (1950s) – leader in the Montgomery Bus Boycott

### **1960s: Peak of the Movement**

- **Fannie Lou Hamer**(1960s) – voting rights activist; leader in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
- **Diane Nash** (1960s) – key organizer of the Nashville sit-ins; founding member of SNCC
- **Constance Baker Motley** (1940s–1960s) key lawyer on Supreme Court cases
- **Dorothy Height** (1950s-1970s) National Council of Negro Women
- **Gloria Richardson** (1960s) – Cambridge Movement
- **Anne Moody** (1960s) – Sit-ins; activism memoir

### **Late 1960s–1980s: Political & Legal Expansion**

- **Coretta Scott King** (1960s–1980s) – Before and after MLK’s death
- **Myrlie Evers-Williams** (1960s–1990s) – NAACP leadership; justice advocacy
- **Shirley Chisholm** (1960s–1980s) – member of Congress; presidential campaign

A list of books and other resources will be provided to participants after enrollment. Participants are free to choose their own topics and materials. One particularly useful source is: Lynne Olson, ***Freedom’s Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement, 1830-1970*** (Scribner, 2001).