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Introduction

In order to go about this assignment, I will have to, obviously, do research on various points for the topic at hand. I will look at major historical moments, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Freedom Rides, and also historical figures like Rosa Parks and Diane Nash.

In this assignment, we will look at how women played such a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement between the 1950s and 1960s, how the Civil Rights Movement would not have had the impact that it did if not for women and how they were overlooked, overshadowed or simply not given the credit that they deserved for the strides they made when it comes to human rights and equality.

Background

The time period between the 1950s and the 1960s is packed with various important dates and events in terms of the Civil Rights Movement and the fight for equality. In 1954, following the *Brown v. Board of Education*, many public schools disposed of segregation laws. In early 1955 was the murder of Emmett Till and in December 1955 was the arrest of Rosa Parks and the subsequent Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into effect, which would help to prevent voter suppression. In 1961, the Freedom Rides occurred.

These are just a few of the events that occurred. Aside from these events it's also important to note the changes that happened. The Montgomery Bus Boycott spurred the whole nation into more active opposition to the racial issues that were rampant in the US, such as strikes, protests and other boycotts. With the Civil Rights Act of 1957 signed, many more African American voters, especially in the South, were allowed to cast their votes and have a say in the policy of the nation.

In this time period, even now still, women faced various forms of discrimination. To the country, they were believed to be destined for domestic lifestyle of family and home-making, however, if not for the women within and without the Civil Rights Movement, the struggle for

freedom and equality would not have gone as far or been as successful as it did.

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Body

Rosa Parks was one of the most important figures, when it came to the struggle for equality. She is most well known for sparking the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. On the 1st of December 1965, Rosa Parks refused to vacate her seat for a white passenger at the behest of the bus driver. The bus driver then called the police to deal with her as this was against Montgomery's backward laws. She used her phone call to call E.D. Nixon, a prominent black in the community, who, following this, bailed her out. The Women's Political Council, under Jo Ann Robinson, began circulating flyers advocating for a boycott against the bus system in Montgomery. This later became known as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, often referred to as "the first large-scale U.S. demonstration against segregation". Although Rosa Parks was responsible for sparking nationwide protests for civil rights, Martin Luther King Jr. was the figure from this historic event that became nationally and globally renowned as a key historical figure. This is a clear example of women being overshadowed by their male counterparts in the struggle for equality.

Another influential woman who was overlooked was Diane Nash. Although she was white, she was very much opposed to segregation, racism and racial injustice. She first attended Howard University, which was classified as an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and

Universities). Nash then transferred to the University of Nashville in Tennessee in 1959. It was there that she could see first hand how terrible racial segregation was. It was also there that she joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a group in which she later became a very prominent figure in. In 1961, Nash was at the forefront of the Freedom Rides. Despite this, she was never given a position befitting the effort she put into the organisation. Instead the men around her who did not hold a candle to the work that Nash put in, were put way above her and even made local leaders of the SNCC. Yet another display of the unfair treatment women received in the Civil Rights Movement.

The gender discrimination of this time did not just consist of isolated cases. Rather it was against women as a whole. On the 28th of August 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. got to tell the world about his “dream”, but what about the dreams of all the women of the Civil Rights Movement who were never given the platform or audience to voice theirs. Aside from the Civil Rights Movement, women in the 1950s were expected to only be wives, mothers and home-makers. Ever since they were young, it is ingrained in women to give up on whatever dreams and aspirations they might have and stick to the role designated to them by the patriarchy. The women that were more progressive, i.e. part of the Civil Rights Movement, knew that in order for this fight for human rights to succeed, the Movement would also

have to address issues on the ground of sexism, homophobia and, even, classism.

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Conclusion

As stated before, it is because of the women, both a part of the Civil Rights Movement or other similar organisations, that the strides for equality were as successful and effective as they were. We can see this from the Montgomery Bus Boycott with Rosa Parks, and again with Diane Nash's involvement in the Selma Voting Rights Campaign.

History is a very important subject and without it, we would most likely be lost. But the thing is that history often neglects to tell the full story. That is why it is important to know that it takes many small moments to make change happen.

Reflection

In this assignment, aside from the historical events that occurred, I have also learnt of the strength and determination held by women throughout time. I have also learnt to consider all of the participants in any historical event, because as they say, nothing happens in a vacuum.

Another thing that was once more made prevalent in this assignment, is that women are often written out of history or overlooked, as compared to the men in history. Therefore it is up to us, as scholars, to ensure that their voices are never forgotten.

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