



E-Newsletter | February 2015

## Civil Rights Activists

Each year in February, we celebrate African American History Month. In this issue of our e-newsletter, we focus on two of the many women who were instrumental in the civil rights movement of the 20th century. We feature Ella Baker and Coretta Scott King.

The granddaughter of a slave, Ella Baker's interest in social justice was sparked by her grandmother's stories. She pursued social activism in college and moved to New York City where she worked with organizations dedicated to civil rights and human rights. She joined the NAACP in 1940 and worked to end Jim Crow laws in the South. Baker moved to Atlanta in 1957 and helped organize Martin Luther's King's new organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She also worked to increase voter registration through the Crusade for Leadership.



Ella Baker

After students from North Carolina A&T University staged a sit-in at the counter at a Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, Baker wanted to assist the students with their crusade. One of the outgrowths was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); that group helped organize the 1961 Freedom Rides. SNCC also worked to organize the 1964 Freedom Summer, reflecting Baker's belief that the right to vote was one of the keys to freedom. Because she was a very private person, she was often overlooked and not remembered; Baker was a key figure in the civil rights movement. She has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



Coretta Scott King

Unlike Ella Baker, Coretta Scott King is widely remembered for her role in the fight for civil rights. She was a gifted vocalist and violinist. After marrying Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., she took part in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 (triggered by the refusal of Rosa Parks to give up her seat on a city bus to a white man). King also worked to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

After her husband was assassinated, she continued her activism. She founded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta. She served as its president and chief executive officer for many years. Well recognized by scholars, this archive is the largest collection of materials forming the history of the civil rights movement.

King was instrumental in getting a holiday established in her husband's memory. In addition, she served as a commentator on CNN and wrote articles. She was committed to social justice and peace, rights for all human beings, tolerance of different viewpoints and the spread of democracy. Part of her enormous legacy is evident in the roles her four children have assumed. King said "I believe all Americans who believe in freedom, tolerance and human rights have a responsibility to oppose bigotry and prejudice based on sexual orientation." Coretta Scott King has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Women's contributions to all areas of our lives have often been accomplished in the face of much discouragement and animosity. We continue to admire the passion, determination and persistence of these women.

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