Ella Baker Behind the Scenes

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Racial stereotypes in America instigated many movements to safeguard the civil liberties and freedom rights of African Americans. These movements brought forward many prominent and intellectual figures from the Black population. They discouraged the practice of mass destruction and violent protests. In the same manner, these movements encouraged the Black population to stand up for their rights and demand equal justice from the state. Likewise, they voiced their rights at both institutional and public level by legally pursuing their rights to liberty and freedom. In this scenario, Black Americans came forward in the leadership of Rosa Park, Martin Luther King Jr, and Ella Jo Baker. Baker formed many organizations for the protection of Black civil rights and worked alongside Dr. MLK to promote their cause at various international conferences. She emphasized on the importance of standing for one’s right and shared communal voice as a way to their freedom. This essay discusses her contributions to the Black freedom rights movement, the idea of feminism, egalitarian sensibilities, and their influences on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Ella Baker came forward as one of the strongest advocates of the black civil rights and demanded equality from the American state. Slavery was abolished as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation, but it did not prove effective in stopping racial profiling of Black Americans. Likewise, this racist attitude gave rise to mass violence directed at the minority Black group. She had a personal history of slavery in her family as her grandmother was taken as a slave, where she was beaten and treated as a submissive being. These personal anecdotes inspired her struggle for freedom rights. Black women faced the issues of double colonization, and they were manhandled by both White and black men because of racism and patriarchy. Moreover, she took inspiration from the Black cultural values of communal unity and the history of White colonization. Similarly, Baker became an activist of people of color, and in 1938, she joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or NAACP as an active member. She always stressed the need for an equal economic system as an important factor in ensuring the equal treatment of both the races in a liberal American society. In an instant, she said, “People cannot be free until there is enough work in this land to give everybody a job” (Orth & Nikki, 2106, pg.30). In the same manner, she openly opposed the Jim Crow Laws as a legislative attempt to seizing the rights of the Black population. Baker assisted Martin Luther King, informing his new organization named the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or (SCLC). Likewise, she demanded the right of suffrage as a fundamental right of the Black population. The right of the vote was a first step towards ensuring the inclusion of African Americans in the legislative system.

Black feminism stresses the need for stopping patriarchal practices and working alongside men for the betterment of their community. Moreover, the concept of sisterhood in African women is so strongly established that they consider it an asset of their communal values. Similarly, the civil rights movement instigated a massive representation of Black women in the protests for freedom right movement. However, the leadership was dominated by male leaders, and the female activists could not voice their concerns regarding patriarchy. This, in turn, led them towards forming organizations specifically based to cater to the rights of Black women in America. Baker voiced her opinions from a radical feminist point of view and demanded equal opportunities for women in the avenues of civil liberties and mass representation. In the same manner, she tried to serve many male-oriented organizations, but she finally gave up since these organizations voiced sexism and male dominance. In the same manner, patriarchal constraints disavowed Black women, and they took inspiration from Baker and stood against patriarchy. A historian appreciates the efforts of Baker in these words "This came to mean that I could be on the same board with my father, or women dating men could be on the same committee, and those intimate relationships were not brought into the organization’s discussion” (Ransby 51). She rejected the commonplace idea of “personal is political” since women's issues were always manhandled by men (Flemming & Cynthia, 2004, pg. 966). Similarly, this highlighted the importance of taking back control of the female voice because Baker was a non-conformist. In the critical times of the civil rights movement, she mobilized the female leadership and student body representation but made sure that women's voices could not be subdued in this process. In her personal and social life, she did not follow the patriarchal stereotypes and debunked all such myths.

Baker was the strongest advocate of Egalitarianism and a staunch believer in exercising her leadership to ensure that leadership should be inclusive of female participation. Moreover, she was adamant about making a prominent highlight of Black female activists during the civil rights movement. Feminism maintains the individual rights of every female in individual life; however, it often overlooks the problem faced by such women who witness any form of control in lieu of colonization. Likewise, African women faced a lot of racial prejudices and stereotypes in America because of their reception as submissive beings in the White dominant society. Equality in both political and social spheres ensures that no one suffers from the violation of their fundamental rights. Both the genders from society can work better to achieve their common goals if they achieve the virtue of equality. Similarly, although the civil rights movement mobilized a massive Black population from both the genders, the issues of gender legacy, superiority, and sexist mindset did not change. Following textual evidence explains her strong egalitarian abilities as “She turned down secured teaching jobs…vowing never to teach because that was expected of Negro women-to work at low-paying, insecure jobs in civil and human rights organizations instead… she held the strong conviction that class privilege and material comforts stood in the way of black political leaders effectively leading mass protest struggles” (Ransby, 2001, pg. 52). Moreover, she was an entrepreneur and witnessed the influences of class and society in exploiting the working force and establishing a capitalist ideology that only helped White supremacists. Similarly, she was well aware of the racist attitude of White people in both educational and recreational institutes. This fluidity of wealth to only the dominant group in America reshaped her opinion on impartiality, and she realized that the economic system is not free of prejudices. Moreover, she grew up hearing the historical anecdotes of slavery, and in the backdrop of both westward expansion and emancipation proclamation, the rights of slaves were exploited. The colonial representation of Black people highly affected their business prospects, and Jim Crow laws were another such attempt.

Baker’s ideas of radical feminism and equality impacted the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or SNCC, which gathered a huge student body representation from colleges all across the states. These sit-ins and protests ensured non-violent practices since the Black minority group was racially profiled through the stereotype of acting uncivilized. She urged the students to regain their autonomy, and Martin Luther King declared the decade of fighting for civil rights as an era of the oppressed ones. Likewise, she encouraged the members on an individual level and never treated them as victims; instead, she put on a brave face and reworked them for decades of struggle. This organization was based on saving the youth from mobs and violent practices to disrupt the law and order situation. The leadership positively directed the energies of youth. In the same manner, Baker selflessly provided her services for the Black Civil Rights movement and a historian, Vincent Harding writes her abilities in these words “Ella Baker was as much a product of her family, her era, and a vast web of personal and political relationships, as well as her agency. But Ella Baker was no saint. She made mistakes, doubted herself, and sometimes succumbed to the pressures and frustrations embedded in her life’s work” (Ransby, 2001, pg. 54). The active role of African Americans concerning the issues of Black identical politics and racial stigmas enabled them to learn the importance of their liberties, and they chose to fight for their freedom. They took courage from their history and past events to react against the White restrictions on the legal justice system and White administrative control. Baker advocated democracy and individual rights in SNCC since she believed in the individual effort of every African American.

The Civil Rights Movement was a massive attempt at taking back the righteous control of the Black minority group concerning their individualism, identity, freedom, and right to equality. This movement left behind a legacy in the history of African Americans, and this struggle encouraged them to demand their equal representation in both political and social avenues. The role of Ella Baker cannot be stressed enough in the struggle for Civil Rights Movement. Since her ideas of radical feminism and egalitarian abilities enabled her to channelize the energy of youth positively. Moreover, through her efforts, Black women were able to represent their concerns against patriarchy and the White hegemony.

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