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## Women and the Black Lives Matter Movement: Relevance Past to Present

Ronieka Burns

*The College at Brockport, State University of New York, [rburn2@brockport.edu](mailto:rburn2@brockport.edu)*

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# Women and the Black Lives Matter Movement: Relevance Past to Present

*Traditional white American society wonders why the Black Lives Matter Movement is even taking place, since many Americans argue that racism doesn't exist. This paper explores why women in the Black Lives Matter Movement are needed and relevant. This paper sets out to open readers' eyes to the fact that, although this is the year 2016, the same trials and tribulations that have taken place throughout our nation's history are still taking place. We still have a long way to go to end racism and sexism.*

## **Introduction**

In this paper, I will explore a genealogical history of powerful Black feminist women in the equal rights and black liberation movement such as Harriet Tubman, Angela Davis, Fannie Lou Hamer, Shirley Chisholm, and Patricia Hill Collins. These women paved the way for African-American women such as me to have a voice in society. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the anti-racist activism was called "Black Power" movement; now in the 2000s, it's called Black Lives Matter Movement. The name has changed but it's still the same struggle and the same fight, just in a different time zone. I argue that there are similar and

different aspects between the earlier Black Power and the current Black Lives Matter movements. Some of the similarities are the goals to push the awareness of racism and oppression of the African-American people and also to receive equality and justice. The big difference that I see is the fact that the Black Power Movement was militant and forceful in the streets, whereas the Black Lives Matter is more tech-savvy using social media. Race, class and gender represent oppressions that affect African-American women, and when these categories of oppression intersect, it's called intersectionality. According to Collins (1990), "Using a social structural analysis of race, class, and gender turns your attention to how they work as a system of power, systems that differentially advantage and disadvantage groups depending on their social location" (p.61). This quote explains why the African-American culture is the most affected, particularly, its women as often experiencing a triple threat to one group of people.

This paper examines why the topic of Black Lives Matter is just as important now as it was during the Civil Rights Movement. I think readers will see how African-American women are affected when they intersect. According to Crenshaw (1991), "because of their

intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (p. 1244).

### **What Do I Mean When I Say 'Black Lives Matter Movement'?**

Black Lives Matter Movement means that throughout the history of African-Americans, we have had to fight for everything that should have been a natural human right. White power and control that started during slavery are responsible for this oppression. 'Black Lives Matter' does not mean that all lives don't matter or that I'm pointing out one group in particular, but rather, it is to bring awareness of all the hardship, turmoil, and injustice that African-Americans endure on a daily basis. I feel that it's an obligation not to let the earliest activists down for all their contributions and hard work. I feel like if everybody does their part, we can have a tremendous amount of success in fighting racism. I'm not saying that we should be doing the same things as earlier civil rights fighters such as invent an underground railroad or create a Black Panthers group, but as long as we're fighting for the rights of the voiceless and underprivileged, then we are making a difference. I believe both of

the movements were and are relevant to how society treats African-Americans. The Black Lives Matter Movement mission states,

#BlackLivesMatter is an online forum intended to build connections between black people and our allies to fight anti-black racism, to spark dialogue among black people, and to facilitate the types of connections necessary to encourage social action and engagement (BlackLivesMatter, 2016).

This movement is so important today; in order for you to capture society's attention you have to adapt to the new way of thinking.

### **Why?**

There are a lot of reasons why the Black Lives Matter Movement and the intersections of racial and gender equality are important topics that need to be addressed today. In order to know where we are going, we have to know where we come from. There was so much work started by black feminists in the 1800s, 1960s, 1970s, to now in 2016. Many strong, educated black women paved the way in activism. This is one of my passions because I would love to be a person to carry the torch forward, to be somebody who's going to continue the movement for African-American

women's rights. This topic is so important to me because I am an African-American woman, and I understand the struggle that we go through on a daily basis. I have experience with discrimination in racism, sexism, poverty, and being a teenage mother. I am also an activist who fights for justice, equality, workers' rights, and fair wages. These are all inequities that affect African-American women at the highest rates. The goal that Harriet Tubman, Angela Davis, Fannie Lou Hamer, Shirley Chisholm, and Patricia Hill Collins had in mind was to stop and cease abuse towards African-American women as a whole, and this is what needs to be continued and passed along by young activists such as myself.

Just a few days ago I met with a few white, male Senator politicians at their office in Albany, New York, regarding the fair wages issue. My goal was to explain to them that a decent wage is totally different from a living wage. Rochester, New York, is known for having one of the highest poverty rates in the United States. even while people are working a full time job. In December 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau released statistics noting that Rochester had an increase in poverty from 32.9% to 33.8%, making it the fifth poorest city in the United States among the top

seventy-five metropolitan areas (Rochester Area Community Foundation, 2015, para. 2). While trying to make my point with the Senators, I noticed that they didn't even look at me while answering my questions; they looked at the male counterparts who were with me. This situation took me back to the struggle among many early black women activists who fought to get their point across in meetings and other male-dominated spaces. In order for black women to make a point and let it be heard, we must have allies across race and gender, a support group so people can go and express how they really feel about the discrimination that they endure, and a community to back us.

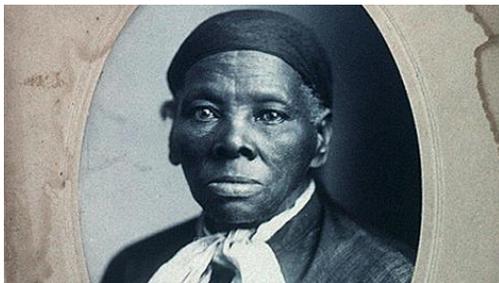
All representation in the community is needed, including white politicians. Conversely, a white male can make one statement and everybody will listen and support his claims. Many white male politicians are just like white male slave owners in that they don't care what black women have to say because they see these women as beneath them in the eyes of society. In the eyes of white men, we are not on the same level and we never will be. I bet Angela Davis and Fannie Lou Hamer felt similar in the 1960s and 1970s as they were trying to make their points for the rights of African-American women. Black

women have yet to gain full respect from white men, and this is extremely difficult considering they are making the laws that affect us. One of Hamer's famous quotes states, "If the white man gives you anything, just remember when he gets ready he will take it right back. We have to take for ourselves" (Brooks, 2014, p. 17). This quote is saying: Don't be foolish and believe everything a white man says, instead work hard and get it yourself because we have the power.

### **The Past**

Harriet Tubman was a powerful a woman who was born a slave and died a civil rights activist. She led hundreds of enslaved people to freedom using the Underground Railroad. Tubman worked in the United States Civil War as a nurse and scout, spy, women's suffragist, and a humanitarian (Angie, 2016). She joined with other powerful civil rights activists such as Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, and John Brown, to expand her work. Even in the 1800s, African-American women were fighting for equal rights for the oppressed groups using only their God-given resources. Tubman's most memorable appearance was at the organizing meeting of the National Association of Colored Women in 1896 in Washington D.C. This is when two generations came

together to celebrate the strength of black women and to continue their struggle for a life of dignity and respect (Angie, 2016). This situation was powerful because it demonstrated that when we come together and unite we can accomplish great things. This is very important to me because it shows that Tubman wanted to pass the torch to the next generation and also that she was thinking about the future. One of the biggest things an activist can do is train and pass down the knowledge to people coming behind them. This is also an opportunity to give respect to Tubman and let her know that we appreciate everything she



has done.

Fannie Lou Hamer was also a powerful black women activist and a philanthropist who came to prominence around the civil rights era. Hamer was born in Montgomery, Mississippi, during the era of legalized racial

*Figure 1.* From "Harriet Tubman," by National Geographic Kids, 2016 ([http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/history/harriet-tubman/#harriet\\_lg.jpg](http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/history/harriet-tubman/#harriet_lg.jpg)). In the public domain.

segregation. She helped African-Americans register to vote, and she also helped found the Mississippi Freedom Democrat Party. Hamer knew that it was time to have a voice. She asked how African-Americans can have their voices heard if they couldn't vote. How could they have a say in making the laws that affected them? Alongside seventeen others, some from the organization of Students for Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and some from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, all wanted to make a change and prove a point as they got on a bus and went to the courthouse to register to vote. Even with all the cops beating and calling them horrible names, they still proceeded. This shows courage, bravery, and dedication. Like most activist women, Hamer endured hardships and laws that prevented her from realizing her rights as a citizen. Hamer was fired from her job, her house was burned down, and she was beaten so bad that she had kidney damage, but she didn't stop championing gender and racial equality causes (Biography.com Editors, n.d.a). She kept fighting until the day she died.

I work with groups that focus on voter registration. We travel all around the state registering people to vote in elections. People should be reminded of

African-American women like Fannie Lou Hamer, who fought for the right to vote and how this right should not be taken for granted. Without her fight, African-American women like me probably wouldn't be able to vote now. We can learn a lot from Fannie Lou Hamer such as dignity and aspiration. She fought against male dominance during the civil rights era, a fight that we are still fighting today. She taught us that no matter what is thrown our way, stay strong and don't give up. Hamer also left a legacy to remind ourselves that it's not



Figure 2. From "Fannie Lou Hamer Biography", by Biography.com Editors, n.d.a. (<http://www.biography.com/people/fannie-lou-hamer-205625#death-and-legacy>). In the public domain.

all about us but about the ones coming after us as well.

Right around the same time that Fannie Lou Hamer was working hard for suffrage, there was an activist named Shirley Chisholm. In 1968, Shirley Chisholm became the first black Congresswoman. She was elected in

New York State to the U.S. House of Representatives, and she served for several terms (Biography.com Editors, n.d.b.). Chisholm served on numerous committees while in office; she was the first black woman on almost all of them. Not only did she serve on the committees, she also voted and represented minorities in a major way while doing so. She became one of the founding members of the Congressional Black Caucus (Biography.com Editors, n.d.b.). She fought for equal education and labor. Chisholm decided that more work needed to be done on a higher level, and so, in 1972, she ran for United States presidency. She made it past the primary election, and then ran against a Republican named James Farmer, to whom she lost. The way Farmer handled the campaign was degrading because he argued that "women have been in the driver's seat" in Black communities for too long and that the district needed "a man's voice in Washington," not that of a "little schoolteacher" (as cited in History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, n.d., para. 4). This statement shows ways patriarchal society thinks women are supposed to be lesser than men. Farmer and Chisholm were both fighting for the same issues, but once Farmer introduced gender into the equation, Chisholm began to lose. Race

and gender oppression are two of the barriers that Chisholm tried to knock down. Even though she gave it a good fight, it didn't happen. One of the great things about Chisholm is that while in Congress, she continued to champion what she started as a community activist. This is so powerful to me, because she didn't let her surroundings get in the way of her passionate activism for the good of the people. Most politicians change when they are elected and cave to dominant political norms, but not Chisholm, and this is why I have utmost



*Figure 3.* From "How are you celebrating Shirley Chisholm Day?," by A. Newman, 2012 (<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/27/how-are-you-celebrating-shirley-chisholm-day/>). Copyright by The New York Times.

respect for her and would love to follow in her footsteps.

Angela Davis is a civil rights activist who fought for the rights of African-

American women. Born in 1944, she grew up during the Jim Crow era. Davis was influenced by her parents, who actively participated in anti-racist marches, and she also had involvement with communist party members (Nagel, 2015). Davis' goal was to fight for the rights of African-Americans in order to reduce mistreatment and injustice. Davis also is a profound scholar and writer who teaches at the University of California at Los Angeles. In order for change to take place, there has to be a leader to take a stance and decide that enough is enough. In this case, Angela Davis saw the mistreatment that African-American women were facing in their daily lives, so she started to question why do women have to go through this when we should all be equal. Davis joined the Black Power Movement alongside the Black Panthers (Nagel, 2015). Just like Fannie Lou Hamer, Davis was arrested for her activist work. One of the things that drew me to Davis was her passion for the people as a whole and this is something that I can relate to considering I'm a young activist in the making, and I feel like you have to tackle society as a whole to make a huge impact. In the article, "Angela Davis and Women, Race, & Class," Barnett (2003) states, "When the personal, political, and

professional struggles and the significant political, academic, and scholarly contributions of Angela Davis are examined, we can see that her life work as an activist-intellectual has earned her the label of a ‘pioneer’” (p. 11). To be a pioneer is to set standards and elevate the bar for the next generation coming after you. Angela Davis is a pioneer because she is among the first to work for justice for political prisoners and also to push for black women’s equality. She



Figure 4. From "All Quiet This Time," by M. Daily, 2011 (<http://magazine.ucla.edu/exclusives/all-quiet-this-time/>). Copyright UCLA Magazine.

is one of the pioneers to do grassroots work to push the agenda for the African-American community, even if it means going to jail and sacrificing her freedom. This lifelong legacy is a personal goal of mine. I know it won’t be easy, but it’s worth the cause and efforts to help people that are voiceless.

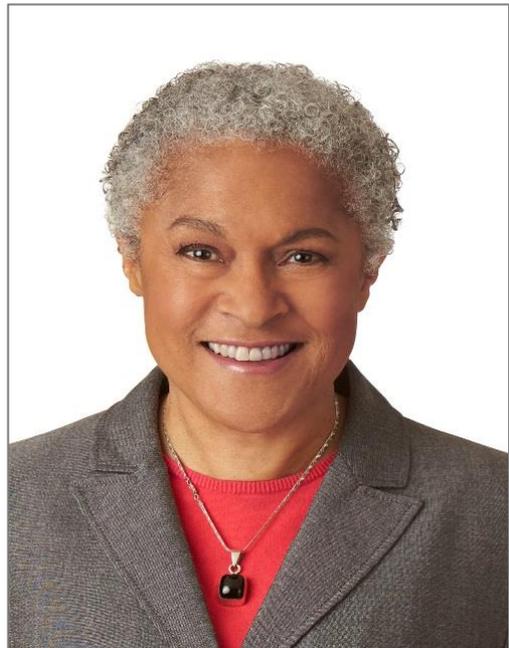
Patricia Hill Collins is an African-American scholar and sociologist. She is a professor at the University of Maryland

where she teaches sociology. As an author of several books and numerous journal articles, Collins uses her work as a scholar and activist to reach the minds of the unspoken, by educating them on how the connection is related to them and their communities. Collins is known for her book *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) and her theory on intersectionality, the connection of race, class, and gender, and sexuality. Collins goes into depth on how black feminist thought is important to understand the structures of dominance and oppression in the African-American women’s life. In her book, Collins states “Race, class, and gender represent the three systems of oppression that most heavily affect African-American women” (p 248). She theorizes these societal oppressions as the “matrix of domination” (p. 276), and this is important because in order for us to fix a problem, we have to get to the root of it so it is necessary to understand how the roots are interconnected. Collins’ work helps us see ways the roots of African-American women’s oppression are connected in economic, political, and ideological ways. What I like best about Collins’ work is that she has solutions on how to fix the problems she brings up. In the chapter “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination”, Collins (1990) states:

First, black feminist thought must be validated by ordinary African-American women who, in the words of Hannah Nelson, grow into womanhood in a world where the saner you are, the madder you are made to appear. To be credible in the eyes of this group, scholars must be personal advocates for their material, be accountable for the consequences of their work, have lived or experienced their material in some fashion, and be willing to engage in dialogues about their findings with ordinary, everyday people. Second, black feminist thought also must be accepted by the community of black women scholars. These scholars place varying amounts of importance on rearticulating a black woman's standpoint using an Afrocentric feminist epistemology. Third, Afrocentric feminist thought within academia must be prepared to confront Eurocentric masculinist political and epistemological requirements (p.8-9).

These are words and actions that I can use while I'm trying to be an effective activist. Collins' quote is important to me because it touches home knowing that I am the woman she is talking about. Because of my race, class and gender

experiences, I'm really mad at society. I'm really mad at the many trials and tribulations I had to face in my life, but at the same time, I learned from them. Understanding Collins has forced me to do something about it in an educational way. This can affect me while trying to



be a contemporary activist, just like previous Black feminist activists.

*Figure 5.* From "Patricia Hill Collins - 'Morgan Lecturer'", by University of Maryland, 2015 (<http://clarke.dickinson.edu/patricia-hill-collins-2/>). In the public domain.

### **What's so Special about Women in the Movement?**

Not by any means is my paper trying to knock all the hard work that men did for the civil rights movement, but rather, to

acknowledge and appreciate all the great work that black women have done that has not been fully recognized. They sacrificed and performed services to help propel the civil rights movement forward. Black women see society as a whole unit, and they realize that you can't treat one problem without fixing another, and so they look at the whole picture. While being in a marginalized position as a black woman, you realize you can't treat one social inequality without addressing race, class, and gender. Women stand for what's right from the heart which is why it's important to let women voices be heard. We need to be able to leverage the voices and have a mutual point across the board. For many years, women have been putting in the footwork by the sides or in front of men helping with the civil rights movement, but they get little to no recognition for all of their hard work. According to Nelson (2011),

With the exception of Rosa Parks who refused to give up her seat one day; we rarely see images of black women from that era or "freedom sisters" as they have come to be known sitting at the table of negotiation, decision or action (para. 6).

This treatment towards black women was done intentionally because of sexism and racism. It means that black women are supposed to be seen and not heard, and silent and supportive all in the same setting.

In my own work, I try my best to make sure that black women have a voice. I try to make sure that every organizational table that I sit at has a representative for black women. This gives the opportunity for a diverse mindset, and this also allows black women a chance to voice their opinions on decisions that affect them. The more that I am an activist in the community, I understand the power of having a voice and how it actually changes situations.

### **Sacrifices**

Sacrifices by Tubman, Hamer, Davis, and Collins had to be made in order to make the point that African-American women are equal to everyone else, but sadly, mistreatment rather than liberation followed. Women going to prison were just as equal as men if not more during the Civil Rights movement, but black women in the struggle for racial equality were not talked about or shown on television as frequently as men were. Tubman had an award for her death or capture (Biography.com Editors, n.d.c). Hamer was beaten so

badly that she had permanent kidney damage, and her house was burned down (Biography.com Editors, n.d.c). Davis was arrested, and in her early career, fired from her job as a professor for speaking her mind. All of these women sacrificed their lives to make a difference. According to Nagel (2015):

During much of her pre-trial incarceration (of sixteen months) Angela Davis was kept in solitary confinement. The other activist woman featured in this essay, Assata Shakur, was broken out of prison precisely because she feared for her life -- not by other prisoners, but by the state's agents" (p. 43-44).

Like many wrongly committed activists, some of them were killed or local community agencies helped get them out. Once a person is in prison, it's extremely hard to get them out, considering the federal government was trying to make a point and they are the ones who uphold the laws. It all has to do with power and control. This is where the Black Lives Movement is related to historical movements and activists. Both waves of movement called out transgression for black women. It also proves that having a voice and activism matters. There are a few things that are different today, such as laws that are put

into place to protect human rights, whereas in the civil rights era, many women were beaten, raped, jailed, or even killed.

### **Present: Why this is Important to Me**

There are many black liberation and anti-racism activists who are active today. They might not say they are with Black Lives Matter, but it's still the same struggle. There is an increase in injustice, mistreatment, police brutality, racism, and discrimination today. We have always seen racism in black communities but there seems to be a little bit more police brutality visible today. Sadly, history shows repeated brutality: master slave, lynching, and rape. Due to technology, it is being exposed and talked about more. I personally went through some rough situations in my life such as being a teenage mother, living in poverty, and experiencing injustice in the workplace and in the community. No matter the hardships and sacrifices that had to be made for equal rights, many brave women did not give up fighting, and I won't either. Most of the African-American women activists fought until they died, and this shows dedication and it is powerful and inspiring to those who follow to make a difference. It's time for people like me and you to continue the

movement of what they started and pass down the torch to the next generation.

### **My Struggles/ My Life**

Sometimes I sit back and think of all the obstacles that I have had in my life. I grew up in the inner city projects, in the middle of the 'hood' between Joseph Avenue and Clinton Avenue in Rochester, NY. My community was known for having the highest amount of poverty. Growing up, my family always said it's not where you come from, but where you're going. One of the things they pushed for was education. Almost all of my family graduated from high school and some even went to college including my mom and dad. Considering the statistics in my community, these are the things that usually don't happen in an area that I'm from. The 2014 high school graduation rate for the City of Rochester is 43.4% (Barnhart, 2014). The sad part about this is it has a domino effect on the community, such as a decrease in college degrees, increase in crime, and an increase in teenage pregnancy.

Having the advantage of an okay family structure didn't mean that I didn't have obstacles such as peer pressure. At the age of ten years old, I had my first period. I honestly can say that I learned about periods from school rather than at home. One of the biggest criticisms that

I have of my mother is that she really didn't explain periods, sex, boys, and pregnancy to me. I think she assumed that I knew all about them or maybe she was ashamed because she had me at the age of seventeen years old. I think this contributed to my next event. I became pregnant at the age of fifteen and had a baby at the age of sixteen years old. This led to a chain of events. I was scared to tell anyone about my pregnancy including my friends because I feared judgment from others. I always had been the favorite kid in my family; I couldn't disappoint them, so I kept my pregnancy to myself. Then one day after school, I walked to Planned Parenthood. Not knowing what I was going to do, I automatically assumed that I was going to have an abortion. When I went to Planned Parenthood, they asked me questions that I really didn't know the answers to, such as when was my last period. Come to find out, my pregnancy was past the time frame where I could have an abortion. Now, I had no choice but to tell my family. Here I go having a baby at the age of sixteen off of a one night stand by a guy who was twenty years old, five years older than me. I was so ashamed. During my pregnancy, I only left the house to go to school and work.

Despite my personal challenges, I graduated from high school on high Honor Roll, and with college advancements while my two-year-old daughter watched from the audience. From that day forward, I promised myself that I would never put myself in that predicament again. My daughter Jahmanique and I got our first apartment when I was eighteen years old, and since that point, I have never returned to my childhood home. I started working at Strong Hospital as a Patient Care Technician, which is where I still work today. As a Strong employee, I experienced many work policies and procedures that I didn't agree with, so I started speaking up and challenging the ones that I felt were wrong. I reached out to my union delegate, curious to see what I could do as a member, and after a few times, one of the union representatives came to me and said: "I like your fire and your willingness to help everyone and not just yourself; this is what we need as a union delegate." Needless to say, I have been a union delegate for the past ten years now. Netta Elzie, a community activist during the Ferguson riots said, "I didn't know I was an activist until someone told me" (Berlatsky, 2015, para. 3). This is exactly how I felt when I was approached to be a delegate. I have never been the one to

hold my tongue when something wasn't right, and I always had it in my heart to fight for the people.

Being a union delegate for 1199 SEIU (United Healthcare Workers East) has allowed me to stand up against what is wrong and fight for workers' rights. It also has allowed me to take extensive training such as learning the state laws, worker's rights laws, and labor laws. In my role as union delegate, I meet with supervisors and managers on a daily basis, sometimes to represent them due to discipline from the supervisors or managers or sometimes to help get their point across or just push the collective bargaining unit contract. After five years, I worked my way up to being a Chief Delegate in the union. This higher role has allowed me to do things such as train other delegates, file and run grievances, and sit on the negotiation committee. This is when we sit down with management and try to come up with a reasonable contract agreement. The things that we fight for include wording on respect and equal rights in the workplace, raises, healthcare, and childcare.

I tell my story so readers can understand where I come from and why the topics of poverty, education, teen pregnancy, and racial and gender injustice are important to me. I faced a

lot of turmoil in my life, which is okay and not all bad, because we learn from what we live through. I wish for my kids, brothers, and sisters, and anybody coming behind me not to endure all the same obstacles that I had to growing up, and these are the reasons why I fight.

My activist work at Strong led to an expansion of my role as a delegate outside of the hospital. I realized that a lot of the labor problems that we were having were bigger than Strong Hospital. A lot of it had to do with laws and politics. I started getting involved in politics, took a leave of absence from work a few times, and took on a role as a political organizer with collaboration between my union and Monroe County Democratic Party Headquarters. This gave me the chance to start working on political campaigns in which I was able to have a voice on what needed to be said. I addressed politicians on topics of childcare funding, healthcare for all, and increase in the minimum wage just to name a few. My activism came at an all-time high. I learned how to persuade and lobby around laws that affected the lower/middle class workers and women's rights such as Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), fight for \$15 (minimum wage), Women's Equality, and the Childcare Act. One of my passions is voter registration, because I

feel it's so important to have this voice, especially since abolitionists and feminist civil rights activists before us fought for our right to vote. When we vote, we are exercising our right to let our voices be heard by people who are making laws that are affecting us and our community. I also took opportunities to sit on some Executive Boards and committees such as Coalition of the Black Trade Unionist (CBTU), AFL-CIO Labor Council, National Coalition of Building Institute (NCBI), Young Leaders @ University of Rochester, and a few others throughout Monroe County. I learned that my work on these committees was another way for me to push the agenda forward for working families and women.

My activism has led me to appreciate women such as Harriet Tubman, Shirley Chisholm, Angela Davis, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Patricia Hill Collins even more. They have done a tremendous amount of activist work all in different views but for the same cause. They helped us continue the work that they have started for the oppressed groups of people. These women have paved the way for me and other modern activist such as Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garzato, the wonderful women who started the #blacklivesmatter movement. Without the previous women's work, modern day

activists would not have a platform to stand on. If you look back over the issues, you would see that the same problems, such as poverty, racism, unfair education system, and injustice, that have existed since the slavery days still exist today. This proves that there is a need to continue the fight that previous black women have started. There is a historical genealogy connection between the Black Power Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement because they both involve and need clarity in letting society know about intersectionality. This is because black women are the lowest in the pyramid in all aspects of life, home, work,



Figure 6. The author, Ronieka Burns (February, 2016).

education, and sexual assault. The conversation needed to happen back then, as much as right now.

### What's Next?

The Black Lives Matter movement today, like movements before it, gained momentum as new awareness began to surface in response to police injustices directed at African-Americans like Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Marissa Alexander, to name just a few. People became increasingly upset and frustrated at the way African-Americans were being killed by law enforcement and the ways justice among African-Americans was not being served. This period of unrest has resulted in more organized protests that continue to address the criminal justice system and the media on issues of racial inequality. All of these factors combined have produced a movement that social media has taken by storm. According to Judith Ohikware (2015), "The organizers continue to work in distinct, but parallel, initiatives to amplify the voices of less heard populations, from undocumented immigrants to incarcerated youth" (p. 1). Their goal is to push for change across the board, the same goal as the seasoned black feminist civil rights activists who ushered in a movement for gender and racial equality in the 1960s. Sadly, this

shows that the problems that existed in the Civil Rights era of Angela Davis, Shirley Chisholm, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Patricia Hill Collins, still exist now. This means there is a lot more work that needs to be done.

I plan on continuing the work that has already been laid out for me from the past to the present. I would love to make sure African-American women are treated as fairly as any other group. The biggest problem is education. I feel if we educate our children at home, school, churches, and in the community, it will keep the awareness going and eventually seize the discrimination. After I graduate, my plan is to get more involved in the community by organizing, bringing more awareness, and eventually starting my own not-for-profit. According to Patrisse Cullors,

The organizer is the person who gets the press together and who builds new leaders, the person who helps to build and launch campaigns, and is the person who decides what the targets will be and how we're going to change this world" (as cited in Ohikuare, 2015, para. 7).

This quote is so powerful, and I get so warm inside when I read it, because I find it motivating and confirming of what I already feel in my heart. We have

a lot more work that has to be done, and yes, we have come a long way, but we also have a long way to go.

### **Conclusion**

As I think back on all the issues that have taken place regarding African-Americans lives and communities, I begin to smile and say we have come a long way thanks to the wonderful African-American women who have paved the way, but then again, we have a long way to go as well. In the 1800s there was a struggle for freedom and equal rights in which Harriet Tubman decided to do something about it and succeeded. In the 1960s, Fannie Lou Hamer demanded equal rights for voter registration for African-American's and made an impact. From the 1970s to now, Angela Davis continues to fight for injustice for African-Americans through her learning and teaching, and she has used her thinking and words to educate people on how they should be treated fairly. From the late 1970s to present, Patricia Hill Collins contributed by educating women on their rights, theorizing on ways we understand power and dominance, and letting us know that we can make a difference by educating ourselves about ways systematic oppressions operate in society.

While working on this paper, I truly learned what hard work and dedication really means by the actions of these powerful women before me. I have learned that sometimes it's okay to be behind the scenes to make a difference; sometimes it is okay to be aggressive to prove a point; sometimes it is okay to use your words to educate people; and also, sometimes it's okay to collaborate with different groups of people to get the job done. This research has also shown there is a fight that has to be fought for the African-American people now, just as much as it was fought in earlier times of racial and gender segregation. It reminds me of what we say on the protest lines, "same struggle, same fight," because we are all in it to make a difference for the good of the people. Hopefully, this paper will call out to younger activists to

help continue the movement with the same dedication as our previous and powerful African-American sisters did.

Help can come in many forms such as joining a community board in your neighborhood or church. You can get involved in voter registration by making sure that everybody you meet exercises their right to vote. In my eyes, one of the biggest things an activist can do is educate children, at home, in church, in school, and in the community. Just like Angela Davis' parents took her on the protest lines as a kid, the same thing happened to me when my mom was involved with the Rochester Housing Authority board. We both learned from our parents to fight for what's right. Let's continue to make a difference in our community, just as our ancestors did.

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