



ANNE MOODY AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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Abstract: The Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans and to secure legal recognition and federal protection of the citizenship rights enumerated in the Constitution and Federal Law. The movements to obtain civil rights for black Americans have special historical significance; such movements have not only secured citizenship rights for blacks but have also redefined prevailing conceptions of the nature of civil rights and the role of government in protecting these rights. Anne Moody is one of the many voices of the civil rights movement who fights courageously to gain freedom and self respect for herself and as well as for the blacks. *Coming of Age in Mississippi* by Moody is one of the most self-reflective accounts of the Civil Rights Movement in America. Her life writing is a civil rights testimonial that serves the role of informing people in contemporary times about the perseverance exhibited by the individuals involved in the struggle. It is also a reflection of how a hopeless cry of a downtrodden segment of society gets transformed into an organized outcry of resilience and empowerment.

Keywords: Civil Rights Movement, Racial Segregation, Discrimination, Federal Law, Resilience, Empowerment.

The American Civil War (1861-1865) is the greatest war in American history; it was a war for freedom wherein many people paid the price with their lives, for their desire for freedom travelled deeper than the colour of the skin. On January 1, 1863 President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation as the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. It declares, "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free" (Lincoln qtd. in Berlin 49). Nearly hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation, African Americans in Southern states still inhabit a starkly unequal world of disenfranchisement, segregation with various forms of oppression, including race-inspired violence. The local and the state laws enforcing racial segregation in the Southern states termed as the "Jim Crow" barred them from classrooms and bathrooms, from theatres and train cars, and from juries and legislatures. The Civil Rights Movement encompasses social movements in the United States whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans and to secure legal recognition and federal protection of the citizenship rights enumerated in the Constitution and Federal Laws.

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine that formed the basis for state-sanctioned discrimination, drawing national and international attention to the plight of African Americans. In the turbulent decade and a half that followed, the civil rights activists used nonviolent protest and civil disobedience to bring about change, and the federal government made legislative headway with initiatives such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Many leaders of African American community rose to prominence during the civil rights era, including Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Andrew Goodman and many more who risked and even lost their lives for freedom.

The movements to obtain civil rights for black Americans have special historical significance; such movements have not only secured citizenship rights for blacks but have also redefined prevailing conceptions of the nature of civil rights and the role of government in protecting these rights. The important achievements of African American civil rights movement have been the post-civil war constitutional amendments that abolished slavery and established the citizenship status of blacks and the judicial decisions and legislation based on these amendments, notably the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* decision of 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These legal changes affected the opportunities available to women, non-black minorities, disabled individuals and other victims of discrimination.

“With the outbreak of the Civil War, many African Americans deployed their pens and their voices to convince President Abraham Lincoln that the nation was engaged in nothing else than a war to end slavery, which black men, initially barred from enlisting, should be allowed to fight” (“African American Literature: The Civil War and Reconstruction,” web. 12 Jan. 2017). With the end of Civil War African Americans finally hoped to witness a new era of freedom and opportunity. Just as black activists were pushing to end segregation and racism to create a new sense of Black Nationalism, so were black authors attempting to address these issues in their writings.

Anne Moody is one of the many voices of the civil rights movement who fights courageously to gain freedom and self respect for herself and as well as for the blacks. *Coming of Age in Mississippi* by Moody is one of the most self-reflective accounts of the Civil Rights Movement in America. Being a young black woman living in a segregated world, Moody joins her fellow young African American civil rights activists to challenge and change a white supremacist system that relentlessly oppresses their lives. She reveals important roles that African American women played in the movement by being leaders and supporters. Her life writing covers a span of nineteen years, from four to twenty-three including her involvement in the civil rights movement. Her personal evolution parallels and symbolizes the development of the civil rights movement. Her life writing is a story of how one young woman deals with the system and survives to become a civil rights activist by participating in sit-ins, demonstrations, rallies and protests to achieve freedom and equality for the blacks and thus, she considers herself an activist, not a writer. “In the beginning, I never really saw myself as a writer. I was first and foremost an activist in the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi” (“Anne Moody: Biography,” web. 14 Aug. 2016).

Moody's life writing is a civil rights testimonial that serves the role of informing people in contemporary times about the perseverance exhibited by the individuals involved in the struggle. “Moody, intimately involved in the civil rights movement in the first half of the 1960s, created an unforgettable image of the inequities and violence that characterized southern society” (Gale, *A Study Guide for Anne Moody's Coming of Age in Mississippi* 5). After graduating from high school Moody joins Tougaloo College, where she meets Trotter, her roommate and the secretary of the NAACP chapter on the campus, who suggests her to be a member as they are starting a voter registration drive in Hinds County and they need canvassers for that. A few weeks after Moody gets involved with the Tougaloo chapter of the NAACP, they organize a demonstration at the state fair in Jackson; four picketers are sent to the fair from Tougaloo, the demonstrators are arrested and bailed that night around eight. All of them await their arrival sitting outside on the dormitory steps, when the police cars come and the students get out of the cars they congratulate them and sing, “We Shall Overcome” (Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* 271). Soon Moody becomes a part of the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and agrees to canvass every weekend for them. She likes the SNCC workers for she had never known people so willing and determined to help others. The SNCC boys have friends everywhere, among the Negroes, while most of the whites are just waiting for a chance to kill them all, the threats do not stop them and they just keep going.

On Saturdays they spend all day canvassing and often at night they have mass rallies which are poorly attended as many Negroes are afraid to come out; most of them are old plantation Negroes who had never heard of voting or who think that only whites are supposed to vote. On Sundays they usually go to Negro churches to speak to the people but those who join them are fired from their jobs, thrown off the plantations, and rendered homeless. Moody feels that she is beginning to change, “For the first time I began to think something would be done about whites killing, beating, and misusing Negroes. I knew I was going to be a part of whatever happened” (276).

In many cases black women practiced individual protest against unfair rules and practices. In the drugstore cafeterias of Washington, D.C., Ruth Powell had her first encounter with Jim Crow. In 1940s when she was a law student at Howard University, her experience was devastating, “I sat there for about ten minutes watching the waitresses whizzing back and forth in front of me, when suddenly the awful truth dawned and I realized what was happening.” She left the store. She knew that “I, alone, couldn’t do anything concrete to revolutionize conditions,” but she also believed “I had to do something to preserve what remained of my self-respect.” Her “something” evolved into a one-woman campaign. She would enter cafeterias, politely ask for service, and, when refused, sit quietly, sometimes for hours at a time. During her sit-ins she would pick out a waiter and stare at him for perhaps an hour or more. Powell maintains, “Whether I was finally served or not was unimportant. What I believed was that all these little bits of agitation would go toward that vital ... awakening process” (qtd. in Murray 205). Her stance represents action taken to get the rules changed.

Being an active member in the black empowerment movement gives a new meaning to Moody’s life. She prefers to work in the movement where she can fight against racial inequality so she is made the spokesman for a team of three members who will sit-in at Woolworth’s lunch counter. They enter Woolworth’s and make small purchases from various counters and then they occupy three seats at the previously segregated Woolworth’s lunch counter. First the waitress ignores them but as they start to write their orders down on their own, she realizes that they want service. She asks them what they want and as they read from their order slips she tells them that they will be served at the black counter for Negroes but Moody insists on being served in the white section only. Thinking that violence will break out, people start leaving without being served while a crowd of cameramen and reporters gather around taking pictures and asking questions. Moody answers them that they are all students at Tougaloo College, they represent no particular organization and all they want is service. In the afternoon students from a nearby white high school come to Woolworth’s who are surprised to see blacks in the white section and do not know how to react so after some time they start chanting anti-Negro slogans.

Violence breaks out when one man throws Memphis, a demonstrator, from his seat and slaps Moody. Another man who works in the store throws Moody against an adjoining counter. Memphis is lying near the lunch counter with blood running out of the corners of his mouth and as he tries to protect his face, the man who had thrown him down, continuously kicks him against the head; finally a police officer arrests Memphis and his attacker. Pearlina, the girl demonstrator, who is thrown to the floor, gets back to her stool along with Moody. Some white Tougaloo teachers in the crowd ask them to leave as things were getting rough. Soon Joan Trumpauer, a white student and SNCC secretary, joins them in the sit-in who is lifted from the counter by her waist and carried out of the store. Two high school boys snatch Moody’s stool and drag her thirty feet towards the door by hair. They both get up and join Pearlina at the center of the counter. Lois Chaffee, a white Tougaloo faculty member, joins them. Now they are four, two Negroes and two whites, and all women. The mob starts throwing ketchup, mustard, sugar, pies and everything on the counter at them.

John Salter, in charge of NAACP activities on campus, joins them and the moment he sits down he is hit on the jaw with brass knuckles. Blood gushes from his face and someone throws salt into the open wound. New demonstrators join them on whom the mobs spray paint from the counter. A high school student wearing a white shirt has the word “nigger” (290) written on his back with red spray paint. They sit there for three hours taking the beating when the manager decides to close the store as the mob had begun to get wild with stuff on the counters. He begs everyone to leave but no one moves. About ninety policemen standing outside the store keep watching the whole thing through the windows but they do not go in to stop the mob or do anything. Dr. Beittel, the president of Tougaloo College, comes running as he hears about it. He takes all the demonstrators out and asks the police to protect them after they are outside the store. As they go outside, the policemen form a single line to block the mob from them but they allow them to throw at them everything they had collected. The Woolworth’s sit-in is an illustration of how blacks and whites, male and female, join the movement. Their united determination in the face of violent adversity is compelling and demonstrates how dedicated they all are to the movement.

Reverend King, the civil rights activist, picks them up in his station wagon and takes them to the NAACP headquarters on Lynch Street. After the sit-in, Moody thinks of how sick Mississippi whites are; they believe so much in the segregated southern way of life that they will kill to preserve it. Before the sit-in, she used to hate the whites in Mississippi but now she knows, “it was impossible for me to hate sickness. The whites had a disease, an incurable disease in its final stage” (290). She recalls how many times the whites have killed, she knows that the killings have just begun and many more will die before it is over. She is disgusted that so many whites in Mississippi are holding on to racial inequality so violently. At night, a mass rally is organized at the Pearl Street Church in Jackson where Medgar Evers, a civil rights activist from Mississippi, introduces all the sit-inners and tells the audience that this is just the beginning of such demonstrations. He asks everyone present there to pledge themselves to unite against segregation in Jackson and throughout the state. The rally ends with the freedom song “We Shall Overcome” (291) and sends home hundreds of determined people. Moody imagines that Mississippi Negroes are about to get together at last; the Woolworth sit-in binds her to the black empowerment movement.

“Although this struggle for black equality was fought on hundreds of different ‘battlefields’ throughout the United States, many observers at the time described the state of Mississippi as the most racist and violent. Mississippi’s lawmakers, law enforcement officers, public officials, and private citizens worked long and hard to maintain the segregated way of life that had dominated the state since the end of the Civil War in 1865. The method that ensured segregation persisted was the use and threat of violence against people who sought to end it” (Austin, web. 2 Feb. 2018).

A six-man delegation of Negro ministers is chosen to meet Mayor Thompson, they present the demands on behalf of Jackson Negroes. After this meeting, Reverend Houghton, the minister of Pearl Street Church, commits that the Mayor is going to consider all the suggestions but the next day Thompson denies making any promises and says that the Negro delegation got carried away following their discussion with him. They decide to prove Mayor Thompson and the white people of Jackson that they mean business and resultantly demonstrations, sit-ins and pickets follow wherein eighty-eight demonstrators are arrested.

During the demonstrations Moody helps in conducting several workshops to teach potential demonstrators, high school and college students, to protect themselves. She joins the pray-in on the post office steps with Reverend King and a group of ministers. They are fourteen of them, seven whites and seven Negroes, and all of them are arrested. The jail is also segregated, Moody tells, “Here we were going to school together, sleeping in the same dorm, worshipping together, playing together, even demonstrating together. It all ended in jail. They were rushed off by themselves to some cell designated for whites” (296). The Negro cell does not even have a curtain over the shower. They are glad to know that over four hundred high school students had been arrested and they sing freedom songs till the jailer threatens them to put them into solitary chambers if they do not stop singing.

Within four or five days Jackson becomes the “hotbed of racial demonstrations in the South” (299). The mass rallies become every night event and after one such rally Medgar Evers is shot dead. No one is able to believe it and NAACP organizes a march protest at Medgar’s death singing freedom songs, “Woke Up This Morning With My Mind on Freedom” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round” (303). The cops go wild, arrest them, and put them into paddy wagons and garbage trucks. They take them to the fairgrounds, roll up the windows, turn on the heater and themselves go out closing the door. Everyone starts sweating and the girls start fainting and the cops rejoice seeing their condition. The cops hit the demonstrators with sticks and arrest even those Negroes who were just looking on from their porches and they are all put in compounds with two large buildings used to auction off cattle during the annual state fair. The opening is closed up with wire like a concentration camp. It is hot and sticky there and four policemen with rifles guard them and keep an eye on them. As she looks through the wire at them, she imagines herself in Nazi Germany, the policemen as Nazi soldiers, “They couldn’t have been any rougher than these cops. Yet this was America, the land of the free and the home of the brave” (305). As they march out of the compound in a single line to have dinner, they see the cook, who is from the city jail, standing over a large garbage can stirring something in it with a stick. No one feels like eating, and within few days many are taken from the fairgrounds sick with hunger.

The day before Medgar's funeral they are out of jail and for the first time Moody sees so many Negroes together; Medgar's death has really brought them to the movement. Moody thinks that may be his death will strengthen the ties between the Negroes and the Negro organizations and if this happens his death will not go in vain. The expression on their faces is that of anger, bitterness and dismay and they give a look as though any moment they are going to start rioting. After Medgar's death every Negro leader and organization in Jackson receives threats that they are next on the hit list, and things begin to fall apart and within a week everything changes; even the rallies are not the same. "Without the framework of an organized civil rights or black resistance struggle, individual and collective efforts at black liberation that focus on the primacy of self-definition and self-determination often go unrecognized" (hooks, *Talking Back* 77).

CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) opens an office in Canton, Mississippi, to start a voter registration campaign in Madison County. Moody is so fed up with the fighting and bickering among the organizations in Jackson that she is ready to go to Madison County even, where Negroes are frequently found dead. "Shortly before Christmas a man's headless corpse had been found on the road between Canton and Tougaloo with the genitals cut off and with K's cut into the flesh all over his body" (311). Everyone is concerned about Moody as they know that she has agreed to work with CORE in that area but as she had come from Wilkinson County she does not think Madison will be worse than that.

Madison County is considered a place with a possible future for Negroes in spite of all acts of violence. Their records show that it has population of twenty-nine thousand Negroes as against nine thousand whites, and the Negroes own over forty percent of the land in the county. Only about two hundred Negroes are registered to vote out of which only half are actually voting. In Canton, the CORE office is in a small room adjoining a Negro café which is owned by C.O.Chinn and his wife, a well established Negro family. Mrs. Chinn's liquor license is taken away within a few weeks of the opening of the CORE office who tells Moody that the place is broken twice and many Negroes are physically threatened. Only about fifty teenagers are involved in the movement from the area as most of the Negroes do not want to be bothered. They are thoroughly brainwashed or are too insecure to work for the whites. In case of distribution of allotments to the farmers, it always ends up with the white people getting most of the allotments. Regardless of how much land the Negroes have, they are never able to get more and it seems to Moody, "that the federal government was directly or indirectly responsible for most of the segregation, discrimination, and poverty in the South" (313). At night there is a rally at the CORE office in which twenty teenagers participate and sing freedom songs, with Mrs. Chinn being the only adult among them.

Moody has been planning to be a part of "the August 28 March on Washington" (333) since the announcement. She joins the march to the Lincoln Memorial with Reverend King, various celebrities and the Negroes. They sing freedom songs and Martin Luther King talks about his dream of freedom for the Negroes. She says, "By the time we got to Lincoln Memorial, there were already thousands of people there. I sat on the grass and listened to the speakers, to discover we had 'dreamers' instead of leaders leading us. Just about every one of them stood up there dreaming. Martin Luther King went on and on talking about his dream. I sat there thinking that in Canton we never had time to sleep, much less dream" (334-335). Her doubts, frustration and discontent with the movement and its leaders are brought forth. On their way back they decide to spend the night in Tennessee and travel through Alabama during the day for fear of being killed by someone after the march. Moody is the only Negro in the car with Reverend King and other white activists of the movement. They sleep in a Federal Park and Moody feels bad thinking that her white friends have to sleep in a park because she is black and cannot sleep in the same hotel with them. The next morning the drive through Alabama goes without incident; Reverend King drops Moody at the Freedom House in Canton and drives on to Tougaloo.

On 15th September, 1963, Moody's twenty-third birthday, she hears the news of the church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama. She is disheartened and describes her passionate outburst against the whites and against God. "As long as I live, I'll never be beaten by a white man again. Not like in Woolworth's. Not anymore. That's out. You know something else, God? Nonviolence is out. I have a good idea Martin Luther King is talking to you, too. If he is, tell him that nonviolence has served its purpose. Tell him that for me, God, and for a lot of other Negroes who must be thinking it today. If you don't believe that, then I know you must be white, too. And if I ever find out you are white, then I'm through with you. And if I find out you are black, I'll try my best to kill you when I get to heaven" (347). She believes that this bombing is Birmingham's answer to the march on

Washington. She expresses her frustration as she had spent years protesting, staging, taking part in sit-ins, getting arrested, being beaten and publicly humiliated, and in an instant all her efforts seem to be in vain. “For the oppressed, the exploited, the dominated, domination is not just a subject for radical discourse, for books. It is about pain – the pain of hunger, the pain of overwork, the pain of degradation and dehumanization, the pain of loneliness, the pain of loss, the pain of isolation, the pain of exile – spiritual and physical. Even before the words, we remember the pain” (hooks, *Talking Back* 3-4).

Moody goes to Jackson for a weekend where she meets Bobbie, one of the high school girls who had worked in Canton with her for some time who shows her a Klan leaflet that she had got from a friend of hers who lived near a white neighbourhood. Moody cannot believe her eyes to see her picture on the Klan blacklist. There were pictures of Medgar Evers, John Salter, Joan Trumpauer, Reverend Ed King, Emmett Till, of ministers and Negroes who had been killed with a cross marked on their faces. She does not ever bother about daily threats but being on a Klan blacklist is the most horrible scare of her life. In 1985, when asked in an interview whether many people who worked in the movement had suffered ‘battle fatigue,’ Moody answered in what is transcribed as halting speech, “Yeah – you know you got that I think from my reading last night, but actually when I – I think a lot of people – you don’t know the effect that it has on – on you, I mean mentally. It wears, it tears at the root of your heart” (Gwin 105).

The closing chapters of *Coming of Age* stress the need to reinvigorate the movement” (“*Coming of Age in Mississippi: Context*,” web. 18 Jan. 2017). On the last eve of the freedom vote she tells her co-workers that she plans to leave the project for some time. Due to lack of sleep and nervousness she is on the verge of a breakdown brought by finding herself on the Klan’s blacklist. She says, “I had gotten so tired of seeing people suffering, naked and hungry. It just seemed as if there was no end to it, or at least ‘the Vote’ was not the way to end it” (376). It becomes increasingly obvious that these political rights will not mean an end to the poverty and suffering of the blacks and the movement should focus more on bread-and-butter issues. Her co-workers try to persuade her to stay telling her what a good worker she is but soon they realize that Moody has made up her mind to leave so they do not pressurize her. On reaching the station she finds herself sitting in the white waiting room with a white civil rights worker who is a fund raiser for CORE. Sitting there in the station she gets the same feeling she had in all the other sit-ins she had participated, “I remember getting up once, and going to the Negro section to ask the Negroes there if they knew the white section was desegregated,” (377) and she realizes that she will never be leaving the movement for good. “Moody had already sacrificed at least a quarter of her life to the movement. Along with hundreds of other female students, she risked everything on a daily basis hoping that blacks would someday be treated like first-class citizens of the United States” (Ezra 151).

Moody goes to New Orleans to stay with her grandmother Winnie who does not even let her enter her house as she is scared of her because of her civil rights work. Then she goes to her uncle George Lee who is living with his wife who welcomes her gladly and asks her to stay as long as she wants. She decides to go to Maple Hill Restaurant for a job. They all welcome her and tell her how proud they are of her after the sit-ins and all her civil rights activities. Mr. Steve, the owner of the restaurant, speaks to her about the movement and is happy to give her job.

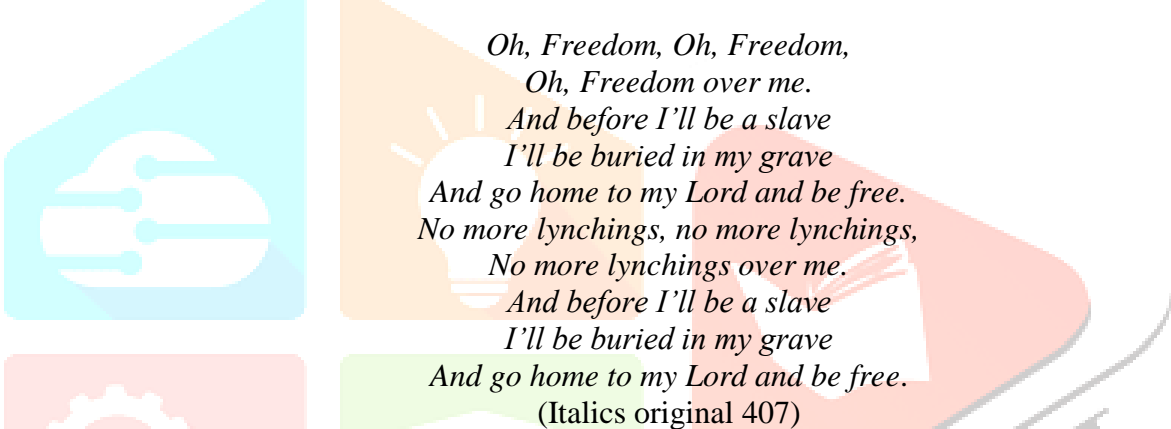
One day as she is working in the restaurant Julian, the new cashier, informs Moody that President Kennedy is shot dead. Hearing this everything around her goes black as to most of the Negroes and especially to her, the President had made “Real Freedom” (389) a hope. The Negroes had lost their best friend who was in a position to help determine their destiny; he had been considered the saviour and ultimate supporter of the Civil Rights Movement and his death is a huge setback. She is changed by the violence she experiences, by learning to channel it into a rock-hard exterior, one that cannot be broken down by hateful words or hateful actions.

Moody sits there in a shock staring at everyone and not seeing anyone thinking, “So much killing. And when will it end? When?” (387). She somehow pulls herself together and walks through the dining room to the customers who are waiting for her. She gets enraged to see all those white faces and feels like racing up and down the table, breaking dishes, smashing food into their faces and shouting and yelling at them calling them “MURDERERS!” (388). She wonders what she is doing in this segregated restaurant serving all of these “evil-minded murderers” (388). Mr. Steve sees her crying and thinks she is fainting, so he asks her to take the day off.

As she changes her uniform she feels afraid to go out into the cruel evil world and thinks that as she will walk on the street everything will be pitch black, “A world this evil, should be black, blind, and deaf, and without any feelings at all. Then there won’t be any color to be seen, no hatred to be heard, and no pain to be felt” (389). She realizes that coming back to New Orleans is even worse than staying in Canton.

Anne Moody thinks of getting involved in the movement again and attends her first meeting of the CORE chapter in New Orleans within a week. There the CORE has a voter registration drive going on in Orleans Parish and Moody volunteers to be a part of the teams that are being organized to canvass on Saturdays and Sundays. Moody finds it as hard to persuade Negroes to register in New Orleans as it was in Mississippi. According to her the only big difference about canvassing in New Orleans is that there the Negro and white civil rights workers can canvass together without being threatened of assault openly.

Moody goes to Canton to be a part of the big “Freedom Day,” (405) everyone at the Freedom House hug her as if she has come home to her family after a while. Within an hour she makes three hundred posters with freedom slogans for the march. Mrs. Devine tells her that they are expecting about five hundred adults and eight hundred high school students ready to demonstrate at the courthouse and Moody cannot believe to see three hundred adults piled out of the church for the march. The entire street is lined up with cops and as the adults enter the church they sing freedom songs:



*Oh, Freedom, Oh, Freedom,
Oh, Freedom over me.
And before I'll be a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.
No more lynchings, no more lynchings,
No more lynchings over me.
And before I'll be a slave
I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.*
(Italics original 407)

To the adults heaven will end their problems but the teenagers believe that the power to change things is within them. Their way of thinking seems to be, “God helps those that help themselves” instead of “When we get to heaven things will be different, there won’t be no black or white” (408). They know that things will remain the same unless they participate in the movement and fight for the change themselves. Moody can see them as men and women living a normal life as a real part of this world, “as a group of people that belonged – belonged because they had fought the battle and won” (408). All hopes for future come to life again looking at the teenagers on the canvassing teams, seeing them Moody realizes that the future of the movement is in the youth and the movement must focus on practical affairs: the younger generation is the hope of struggle for equality. Aretha Franklin in the song “A Change Is Gonna Come” expresses “this feeling of enduring despite the odds. She sings that there were times that she thought that she would not last for long. She sings of how it has been an ‘uphill journey all the way’ to find the strength to carry on. But despite the difficulties, Aretha ‘knows’ that ‘a change is gonna come’” (qtd. in Collins 132).

One of the cops in the street asks the teenagers why they are marching calling them “niggers” (410). A teenager replies that they are marching because they are aiming to taste a bit of the freedom that the white people are enjoying. They are going to eat in the white restaurants, drive their police cars, vote and do everything else that the whites do. The cops get angry and pull a young man, McKinley Hamilton, hit him with sticks on his head and almost kill him. They go to the church to discuss the matter with Reverend Cox, CORE field secretary, and eighty volunteers go for a march with an eighty-six-year old man leading it. All the marchers are stopped by the cops and taken to jail. The Negroes are angry because of the cops beating McKinley and the whites are mad because the Negroes are trying to get together finally.

Moody returns to Tougaloo to attend her graduation ceremony from the college; she feels sad to see that neither her parents nor any other family member is there for the ceremony. She is happy to receive her diploma and when

she is back to New Orleans, Adline gifts her a very pretty green dress which symbolizes her attainment of a college degree and Adline's acceptance of Moody's goals. Adline is happy to see her diploma as she is the first person in family to graduate from college. Moody goes back to Canton after few days and feels worse than she had ever felt before. She plans to go to Jackson and the moment she reaches the COFO headquarters she finds a bus going to Washington and joins them. The bus is filled with volunteers who all seem far more exuberant and younger than her. As the bus starts moving everybody sings and Moody leans back in the seat and listens:

*We shall overcome, We shall overcome
We shall overcome some day.
Oh, deep in my heart I do believe
We shall overcome some day
The truth will make us free,
The truth will make us free,
The truth will make us free some day.
Oh, deep in my heart I do believe
The truth will make us free some day.
(Italics original 423)*

Images of earlier happenings keep crossing her mind, the Taplin burning, the Birmingham church bombing, Medgar Evers' murder, the blood gushing out of McKinley's head and all the other murders. With tears welling up in her eyes she wonders whether they will really overcome racism and all other problems some day; she wonders if things will change and the Negroes will ever be free; it reflects her grievous frustration with the movement. Moody later reflects, "I realized that the universal fight for human rights, dignity, justice, equality and freedom is not and should not be just the fight of the American Negro or the Indians or the Chicanos. It's the fight of every ethnic and racial minority, every suppressed and exploited person, everyone of the millions who daily suffer one or another of the indignities of the powerless and voiceless masses" (Opatrny, PDF). She dedicates her life to the cause of fighting civil rights, she says that, "we made a few visible little gains; yet at the root, things always remained the same; and that the movement was not in control of her destiny, nor did we have any means of gaining control of it. We were like an angry dog on a leash that had turned on its master. It could bark and howl and snap, and sometimes even bite, but the master was always in control" (Wynn, web. 20 Jan. 2017).

Anne Moody's life writing helps one understand what life was like in the South before and during the Civil Rights Movement. Senator Edward M. Kennedy, the spokesperson for *The New York Times*, with his 1969 review declares that *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is "a history of our time, seen from the bottom up, through the eyes of someone who decided for herself that things had to be changed" (5). Her personal story manifests that the Civil Rights Movement was a slow and difficult process and it was difficult to persuade people to join the movement. It talks about the struggles and hardships to have even basic rights. It is also a reflection of how a hopeless cry of a downtrodden segment of society gets transformed into an organized outcry of resilience and empowerment. It is true that the nature of racist oppression and exploitation has changed as slavery has ended and the apartheid structure of Jim Crow has legally changed, but "white supremacy continues to shape perspectives on reality and to inform the social status of black people and all people of color" (hooks, *Talking Back* 114).

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States has been a primarily nonviolent struggle to have full civil rights and equality under the law to all Americans. The movement has had a lasting impact on United States society by increasing social and legal acceptance of civil rights, and in its expose of prevalent racism. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s witnessed great changes in American society. From *Brown vs. Board of Education* to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, March on Washington, Freedom Rides, the Black Power Movement, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the era guaranteed basic civil rights for all Americans, irrespective of race. Key Civil Rights Organizations such as the NAACP, SCLC, SNCC and CORE played vital roles during the period defined by race, violence and democracy.

The history of black civil rights is the story of America's caste system, it is the story of how for centuries, upper-class whites treated African Americans as slaves, easily identifiable because of their dark skin. To all mainstream civil rights leaders, with the current social conditions, many African Americans and poor people must

remember the names, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Medgar Evers as constant reminders of past struggles. In 2014, America marked the fiftieth anniversary of the March on Washington, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Freedom Summer. In 2015, it recognized the fiftieth anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. As they move into the 21st century, America finds itself at the beginning of a new era defined by its own set of civil rights struggles, “The battles of 2015 are in some ways marked different from those of the 1950s and 1960s, as ‘whites only’ signs and overt displays of societally condoned racism are mostly relegated to history. However, what remains is a country full of disparately impacted populations, with people of color facing disadvantages at home, at work, at school, and in the justice system, all in the context of a society that prides itself on its imagined march towards post-racial colorblindness” (“The Present and Future of Civil Rights Movements: Race and Reform in 21st century America,” web. 16 Jan. 2018). The African American women writers powerfully manifest their confrontation and triumph over the racist sexist society by giving the reader a true success story which can be the guiding light and an inspiration for many.

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