

## Black women paved the way for Kamala Harris

By DeNeen L. Brown, Washington Post

Student-created Annotations	Required Annotations	Summary / Questions / Reflection
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Not many history books tell the story of Annie Lee Cooper. During her life, Black Americans were often stopped from voting in the South, but Cooper was persistent.

"I've tried to register several times," she said. "They rejected me once and told me I failed the registration test. The other times, they never let me in the place. Once I stood in line from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., but never got in to register."

In 1965, Cooper once again tried to register to vote at a courthouse in Selma, Alabama. Local police arrived at the courthouse and tried to break up the line. At one point, the sheriff hit Cooper. However, she hit him back and knocked the man to the ground.

In November 2020, Kamala Harris was the first Black and South Asian woman elected as vice president of the United States. Vice President Harris **acknowledged** the women who came before her in a speech. Harris said that while Black women are historically overlooked, "they are the backbone of our democracy. I stand on their shoulders."

Judith Browne Dianis works at Advancement Project, a civil rights organization. She said, "So many Black women have laid the groundwork for this moment. They did kick down the doors and they laid the groundwork. They were the ones who were the architects of the voting rights movement."

Black women played critical roles in organizing, planning and putting their lives on the line for political freedom. Even during slavery, Black women planned resistance movements. They organized in their communities to fight for freedom.

More than 170 years ago, Sojourner Truth preached against slavery. Truth had been born with slave status. In her life, she fought for women's rights even when white women activists did not support the anti-slavery movement.

### A Stand For The Race

Ida B. Wells was born with slave status in 1862 near Holly Springs, Mississippi. Wells became an author and a newspaper owner. She also spoke out against lynching, or the killing of someone by a group of people.

In 1913, Wells created a suffrage group for Black women. Suffrage is the right to vote and women who campaigned for the right to vote were called suffragists. White female suffragists often excluded Black women. For example, white suffragists organized a parade in Washington on March 3, 1913. However, they wanted the parade segregated by race. Wells did not feel this was fair and instead marched in the parade at the front.

She later wrote that her actions were "for the future benefit of my whole

race."

## Mississippi Challenge

Ella Baker was involved in the organization of many groups in the civil rights movement in the mid-20th century. She helped organize the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The SNCC planned Freedom Rides. These were efforts to challenge segregated transportation between states.

In 1964, Mississippi's Democratic Party sent **delegates**, or representatives, to the Democratic National Convention. All of the delegates were white. In response, Ella Baker co-founded the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party.

Fannie Lou Hamer was another co-founder of the party. In 1964, Hamer attended the Democratic National Convention. She spoke about injustices suffered by Black people in the South. She also talked about her experiences with police stopping her from registering to vote.

Hamer said, "Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings?"

## Selma

Civil Rights activist Amelia Boynton offered her basement to organizers of the Selma to Montgomery march. This was a protest march in Alabama for Black **suffrage**.

On March 7, 1965, Boynton and more than 600 people gathered to march from Selma to Montgomery. But the group met with police at Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Local police and state troopers attacked marchers. Television and newspaper cameras captured the incident. This day later became known as Bloody Sunday. A photo of Boynton, after she was attacked by police, would be published in newspapers around the world.

In 2015, President Barack Obama and his family joined civil rights activists who had walked across Edmund Pettus bridge in 1965 at the bridge in Selma, Alabama. Amelia Boynton is shown to the right in a blue outfit. Photo: Wikimedia Commons/White House

## Sit-In, Kneel-In, Lie-In

Some Black women have had their stories lost by history. Some are listed only by their first name, such as Angela. She was one of the first Black women to appear in records of the colony of Virginia.

Other Black women, such as Daisy Bates, are well-known. Bates was the only woman to speak at the March on Washington in 1963. Bates said, "We will kneel-in, we will sit-in until we can eat in any corner in the United States."

Some Black women, such as Aylene Quin, overcame violent attacks. In September of 1964, Quin's home was bombed because she had opened her

restaurant to SNCC workers.

Quin traveled to Washington, D.C., the day after the bombing. She met privately with President Lyndon B. Johnson. In the meeting, she demanded that he increase protections for Black people in the South.

### Seeking Higher Office

Shirley Chisholm was the first Black woman elected to Congress. On January 25, 1972, Chisholm declared that she was running for the Democratic presidential nomination. In the end, Chisholm did not win the party's nomination. **Nonetheless**, she became the first Black person to run for president with a major political party.

Republican Richard Nixon won the presidential election. Nixon was later accused of abusing his power as president. However, he would resign before he could be removed from office.

At Nixon's trial, Representative Barbara Jordan of Texas delivered the opening remarks. In 1972, Jordan was one of two Black people who served in the U.S. House of Representatives at the time. In her opening statement, she said, "My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total."

Jordan said Congress needed to remove Nixon from office. If it did not, "perhaps the 18th-century Constitution should be abandoned to a 20th-century paper shredder."

### Questions

1. Which sentence from the article supports the MAIN idea of the article?
  - a) Black women played critical roles in organizing, planning and putting their lives on the line for political freedom.
  - b) Ida B. Wells was born with slave status in 1862 near Holly Springs, Mississippi.
  - c) She was one of the first Black women to appear in records of the colony of Virginia.
  - d) Nixon was later accused of abusing his power as president.
2. Read the following paragraph from the section "Selma." *On March 7, 1965, Boynton and more than 600 people gathered to march from Selma to Montgomery. But the group met with police at Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Local police and state troopers attacked marchers. Television and newspaper cameras captured the incident. This day later became known as Bloody Sunday. A photo of Boynton, after she was attacked by police, would be published in newspapers around the world.* Which statement summarizes the paragraph?
  - a) Amelia Boynton organized a protest march in Alabama that was planned to go from Selma to Montgomery.
  - b) Newspapers published a photograph of Amelia Boynton after she was attacked during a march.
  - c) March 7, 1965, became known as Bloody Sunday because protesters were attacked by police in Selma.
  - d) Television and newspaper cameras captured an incident in which peaceful protesters were attacked.
3. What does the author want the reader to understand about Barbara Jordan?
  - a) She was an important African-American representative who believed in the Constitution.
  - b) She served in the U.S. House of Representatives for only a short time during the 1970s.

- c) She thought that the Constitution should be shredded because it was written in the 18th century.
  - d) She believed Richard Nixon should resign from office instead of being put on trial and removed.
4. Read the article's Introduction [paragraphs 1-7]. Which sentence from the section shows Kamala Harris's point of view about Black women who fought for civil rights?
- a) Vice President Harris acknowledged the women who came before her in a speech.
  - b) "I stand on their shoulders."
  - c) She said, "So many Black women have laid the groundwork for this moment."
  - d) They organized in their communities to fight for freedom.