

Example of A-level Primary Source Paper

The primary source is an interview conducted by Eugene Walker interviewing Ella Baker on 4th September 1974 in Durham, North Carolina. Ella Baker was a female African-American who is aged 71 at the time of the interview. She was an important and active figure in the Civil Rights Movement though often overlooked due to males such as Martin Luther King dominating historical discussion. Her involvement in Civil Rights began when she joined and worked for the NAACP in 1941 and was hired, without any real consent, she states, by Martin Luther King to establish one of the first SCLC offices in Atlanta in 1958 due to her skill and connections. The interview largely focuses on the early setting up of the office in Atlanta, the challenges she faced and her lack of real authority due to being a woman.

The interview was conducted largely due to the context of the time. 1974 was a time where the Civil Rights Movement had arguably come to an end in the mainstream consciousness of Americans but the Second Wave Feminism was still a current and relevant issue. The interview being conducted in this time period and the types of questions posed could then suggest that it was a period of historical reflection and investigation on the Civil Rights Movement simultaneously with a curiosity on women's issues and the female roles within this movement as gender equality was now at the forefront of social issues. Walker's motive was therefore to investigate both of these social issues by speaking to an African-American woman, which therefore crosses both areas. Considering the interview is part of the Southern Oral History Program Collection located in the University of North Carolina library, he intended this interview to be for historians, scholars and an educational resource to students. The source allows us to

learn about the time period in which the interview was conducted as well as the specifics of Baker's activism and the organisation of the Atlanta SCLC office and hierarchy.

Speaking to women that were active in the Civil Rights Movement, the source provides insight into an area of its activism that is often overlooked which is the participation and role of women. Additionally it shows how even within a social movement fighting for the cause of equality and rights for citizens treated as inferior, it contained its own inequalities due to gender inequality. Ella Baker in particular was one of the leading women in the movement yet she still herself states in the interview when asked about being one of the first and only women in a high ranked position in the movement, "I didn't have any significant role in the minds of those who constituted the organization... I was just there to carry out the orders of Dr. King and somebody else, but incidental since there was no designation of authority. I wasn't a person of authority." However, Baker is not even necessarily representative of women in the Civil Rights Movement as she was in one of the highest positions, which therefore doesn't show the everyday activism of the women within the movement. This reveals that African-American women were assigned an inferior status and value within the Civil Rights Movement, ironically fighting for equality, as well as wider society.

The experience of inequality, inferiority and a lack of authority within the Civil Rights Movement for women that the interview with Baker reveals does relate to discussions in class of women being omitted in history, and in this case, African-American women. One example would be Henrietta Lacks. Additionally it presents to

the historian and supports the view that women and African-Americans have been treated as second-class citizens.

Primary Source:

- **Document 13: Interview with Ella Baker by Eugene Walker, 4 September 1974 (G-0007), pp. 34-46, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.** Included in [*How Did African American Women Shape the Civil Rights Movement and What Challenges Did They Face?*](#), Documents selected and interpreted by Gail S. Murray (<http://asp6new.alexanderstreet.com.www2.lib.ku.edu/wam2/wam2.object.details.aspx?dorpid=1003083031>)