

Diane Nash

Essential Question: What role did Diane Nash play in the African American struggle for Civil Rights?

Diane Nash was born in 1938 in Chicago. After graduating high school, Nash attended Howard University in Washington D.C. for one year then transferred to Fisk University in Nashville where she majored in English. As a student attending school in Nashville, Diane Nash experienced the full effects of Jim Crow laws for the first time. For example, African-Americans were not allowed to eat at lunch counters in downtown department stores because of their race.

In 1959, she began to attend direct action non-violent workshops led by the Rev. James Lawson. These workshops stressed protest methods that used non-violence in response to the treatment African-Americans received under Jim Crow laws. Nash had the opportunity to practice nonviolent direct action when the Student Central Committee in Nashville organized a sit-in at a local department store lunch counter in downtown Nashville. Nash impressed so many people in the movement that she was elected chairperson of the Student Central Committee. This in itself is important because there were very few female leaders in the Civil Rights movement. In April 1960, Nash helped found and lead the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. More sit-ins followed and hundreds of Fisk Students and young African-Americans took part along with some white students.

On the morning of April 19, 1960 the home of Z. Alexander Looby, who had assisted students and participants in the Civil Rights movement in Nashville, was bombed. Nash organized and led a march in support of Looby. The march began with around 2,000 people and ended at the courthouse in Nashville with somewhere between 3,000 to 4,000 people participating. Besides the sheer numbers, the most impressive fact about the march was that it was accomplished in complete silence.

At the courthouse steps Mayor Ben West came out to meet the protesters. Discussions followed and Diane Nash took her turn. Nash asked Mayor West if it was wrong to discriminate against a person at a lunch counter solely based on his or her color or race. After a moment of silence Mayor West said he did not think it was correct. Nashville, Tennessee shortly thereafter became the first southern city to have integrated lunch counters. Nash was nominated by Dr. King for an award from the New York NAACP. Dr. King said, "Nash was the driving spirit in the nonviolent assault on segregation at lunch counters".

After the Nashville sit-ins, Nash helped to coordinate and participated in the Freedom Rides organized by the Congress of Racial Equality. There was some opposition to the Freedom Rider program by some leading members in the Civil Rights movement. Even after the Ku Klux Klan burned a Freedom Rider bus in Anniston, Alabama Nash continued to coordinate Freedom Ride efforts into Mississippi from her Nashville base.

In 1961, Nash dropped out of school to become a full time organizer, strategist and instructor for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference headed by Dr. Martin Luther King. Nash was active in the Civil Rights movement for several years. Nash has received several awards for her leadership in the fight for civil rights. She later taught school in Chicago and continued her activism in social and economic reform.

Sources: “Diane Nash.” *Makers.com*. Makers, 2014. Web. 31 July 2014.
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“Students Led the Way.” *Because of You*. The Tennessean, n.d. Web. 31 July 2014. <<http://archive.tennessean.com/civil-rights/>>

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Design a postage stamp in honor of Diane Nash. Afterwards, provide a brief explanation for why Diane Nash deserves to have a stamp made in her honor.


