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The History of Black women's education

The education of black women has been a long and hard road. In both African and American society the education system for black women has been a bit rocky given that society views women as inferior to men. Women in America couldn't go to school at first so imagine how hard it was for black women in America. Through the acts of feminism women of color had to fight for their rights to education. There were a few black women in history who've contributed to the education system today. A great example is Ruby Bridges. The contributions of these strong women must be recognized.

The importance of feminism is something that must be discussed before we acknowledge these trailblazers of education. Feminism is the ideology and philosophy that black women are valuable. It is something that views black women's liberation highly. Many women of color put in a lot of effort and dedication back then. There were many movements that black women were a part of because they were discriminated against and had to do things on their own. During the women's suffrage movement in the 1850s Sojourner Truth attended the Ohio Women's Convention at Akron in 1851 and delivered her iconic "Ain't I A Woman?" speech, arguing that women deserve the right to vote. Additionally, during the civil rights movement Rosa Parks made a stand against the discrimination at bus stations. Following in her footsteps, Women young and old attended the famed March on Washington, participated in the Freedom Rides to protest segregated bus stations, and marched in local demonstrations with signs and placards. Black women like Truth and Parks are a great example of what it means to show true feminism

and standing up for the rights of women of color. Additionally, as we know around the same time of segregation, schools were also segregated.

Education and its importance on the black community is something that should be considered when talking about education for black women. Schools and education are learning environments that are formative to shaping how children and the youth view themselves. Although we might have the enactment of Title IX in 1972 that has guaranteed the right to education free from sex discrimination, the stuff black women endured before that still remains. An example of black women going through traumatic experiences trying to get fair education is the story of Ruby Bridges. The story of Ruby Bridges is a story that should be remembered and recognized for years to come because it's a pivotal moment in black women history. Ruby Nell Bridges Hall is an American civil rights activist and was the first little girl of color to integrate in an all-white school back in the 1960s. Her story touches most black people in America today because of the things she endured while trying to obtain equal education. Ruby's birth year, September 8, 1954, happened the same time the US Supreme Court's ruling of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, to end racial segregation in public schools. Anyhow, A New Orleans kindergarten had exams for black people to see if they could fit in their all white schools. Ruby had passed these exams and her parents had to make a tough decision whether or not to send her to this all white school. Eventually they decided it was best to give Ruby educational opportunities that they didn't have and send her to the school. However, Ruby had to deal with racism from both in and outside of her new school. After her first day there Ruby and her mother were escorted by four federal marshals to the school every day because of the large racist protesters screaming vicious slurs at her. These protesters really wanted to express their hatred to black girls trying to obtain an education because not only did they yell slurs but they threw

objects, spat at, and even brought traumatizing objects to young Ruby who was only around 6 or 7 at the time. It didn't end there though, the parents of the students inside the school even took their kids home because they didn't want their kids in the same room as a black girl. Even some of the school staff quit their jobs because they didn't want to deal with Ruby. However through all of this Ruby and her family pushed through. If all of the other kids in Ruby's class wanted to leave then she'd just have to be the only student in the class learning, and she was. Ruby was a class of one being taught by Barbara Henry, a white Boston native, who was the only teacher willing to accept Ruby. Despite being alone at lunch, playing with her only accepting teacher during recess, and dealing with racist comments of the neighborhood, Ruby constantly attended her school because she cared that much for her education. Ruby eventually graduated from a desegregated high school and became a travel agent. She was reunited with her first teacher, Henry, in the mid 1990s, and for a time the pair did speaking engagements together. Ruby later wrote about her early experiences in two books and received the Carter G. Woodson Book Award.

Girls like Ruby Bridges are great examples of the sacrifices made just to attend school and grasp a proper education. This can be compared to one of our course texts, "Ain't I a woman?" because of the mentions of black women's struggles in American society. Ruby Bridges is one of many stories that talk about racial discrimination in America and these stories will continue to be told because racism has been in this country since the beginning. Black women fighting for their natural born rights and enduring the pain and sacrifices that come along with it is why "Ain't I a woman?" can relate to black women and their struggles with grasping education. Sexism and racism towards black women has been engraved in history forever. The racism, which mostly comes from white men, stems from the ignorant narrative that black

women are inferior to them. This mindset was also used during slavery times when they tried to keep black women stupid and use them for their own economic gain. White people even did this to their own women. Women in general weren't seen as individuals and only seen as a man's property. An additional fuel to the fire is that it took but so many years for black women to even be considered human and when they were, they were only 3/5ths of a human, which is the most idiotic thing to ever happen in American history. In "Ain't I a woman?" Truth mentions the specific sexism and racism black women experience. Truth was trying to persuade people that women, black or white, should be treated as equal to men. They should have rights just like men. This also includes education. Most of the reason Ruby Bridges endured the things she did was because of her sex and race so compared to Truth's words it proves that there was a strain on equality of black women. Another course text that Ruby's story can be compared to is "Generation X: The Role of Culture on the Leadership Styles of Women in Leadership Positions". This text's overview says, "[the book's] goal is to assist organizational leaders to view Generation X women in positions of power from a different perspective. Women leaders are capable of leading a 21st century organization because of their scope of knowledge about growing businesses, and their ability to blend and incorporate new technologies and innovations in the business environment. Generation X: The Role of Culture on the Leadership Styles of Women in Leadership Positions is relevant to the fields of business, cultural, human relations, leadership, management, and cross-cultural leadership and women studies. The cultural values of women in many societies are grounded in the shared experiences of symbols and norms, which are manifested in beliefs and practices. These play obviously a significant role in the leadership styles and expressions of Generation X women who are in leadership positions." The book also says that, "[it] will also assist Generation X women in positions of power in building highly

effective and functioning teams in adapting to global business and environmental trends.” The same way that society needs to have an understanding of the contributions of women is the same way Ruby’s school needed to acknowledge her efforts as a black girl. In the education system all the other kids took the same test Ruby did and some didn’t get in the school but Ruby did. Just like what is talked about in the book, acknowledging the gifts and talents of a black women are important because it could benefit an organization or a school. Additionally, the book mentions adapting to environmental trends which can be used in Ruby’s case too because society was unable to adapt to a black girl attending an all white school to get equal education. The final course text that this can be related to is “Women, Race, and Class” by Angela Davis. In the book Davis talks a lot about the liberation of black women and America’s racist history relating to that. A few quotes that can be related to black women trying to obtain an education and Ruby’s struggles is “Black women had been more than willing to contribute.... But at every turn, they were betrayed, spurned and rejected by the leaders of the lily-white woman suffrage movement... Black women were simply expendable entities when it came time to woo Southern support with a white complexion.” This quote basically mentions mistreatment that black women get despite their efforts and that they will always be looked down upon.

In similarity to all three of these texts, Ruby Bridges’s story is one of many that talks about the unfair inequality of black women. This inequality also hinders black women from education and causes black women to sacrifice even more. Racism and sexism are a black women’s toxic friend because no matter where they are it always follows. Whether it's in a business room or in an education system, it hinders their growth. Even though many changes have been made since the 60s it’s still important to recognize these things because racism and sexism will never die and it’ll only get worse if it’s ignored.