

Kiara Escalera

Ms. Hazel

U.S History 300

2/15/2021

Diane Nash is not the most popular amongst other activists, however, she does play a major role in the Civil Rights movement for people of color in America. She was an African American civil rights leader and activist, during 1964 when the Jim Crow laws and racial segregation were legal in the U.S. She was born on May 15, 1938, in Chicago, Illinois, and grew up in a middle-class catholic family. . She had an American mother and an African American father, which made her skin color different from both her parents. Nash's mother worked as a keypunch operator during the Second World War, leaving Nash in the care of her grandmother, until age 7 while her father served as a veteran during World War II. Growing up, Nash was considered a beautiful young woman, and she won several beauty contests but at some point, she wanted to be a nun. Once she graduated from high school, Hyde Park High School in Chicago, she went to college. The first college she attended was Howard University in Washington, D.C., HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). She later transferred to Fisk University, but once she entered the south she had her first encounter with racial segregation.

Nash was a respected leader at the University of Nashville, Tennessee. Nash went there to major in English, she also wanted to explore the world and its challenges. She thought if she can explore life's challenges that it would help her with personal growth. She faced pervasive segregation for the first time when she went to a state fair. When she was told she had to use the "Colored Woman's" restroom, this was the first time she saw and been impacted by racial

segregation. Once, Nash was found contempt of court while pregnant by a Mississippi judge for refusing to move to the back of his court which led her to spend the night at a Mississippi jail cell. Diane Nash refused to have her power taken away. She once said, “There were signs that said white, white-only, colored. [The] library was segregated, the public library. Parks, swimming pools, hotels, motels,” she recalls. “I was at a period where I was interested in expanding: going new places, seeing new things, meeting new people. So that felt very confined and uncomfortable” (The History, 2021). Diane Nash wanted to experience the world and the people of the world but she didn’t think that in some parts of the world people of color were still being treated unequally. Now that Nash was heavily involved in racial desegregation, she felt that she could no longer watch people of color continue to get discriminated against. She wanted to make a difference by doing something about it and so she did by protesting.

During the movement, Diane Nash was only 24 years old and six months pregnant. She led the Lunch Counter protests and organized the second wave of Freedom Riders in the 60s. Among the movements that she helped start are the Lunch Counter Integration Campaign, the Freedom Riders movement, and was one of the founders of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee that also helped organize voting rights in Alabama and the Voting Rights movement in Selma. This committee also helped ratify the Voting Rights Act of 1965, empowering the federal government to ensure that African Americans and other minorities could register as well as a vote during election periods. Her determination and courageousness encouraged her to strive to fight against these rights. Her commitment contributed to African Americans being able to have the right to vote during elections. She was one of many Civil Rights activists who paved the way for ethnic equality in terms of voting in the U.S., to this day she still lives on to tell her story.

