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Black Women Socio-political Activism in America up to 1980s

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Dedication

This study would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of many people.

I would like to dedicate this work to my entire family, especially to my **parents** who have truly been an inspiration in my life, whose prayers and support gave this work more personal meaning.

No person believes in me more than you.

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Abstract

Black women activism was a sociopolitical movement against racism, sexism and segregation which was led by African American women. The first chapter examines black women discrimination and oppression during slavery and the primary resistance methods that were available at that time. Whereas, Chapter two analyzes Black women issues especially gender and race subjects. Black women's politics stressed the importance of the organized work through institutions and organizations that allow their voices to be heard. Black women reacted both against gender segregation and patriarchy as well as racism forms which were displayed by some white women. During their long journey, black women emphasized on the importance of radical thoughts which aimed to liberate the black race. The experiences and life lessons that black women provided in this study illuminate the means of self and community strong relationship of the black race in US. In this work black women are introduced in different levels that show their chronological changes, in which they positively and successfully moved to a better social and political position.

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List of Abbreviations

A.A.S: Anti-Slavery Movement of America

A.E.R.A: The American Equal Rights Association

A.W.S.A: The American Women Suffrage Association

B.P.P: The Black Panther Party

C.W.L: The Colored Women's League

I.C.W.D.R: The International Council of Women of Darker Races

N.A.A.C.P: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

N.A.C.W: The National Association of Colored Women

N.A.W.S.A: The National American Women Suffrage Association

N.F.A.A. W: The National Federation of Afro- American

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General Introduction

Africans survived brutal experiences through the transatlantic slave trade; they endured hard times during their transportation to the Americas including the Middle Passage, where they suffered several forms of discrimination physically and psychologically. As they arrived to the New World, they worked on plantation fields, mine industries and domestic service. The slave trade profits brought economic prosperity to European and American countries. The reproduction of slave trade in the Americas seemed a safe method to increase the number of the slave commodity rapidly and easily. Black females, in particularly slave mothers witnessed several kinds of sexual abuse, and oppression, they were considered as the central source of slaves reproduction.

Black women narratives recorded how black females were oppressed in every aspect of their lives at home and on plantations. They resisted all kinds of sexual harassment, they were fully aware of the daily discrimination they received. As the time passed, African American blacks changed. Technological and industrial achievements facilitated life in America. Black intellectuals started to express their new vision through press and literary pieces. They were fully aware about race issues and discrimination acts. World War I and II marked an important shift of the afro American society in US. Black leaders spread awareness; in turn black people took various forms of resistance to get their liberty and their proper rights through several manifestations which characterized their historical career. Black women played an important role in the black race revolution. They strived strongly against sexism and racism, they were engaged in different social and political activism, they challenged various obstacles and they found new ways to address their issues.

Black women activists shaped their destiny through crucial events as the Civil Rights Movement (1950s_ 1960s), Harlem Renaissance, and different marches and manifesto, they were always present, fighting for the whole black race. Black women had had a positive effect on many aspects of the American community; they continued to play a vital role in the sociopolitical life of the United States.

The history of black American women activists marked the foundation of many political institutions and organizations that defended black females and brought back their proper right as full American citizens, This study seeks to shed light on African American women activism including the ways in which their life experiences had saved the next black female generation by analyzing black liberation events and black feminist discourses. Research question that drives this study are:

1. How did African American women resist gender oppression?
2. What did black women activists do for the black race liberation?
3. What were the socio-political strategies that black women had planned to detect gender issues?
4. What were the changes and the mobilizations that shaped the new black women image?

The purpose of this study is to highlight the crucial roles of black women in the history of the American community. Providing a brief look into African American women background, may help readers to depict a clear understanding of the sociopolitical experiences that accompanied black women during their struggles for gender liberation. The research also gives a close review about black women achievements which inspires today's black American females such as the former USA lady Michelle Obama and the black billionaire Oprah Winfrey who have successfully established a powerful black American model.

This dissertation is divided into two main chapters:

Chapter one initiates the historical review of the transatlantic slave trade that allowed the transportation of African slaves to the Americas and how they were involved in industrial and agricultural tasks. It also explains the shift from the shipment of slaves from the mother land to the reproduction of slave profit in the US. Black female slaves were considered as the central source of human material profit, they faced sexual abuse and discrimination for a long time. This chapter examined black women resistance against unjust treatment and the role of black female intellectuals on supporting social awareness over the black race.

Chapter Two discusses gender issues and how black women activists organized themselves politically to gain their rights as they recognized that it was the only strong way to manipulate their liberation. They established their own political network including clubs and institutions from which their voice had been heard. They held national conferences to get their rights; they struggled against racism, sexism and patriarchy publically. This part of the study focused more on the initial role of black women sociopolitical activism and the way in which they united the black race as whole.

Chapter One:

The History of Black Slavery in America

Introduction

Slavery had existed for thousands of years, but black slavery was in particularly inhumane institution. The transportation of Africans to the Americas from the 16th to the 18th centuries may be regarded as mankind's largest transoceanic migration. Africans suffered for a long time from various types of discrimination which governed their lives. The content of this chapter tends to review the period of slavery that black Americans had faced, dealing with the origins of black slavery that began with the Portuguese and followed other European powers as, Spain, Britain, France, and the Netherlands. The transatlantic slave trade (the conveyor belt to early death) was responsible for the violent transportation of millions of Africans overseas causing death and diseases. The arrival of black flood to the New World was soon seen as an economic necessity that played great role on the prosperity of the European economy. Slavery met tremendous support among the European planters of the Americas, black slaves and their offspring maximized the increase of slave profit, the reproduction of the black slave race contributed grandly on the development of the European incomes. Black slave women played a crucial role in the formation of black slave family; they were treated either as trade commodities, domestic labourers, or slave child mothers. Numerous negative issues bothered black slave women as sexual abuse (coercion) which threatened their lives for a long time. Many slave narratives recorded the hardship of the forced sexual relationships that covers history and literary books but how they went beyond it through several forms of resistance, was another story that paved the way to black women activism.

2. Roots of Black Slavery

The backbone of black slavery was connected to the first Portuguese who were marked by the love of adventures and inspired by the geographical discoveries. Prince Henry “the Navigator”, organized expeditions to Africa. In 1442, Captains of the exploring caravels brought back with them dozen of African slaves whom they had kidnapped on the west coast of Africa and transported them to Europe to show the king that they reached the land of blacks. ¹“It was the Portuguese who ... Started the Atlantic slave trade and established the first European overseas empire. “ Declared James Rawley in his book *The Transatlantic Slave Trade (2009)*.²

The Portuguese claimed that enslavement was sanctioned by the holy scriptures of the Bible and their mission to Africa was rather to convert Africans to Christianity. In 1492, the explorer Christopher Columbus who represented the Spanish monarchy discovered the Americas and the gold mine of Haiti Island or as the Spaniards called it Hispaniola. Spain contracted with Portugal for the supply of African labourers .The following years of the 16th century marked the transportation of blacks to the New World. The spread of the Spanish power on the Americas between the years 1543-1834 and the precious mines founded there, requested additional manpower. The exploitation of the natural wealth of the new country opened unlimited demand for human material. The Spanish sovereign Charles III introduced “the Assiento System” which was a contract trading agreement that permitted Europeans to buy and sell slaves.³

¹ Raybin Emert Phyllis,ed, *colonial triangular trade : an economy based on human trade* (Carlisle Massachusetts : Discovery Enterprises,Ltd .1995), p 07

² Ibid, 08

³ Edmund Dene Morel , *The Black Man’s Burden*,(Manchester: The National Labour press 30 Black Friars street Ltd, 1920),p15

Great Britain, France, The Netherlands, Sweden and other European ruling powers authorized the slave trade for ethical reasons adopting an ideology that could justify the trade of the African flesh. It is estimated that more than half of the slave trade took place during the 18th century, with the British as the biggest transporters of slaves across the Atlantic.¹

The first labourers to work on the vast lands of the Americas were the native inhabitants “the Indians” but they were unable to adjust themselves to the new lifestyle, as Fernando Ortiz wrote in the introduction of *Historia de la Esclavitud de los Indios en el Nuevo Mundo* book (*The History of Indian slavery in the New World* 1932):

To subject the Indian to the mines, to their monotonous, insane and severe labor, without tribal sense, without religious ritual . . . was like taking away from him the meaning of his life. ... It was to enslave not only his muscles but also his collective spirit.²

For the ruling powers, Indians slavery was unprofitable and the sugar, cotton and tobacco plantations needed strength which the Indians lacked. So the dominating nations of the slave trade turned to the White European servants including indentured servants (who had signed contract indented by law). They were redemptioners, poors and prisoners seeking for freedom. The white servitude, however, gave disadvantages as they could not resist the misery of being on small boats with small amount of food, knowing that the voyage was too long (about five and half weeks) even when arriving to the Americas conditions served against the wishes of the white European servants.³

¹ Ibid, p 13

² Ibid, p 19

³ ibid

Slave traders considered Africans as worthy human material which may satisfy the necessity of their production. The importation of slaves from the Dark Continent met tremendous support in which whites declared the beginning of a long trade slave trip.

3. European Arguments and Justification for African Slavery

European powers claimed that Africans were “barbaric”, “uncivilized” and “savage”. They justified the enslavement of the blacks based on religious terms. However, the real reasons behind choosing Africans to work as slaves were not cultural or religious. In fact, African labourers were considered more suitable than European servants and Indigenous labourers as they used to work in tropical agricultural conditions, and were resistant to diseases. They seemed to be an inexhaustible supply, able to seek out new sources. European justifications were unsound because the African history marked its strength throughout the various empires and civilizations that existed centuries ago.¹

Europeans were still convinced about being the torchbearers who lightened the Dark Continent; in fact indirect reasons guided the white men towards exploiting the black human material. The technological European advance and the capacity of sending ships from continent to another over a long time showed the strength point of the whites in comparison with the other nations that practiced slavery before (sub-Saharan slavery). Sugar canon plantations in Brazil and the Caribbean required strong physical standards that were on the hands of the Africans, and thus the infinite demand of the black workers increased rapidly.²

¹ Muhammad, Esq and Patricia M. *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Forgotten Crime Against Humanity as Defined by International Law*, (American University International Law Review 19, no. 4 ,2003),p 888

² Luis Angeles, *On the Causes of the African Slave Trade and African Underdevelopment* (Uk: University of Glasgow, 2011),p 17

The importation of blacks was much easier since they were twice times cheaper than the products that were exchanged with the local African traders. Economists argued that the central reason behind the spread of the black slave trade was the low cost of slaves. They considered it as a crucial link to understand why only Africans were the primary victims of the European huge wave which supported the exploitation the black race.¹

4. The Transatlantic Slave Trade

The Transatlantic slave trade took place across the Atlantic Ocean; about 12.5 million Africans were transported to the Americas in three and a half centuries. Europeans were searching for new roads to India where they explored the new trade ways. At first, Europeans brought ivory and gold from the West African coast (Niger River, Guinea coast, and Senegal) then they recognized the importance of slave commodity profit. They started to exchange merchandise for slaves and transported them to the Americas across the Atlantic Ocean. The vast majority of slaves went to the West Indies, Brazil, the Caribbean, South and Central America.²

Slavery was soon seen as an economic necessity since there was a need for new labour in order to cultivate the large plantation fields of the Americas. Various African tribes played a fundamental role in slave trade business, the majority of African slaves were foreign tribe members obtained from kidnappings, raids, or tribal wars. The victims were treated as commodities and sold to Europeans in exchange for items as manufactured goods and clothes.³

¹ Ibid, 24

² James A. Rawley and Stephen D. Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History, revised edition* (London: university of nebraska press, 2005), p17

³ Muhammad Esq and Patricia M, op.cit, p893

Traders in turn transported slaves to the American colonies to work on sugar, rice and cotton plantations in which the products (raw material) were sent to Europe to be reinvested (Industrial Revolution). It was a profitable system that brought vast economical wealth to Europe.¹

The horrific journey across the Atlantic Ocean termed the Middle Passage certified the long trip of African slaves from the Dark Continent to the New World. Traders forced slaves and packed them onto ships, chained them together using iron devices around their legs and necks causing physical injury. Many slaves died during the voyage suffering from smallpox and dysentery, others chose hungry as a form of suicide. The vessels themselves were unequipped for journey which lasted several weeks. In addition, food was insufficient to feed all the slaves and medical health care was not available to cure every one; slaves faced all kinds of cruelty, the ocean storms racked many ships and marked the lost of numerous Africans.²

A passage from *Captain Gamble's log book* (1793-p04), may give clear descriptions of the Middle Passage scenes:

The slaves are made fast round the neck (by) a long stick which is secured around the waist from one man to another ... The (Africans want) salt which they feed to their cattle. Tobacco and beads are next in demand.³

¹ Ibid,p897

²Pat perrin, ed, *Slavery: Researching American History*,(Carlisle Massachusetts : Discovery Enterprises,Ltd,2000),p 07

³ Ibid,p08

The transportation of slaves through the Middle Passage certified the painful experiences of the black slaves. Men and Women were separated, arranged together to form a cluster, kept naked and bound for long periods in order to keep them under control (The average duration from Africa to the Americas was two months) most slave traders used harsh methods to assure the abeyance of slaves before reaching the auction blocks of the Americas.¹

Many slaves recorded the doleful experiences that they had faced along the voyage; they chose to flee or commit suicide rather than bear the sight of what they called “the white devils”. Ship captains feared the loss of their profit because many Africans died on their way to the American coast. Slaves arrived to the New World and settled in its colonies mainly in the Caribbean Island where they were introduced to their new home. The Atlantic slave trade stretched out when a great demand for labour on plantations met great support. Most of the plantations produced sugar, coffee, cocoa, rice, tobacco, and cotton. At the beginning, Virginia cultivated Tobacco, it was able to produce good amount of tobacco at a lower price throughout the season.²

The sugar field was considered as the main leading power in Brazil and the Caribbean, it was a highly profitable crop and an exhausting task that needed a gigantic black energy. Black slaves also worked on mine industries in Mexico as well as cotton and rice plantations on the British colonies of North America. Resistance of the black slaves took many forms including mutiny, starvation, and running away (mountainous lands and less populated areas were possible runaways to escape European enslavement), plantation owners found it difficult to control slaves rebellion.³

¹ David Eltis. *A Brief Overview of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* (Emory University, 2007) url: <http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/essays>, accessed on February 24,2017

² Norman Coombs, *The Black Experience In America: The Immigrant Heritage of America*(Twayne, 1972), p23

³ Ibid,p27

5. The Formation of the Black Slave Family

The flowing of the African race to America from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, augmented yearly. From the moment of its birth, black slavery certified the transportation of both black males and females, even children were not able to escape the hardship of the slave masters; they were not mature enough to realize the concept of being property of the white men. The Formation of the slave family life started within single parenthood including pregnant women who were shipped to the New World to work on plantations as the rest of slave. Mothers and their children were separated. Black mothers did not have the right to take care of their kids or guide them. The black African mother was “only a legitimate parent of her child”. Slave owners then tended to couple black men and women in order to overproduce the maximum number of the slave profit (child-slaves).¹

John Henrik Clarke a member of African Pan Writers and a black historian illustrated in his article “The Black Woman: A Figure in World History” (Part III, July, 1971) that:

The family as a functional entity was outlawed and permitted to exist only when it benefited the slave-master. Maintenance of the slave family as a family unit benefited the slave owners only when, and to the extent that such unions created new slaves who could be exploited

Black mothers endured cruel experiences, being unconnected to their children broke their hearts; children in turn were seen as future economic fabric. The process of constructing black slave families was called “chattel slavery” in which slaves and their offspring were owned for life.²

¹ Angela Davis, “The Black Woman's Role In The Community Of Slaves”, *The Black Scholar Journal of Black studies*, (New England Free Press, December, 1971), p03

² Ibid,06

“Chattel slaves” were subjected to direct norms of racism from the ruling class. Naturally women were supposed to keep home in a well structured order, but it was not the case of black women, who spent the whole day working in plantation fields and domestics, they were oppressed physically and much more mentally. Moses Grandy an ex-slave and an eyewitness who undertook the cruel scenes of the black women bondage in particularly enslaved mothers, he described in his book entitled *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy; Late a Slave in the United States of America* that:

. . . Women who had sucking children suffered much from their breasts becoming full of milk, the infants' being left at home; they therefore could not keep up with the other hands: I have seen the overseer beat them with raw hide so that the blood and the milk flew mingled from their breasts. ¹

Black women were totally aware of the daily inhumane treatment that they received. Some of them followed the slave system silently and others rebelled in their own way. For instance, enslaved women who worked in domestics poisoned their white master's food or flamed fires on crop plantations representing the resistance of their own. Incidents of sabotage marked its print where slave males and females united together against whites, organizing contumacious forms of resistance in many parts of America. Much more had been said and announced in journals, articles and formal letters about the successive plans of slave's rebellions but they met a harsh punishment when they were caught, most of the time ended by execution. ²

¹ Ibid, 9

²Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolt*, (New York: International Publishers, 1970,1st ed., 1943) , p 293

The historian Herbert Aptheker an American historian and political activist published numerous essays in which he described the black's resistance which took many forms in different parts of the American continent, he said:

They made several attempts to destroy the town by fire and succeeded, within a period of three weeks, in burning eleven buildings. Patrols were established, strong guards set up, the militia dispatched to the scene of the unrest . . . and a reward of three hundred dollars offered for the capture of the insurrectionists¹

He added:

A successful elimination by poisoning of several "of our respectable men"(said a letter to the governor of North Carolina) was met by the execution of four or five slaves. One was a woman who was burned alive²

Black women resisted slavery and oppression individually or in groups and in varying ways. It was accounted as form of rebellion; they did not accept the situation they were in. They were often in closer contact with white men and women, they took different resistance forms, for instance, they damaged white men's property as machinery or crops. Some black women used to kill their new babies rather than bring them to the salve world. Black women kept their cultural and traditional norms alive and they communicated with each other using African language orally as a vital type of rebellion.³

¹ Ibid, p 241

² Ibid,p 242

³ Ibid

6. Black Women Headed Families (Mothering Issues)

Black women headed families experienced a complex life, they participated in all services, cooking or cleaning their master's house, working on plantation fields and contributing to the most interesting part which was the reproduction of slave profit. Black women felt a daily fear from whites who in anytime may steel their children far away from their breasts.¹

A slave woman was interviewed in the Federal Writer's Project asserted:

These same old eyes seen powerful lots of tribulations in my time, and when I shut them now I can see lots of children, just like my grandchildren, toting hoes bigger than they is, and they poor little black hands and legs bleeding where they scratched by the brambly weeds, and where they got whippings 'cause they didn't get all the work the overseer set out for them. I was one of them slave girls my own self, and I never seen nothing but work and tribulation till I was a grown woman.²

The multiple roles of black women were seen as an important support of the slave economy, it was an indirect order that encourage black women to establish black slave commodity. The conditions of black slave family did not allow them to live under one roof and enjoy life moments. Black males were more likely to be sold and their absence in the black slave family apposed a heavy responsibility on the black females.³

¹ Marci Bounds Littlefield, "Black Women, Mothering, and Protest in 19th Century American Society", *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.2, no.01 (India: University Indianapolis, November 2007),p55

² Ibid,p59

³ Adrienne D. Davis, *Slavery and The Roots of Sexual Harassment*, (Washington University, 1993),p460

Slave child life was centered on his mother's existence, though it may be temporary. The protection of black children depended on their mother's way of resistance and how they struggled to hide their kids through tricky ideas and thoughts that represented a kind of daily fighting in order to survive peacefully. Black women crucial role in conserving and saving the black race environment marked a great change and challenge in the Afro-American community. ¹

7. Black Women Sexual Abuse

Overseers, slave owners and white men forced black women to satisfy their sexual desires violently. South slaveholders organized markets (fancy girl market) to sell enslaved women for sexual purposes. Black man had no authority to protect black woman because he would rescue his life and her too unless he was her husband. Black women were ignored according to the social law at that time and sexual exploitation was permitted since they were the property of the white owners. The plantation fields were the black females' workplace where they used to spend a long time working on the crops in which many criminal and sexual operations took place. The geographical location of the plantations was known for its vast and isolated spaces and which assigned numerous rape crimes against the enslaved black women who could rarely escape in such places. The reproduction of the slave commodity served the economic infinite demand of the human material whereas the sexual dominance of the white man ensured the submission of his personal pleasure. Domestic also shared the same bitterness of black women sexual abuse; enslaved women were invited forcibly to sleep in their masters rooms. ²

¹ Ibid, p 461

² Ibid,p464

Black men and women were forced to marry each other or have sexual relations even if they were formerly engaged and had had their own families; slave owners ignored the means of the black family union, they just cared about how much children would a black couple produced in a short time. White owner's fortune was their slaves, some slave girls became pregnant at the age of twelve, and they were too young to bear the responsibility of new born baby. Sexual relation between the white master and his black female slave created jealousy atmosphere in the house, in which the white mistress would react badly if something seemed to threaten her beinghood.¹

Slave narratives and interviews of former slaves recorded the awful sexual experiences that were practiced against black young girls. History books and literary novels showed a series of countless illegal violation acts performed against black females. William Thompson, a black slave in Virginia who was interviewed in Ontario, Canada (1855) asserted:

I knew a man at the South who had six children by a colored slave. Then there was a fuss between him and his wife, and he sold all the children but the oldest slave daughter. Afterward, he had a child by this daughter, and sold mother and child before the birth.²

Harriet Jacobs's novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) exemplified the horrible sexual acts committed against black slave women and the hardship that they had endured through their life time.³

¹ National Humanities Center Resource, "On Slaveholders' Sexual Abuse of Slaves: Selections from 19th- & 20th-century Slave Narratives" *The Making of African American Identity: Vol. I, 1500-1865*, p 0 2

² Ibid,06

³ Francois S.Tiffany , *How the Portrayal of Black Women has shifted from Slavery times to Blaxploitation films in American Society*,(High Point University ,nd), P 04

Jacobs shed light on many aspects that black women suffered from; she introduced bundles of detailed discretions of her own life through Linda's tongue, the main character who faced sexual harassment by her master. Linda stood uncomfortable in the story; she fought against her master to define her own sexuality and it was the same case of many other slave women who were the subjects of their owners, Harriet herself affirmed the undesirable treatment of her master in the following passage:

My master met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air after a day of unwearied toil, his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother's grave, his dark shadow fell on me even there.¹

Adrienne Davis an American black female historian argued that “Every sale of an enslaved woman was a sale of sexual labour”². Her statement ensured the doubled labour of black women as commodities of economic market and sexual dehumanized objects. Sexual commerce appeared as the slave trade began, coloured women were the main commodities that encouraged the increase of its growth. Black woman's life was shaped to experience sexual abuse by any means; the explicit sex trade in public was not seen as taboo. There were no social laws or religious rules that forbid the practice of such kind of commerce. Black women were victims of the planter's lust, the superiority of whites allowed them to do anything to bother black females.³

¹ Ibid, p07

² Adrienne Davis, op. cit, p 459.

³ Emily Alyssa Owens, *Fantasies of Consent: Black Women's Sexual Labor in 19th Century New Orleans*, (Cambridge and Massachusetts : Harvard University, Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, July 2015), <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:23845425> (accessed September 21, 2016 5:54:12 AM)

Black women were not protected by rape laws and they were totally excluded from the American social norms. They endured sexual terrorism in public under illegal sex commerce standards.¹

Black women did not tell what happened to them when they were sexually abused. They chose silence because it was almost impossible to talk about such topics as they lacked power and courage. Their position was not strong enough to speak out and take a relief, and thus it remained difficult for them to address their problems publically. In Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1988), the black female character Celie was not able to talk about the sexual abuse she received from her stepfather, she said (p57):

Even I found it almost impossible to let her say what had happened to her as *she* perceived it . . . And why? Because once you strip away the lie that rape is pleasant, that children are not permanently damaged by sexual pain, that violence done to them is washed away by fear, silence, and time, you are left with the positive horror of the lives of thousands of children . . . who have been sexually abused and who have never been permitted their own language to tell about it.²

Racism and sexism were two of the biggest obstacles that black women faced in America .Sexual violence against black females remain ignored; the harmful experiences they endured affected their health and psychological states. Narratives and literary texts retold sexual harassment stories differently, most of these accounts described real events that happened in the Afro American society at that time.

¹ Ibid

² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black feminist thought : knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* , 2nd ed(New York and London: Routledge,2002), p 123

Conclusion

The transatlantic slave trade was the largest human commerce in history that supported the exploitation of black African people in the Americas. Europeans were the heads of the slave commerce and the leading powers by which Africans were transported to the New World. Many slave ships went across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas where the cultivation of plantation crops spread in large scale. Raw material and needed commodities were produced through the use of black slaves who worked in hard conditions. Both black men and women spent a long time working on plantation fields. The reproduction of slaves seemed a wise solution that guaranteed the increase of the slave profit in a short period of time. Black women were more victimized than men; the ill treatment and the discrimination of black females took many forms. Black mothers, young girls, single women, and even children witnessed the cruelty of the white men; black females were seen as objects, they were ignored and marginalized. Black women' awareness spread over time, their ambition to be free pushed them to react and protest, their voices were not hidden anymore, so what did black women do to raise race and gender questions? And how they organized themselves to gain their equal rights as legal members of the American society?

Chapter Two:

Black Women Sociopolitical Activism in America

Introduction

African American women suffered all kinds of oppression for a long time; black women were essential labourers who shaped the American capitalism, they had no civil or political rights that might protect them as human being or that granted them as workers; they were totally excluded from public office and justice system and it was the same case for all the black race in America. Educational institutions denied literacy to black people; racism and segregation were seen as natural part of the American society, no social norms could control such behaviour, negative stereotypes manipulated black women life. The surrounding circumstances encouraged the American society to keep this image of submission and bondage long live in their minds. Numerous accounts rose to define the context of black slavery and how black people operated in the slave society in particularly, black woman who were conflicting to create a new birth of black womanhood. Black women intellectuals challenged the hegemonic ideas of race, gender and class through various writings, autobiographies and speeches published in and around the 19th and 20th century American society. Politics functioned as fundamental element which protected the black race rights and guaranteed their citizenship as any member of the American community. Black females struggled hardly to gain their legal political rights and equality; they brought back what they deserved passing through series of social and political facts. This chapter seeks to shed some light on these individuals who were finally organized to produce justice. By the end they were engaged on different society occupations as members of black churches, teachers, musicians, poets, writers, and leader of the American society.

2. White Women Suffragists vs. Black women in America

American white women wanted to get their rights as white men did, it was only in 1866 that they could express their feminist thoughts through different social movements such as the American Equal Rights Association (A.E.R.A). The later followed the rise of the American Civil War (1861-1865) after one year. The abolition of slavery between Northern progressives and Southern plantation owners was supported by black slavery abolitionists who demanded freedom and equal rights for all blacks. White women felt inspired to do the same as black men did and struggled for their own rights. Associations and public spheres helped white feminists to express their thoughts and needs publically in order to gain civil rights and full citizenship. They felt sympathy for black males and they allied together since they were fighting for the same goals. National American Women Suffrage Association (N.A.W.S.A) members struggled hardly to win the right to vote, they cooperated with minority groups as black males to empower their ideas. However, white American suffragists refused to acknowledge black women issues in many occasions, they ignored black females gender questions and hid their voices.¹

2.1 Sojourner Truth Speech “Ain’t I A Woman”

Sojourner Truth was considered as one of the most active and remarkable female figure who was associated with white American suffragists. Truth was a former black slave and one of the very few coloured women who spoke out in public; she was middle-class brave women. Several reasons allowed her to vindicate women’s rights with white suffragists.²

¹ Charlotte Theys, “ Black Feminism in America : An Overview and Comparison of Black Feminism’s Destiny through Literature and Music up to Beyoncé”,Diss,(Master Degree, LEUVEN, BELGIË 2014),p 02

² Ibid

White women chose Truth because she symbolized both a feminist figure and a black ex slave; so their call for emancipation would be just as righteous as the question of slavery abolition. Sojourner Truth was a perfect candidate as she fought against both white and black patriarchy. Truth addressed gender issues in her memorable speeches “Ain’t I a Woman?” delivered in 1851 in the town of Akron, Ohio where she defended the rights of all women bringing together both black and white women¹, she said:

...Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? ...²

Sojourner Truth played a crucial role in advancing coloured females questions moving their position and statue to a better situation by using her own experience as vivid illustration. The way she conveyed her message left a tremendous emotional response to the American audience. Truth repeated some expressions in her speech language referring to biblical passages; she effectively raised the sense of responsibility and awareness toward race and gender quality. She invited women who witnessed discrimination, to speak out about their bondage issues. She pointed out the inequality between men and women, blacks and whites. Her voice was a powerful tool by which she inspired all women of the American society to bring back their stolen rights.³

¹ Ibid, p05

² See the whole speech on appendix 01, electronic source: Feminist .com, articles and speeches www.feminist.com/sojour.htm accessed in 16.04.2016

³ ibid

3. Black Women and American literature

Literary works of black females as Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1982) and other Black women's creative productions argued social and cultural emancipation of African American females.¹

Black female writings spread awareness among black women. Harriet Jacobs's novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* could be a vivid picture of black women daily struggles, her autobiography written by herself (1861) was told through Linda Brent tongue in which she narrated her terrific life experience as a coloured slave young girl of the South, where she tried to find way to flee psychological and physical abuse of her white master Dr Flint. Jacobs expressed herself in very talented way in which she attracted public sentiments. She experienced sexual harassment and she feared the loss of her own children. Jacobs succeeded to flee to the Northern side realizing that the North guaranteed freedom and protection.² When she spoke about her personal experience, she presented the whole black females, and she confirmed that in her own words:

Neither do I care to excite sympathy for my own sufferings. But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse.³

¹ Isabel Soto, *Strategies Of Empowerment: 1 Two Narratives By African American Women*,(Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2000),p 118

² *ibid*

³ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl Written By Herself*, Edited By L. Maria Child, Preface, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html> ,accessed in 18.04.2017

Jacobs's narrative was important evidence that recorded her struggles for both motherhood and womanhood. She was writing for a specific purpose. Black women identity was a major theme of her work. Harriet's autobiography was well received since it was honestly and truthfully transmitted to the American audience, after writing her book, Jacobs continued to help those who were left behind in slavery.

The Harlem Renaissance (1918-1937) was regarded as the cultural, artistic and social movement that was born in New York City. Throughout Harlem Renaissance, black authors and other artists came to Harlem to build a black united state in order to express creative pursuits challenging white paternalism and racism. During Harlem Renaissance black women writers continue to address black female's hard times such as Anna Julia Cooper who focused on patriarchal domination over black women. Her work *A Voice from the South* (1892) emphasized the importance of black women education. Also writers like Zora Neale Hurston raised issues about Afro-American women; her literary work *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) stressed the inferior position of African American women in the American community.¹

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* published in 1982 won both Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award. Her story characters faced different kinds of violence among their friends and family members, black female positive energy determined the portraits of her women characters. She attacked black men in many of her writings including poems, short stories, essays and novels. She tended to depict gender and class issues in the American society.²

¹ Ariel Moniz, *Black Women in American Literature: Slavery Through Slave Narratives and Contemporary Fiction*, (University of Hawai'i at Hilo, 2015), p33

² E. Dhivya, *Women as Victims: An Analysis of Alice Walker's The Color Purple*, <http://www.languageinindia.com/>, January 2016 accessed in 18.04.2017

The Color Purple was written in epistolary form. The protagonist Celie a black wife believed strongly in religion. She wrote her daily troubles only to God. She was sexually abused by her stepfather during her childhood; she kept her pain burning inside her. Celie married a man without love; she lived in silent mode till she met her close friend Shug who taught her worthy values. Celie never voiced out things that bothered her and perturbed her existence. By time Celie learnt how to solve problems and get rid of her sexual exploitation memories. She later fought against men dominancy which was rooted in her society. In this novel Walker brought out voiceless black women to voice.¹

The image of black women through literature took several forms, different plots played significant roles in developing black women thoughts. The purpose of these literary works was united under one umbrella which aimed to protect black women existence and supported gender continuity. Black female writers constructed positive vision that encouraged black women to strive their path toward freedom; they documented the evolution of black feminism and served to ensure an appropriate place for all black American feminists.

4. The Rise of Black Women Activism in the 19th century

Women in the American society were seen as vital part of family system. The culture of domesticity represented the proper role of American women inside society, where a true woman should be placed. Black women were viewed as the source of new slave profit, while white women gave birth to new white leaders. Black women were excluded from the context of womanhood; they were treated as properties unlike the white women who could identify social and political statues. This social hierarchy created a system of apartheid that placed white women at the top and black women at the bottom.²

¹ *ibid*

² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black feminist thought : knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* , 2nd ed (New York and London: Routledge,2002), p06

Throughout the 19th century, white women engaged in society occupations including employment and education. Victorian morals and thoughts allowed white women to get more freedom; they got jobs and fought for women's inferior standing. According to white women suffragists in America, white women should be given equal rights as white and black men. However, American suffragists excluded black women from their political demands. In the history of the black human race, no one had suffered more than the black women in a civilized country like America. The development of women statue was seen only in white middleclass elite females.¹

5. Black Women Intellectuals and their Crucial Roles in Building Afro American Society

Black women intellectuals portrayed African American women as complex individuals who often showed tremendous strength. They used international strategies to attract world's attention on the black race problem in the US. Slavery period, the two World Wars and post-bellum era all marked great progress in the American black women's mobilization for racial justice. The achievements of black women activists such as Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, Harriet Tubman, Miss Jane Pittman and other black female leaders contributed actively on different international movements and organization which made their voices heard. They attended international conferences and meetings organized by several movements to express themselves as black community representatives²

¹ Ibid, 07

² Fatma Ramdani, " Afro-American Women Activists as True Negotiators in the International Arena (1893-1945)", *European journal of American studies* Vol 10, (European Association for American Studies, 30 septembre 2016), p 03

Bell Hooks an American author and social activist (1997) claimed that:

Unlike most white women's rights advocates, Tubman, [Truth, Cooper and others] could refer to [their] own personal life experiences as evidence of women's ability to function as a parent; to be the work equal of men; to undergo persecution, physical abuse, rape, torture; and to not only survive but emerge triumphant.¹

Black intellectuals handled a serious responsibility especially in raising awareness among the black race in particularly black females through their formal and informal manifestations. The American black female poet Mari Evans argued the importance of awareness; in her poem entitled *Speak the Truth to the People* she exhorted black intellectuals to speak the truth to people:

Speak the truth to the people
Talk sense to the people
Free them with reason
Free them with honest

Free the people with Love and Courage. . . .
And Care for their being²

In her collection of poems, Evans wanted to convey a message to the black people that they should recognize the truth about themselves and the meaning of the black race existence.³

¹ Hooks, Bell, *Black women and feminism*, In Sandra Keys and Judith Squires ,Eds, *Feminism*,(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997),p207

² see full version in appendix 2, Chicken Bones : A Journal, <http://www.nathanielturner.com/speakthetruthtothepeoplemarievans.htm> accessed in 04.05.2017

³ Mari Evans, *Speak the Truth to the People*, I Am A Black Woman collection(New York: William Morrow.1970), p 91

During the 1830s, African American women played a significant role within the anti-slavery movement (A.A.S) in America. Black women abolitionists resisted public opposition and created debate over black women's roles within A.A.S organization. Many of black women abolitionists wrote biographies about antislavery wave. Their literary works addressed gender issues convincing how black women ideas changed the negative image of the black society; they shaped their own world and opened the door to other black women to fight for a new position in the US community. The abolitionist movement and the Civil Rights Movement marked the progress of black women activist in combating racial, sexual, and class issues. They created institutions to protect black women rights.¹

“womanism” was literary term that characterized writings of black intellectuals, it was introduced by the American author Alice Walker (1983) : “womanist” referred to black feminist or feminist of colour”

Walker pointed out that black females struggled against sexism and racism; they posed hard efforts to achieve liberty. womanists as a term draw attention to the ways in which society and culture displace black women.²

Black women Intellectuals were not supposed to be educated or belonged to the middle class society. The activist Sojourner Truth was a good example of non educated feminist thinker who never learned to read or to write but still a powerful feminist voice that marked the progress of black's history. Her

¹ Hooks Bell, op cit ,p 210

² Alice walker, *In search of our mother's gardens*": *Womanist prose*(New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1983), p xi

unforgotten speech entitled “Ain’t I a woman?” addressed black women to turn the future wheel of their history toward a successive outlook.¹

Examining such kind of activists like Sojourner Truth ensured that the concept of intellectual had no relationship with education or whether black women occupied academic jobs or earned a degree in colleges. Instead, it was the process of melting thoughts and courageous steps that maximized black feminist chance to receive attention of different social views regardless the actual social standards of the black activist. Black women intellectuals’ first mission was to resist African-American women’s oppression of race, class, gender and sexuality; they responded greatly to obtain their rights. Yet segregation and racism were visibly practiced and widely used in public as normal social treatment.²

Most black women did not have the right to befriend white women and men, nor did their children attend school with white children. They were living with daily racial segregation. They were subdued to skin colour boundaries. The formation of black groups met encouragement. The construction of black race institutions including schools and workplaces that enabled the black members to share their experiences in collective way was passed through various political networks, Katie Cannon a black woman theologian observed that black women suffered both black and white racism, she stated that:

Throughout the history of the United States, the interrelationship of white supremacy and male superiority has characterized the Black woman’s reality as a situation of struggle—a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one white, privileged, and oppressive, the other black, exploited, and oppressed³

¹ Rosser-Mims, “Black feminism: An epistemological framework for exploring how race and gender impact black women’s leadership development”, *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, 2010, p 03, Retrieved from http://advancingwomen.com/awl/awl_wordpress/

² Patricia Hill collins, op cit,p 24

³ Ibid, p26

Black women believed that they have common interests and they should support one another strongly. Many scholars, writers and thinkers worked alone or within African-American organizations, as black women club movement and black churches. During the shift to industrialization in the early nineteenth century, black women unpaid work was a neglected topic, working in domestics as dishwashers, cleaning assistants, cooks might be paid for low wages or none paid for ever. Although the accurate living hard conditions, they were still resistant supporting their families with education, empowering and stimulating each other in form of glory.¹

6. Black Women Leaders of Political Organizations

Black women activists recognized that political power speaks more effectively than other few isolated voices. They were involved in many associations and organizations; black women worked tirelessly to support the antislavery movement; they were active participant in the Civil War of 1950_1960. Black women activists organized the Black Club Movement (1890). It was created by hard working African American women who established a strong black league. Ida B. Wells-Barnett inspired many black women using accounts which described her experience in Memphis. She published several articles that stimulated many Afro American women, her efforts led to the construction of the Black Club Movement which gathered most of the powerful black women who addressed various problems as health and education.²

¹ George G. Bradford, *Mortality Among Negroes in Cities*, (The Atlanta University Publications, 1896), P16

² Yvette Pierre, *Rooted Pedagogies: Black Women Activist Teachers For Social Change* ,Diss,(The Ohio State University, 2010), p13

Few years later, black women's clubs joined together to form the National Association of Colored Women (N.A.C.W) was established in 1896.

6.1 The National Association of Colored Women N.A.C.W (1896)

It was founded in 1896 from the fusion of the National Federation of Afro- American (NFAAW) Women with the Colored Women's League (CWL) of Washington D.C , the NACW presented collection of powerful voices that had a tremendous opportunity to speak on their own behalf. They banded together against the discrimination of the black race¹. According to Angela Davis an American political activist, and author:

When the First National Conference of Colored Women convened in Boston in 1895, the Black clubwomen were not simply emulating their white counterparts, who had federated the club movement five years earlier. They had come together to decide upon a strategy of resistance to the current propagandistic assaults on Black women and the continued reign of lynch law²

Mary Church Terrell was the founder and the first head of the organization; she presented questions and issues of the coloured people and black women as well. At the first biennial convention of the organization (Sept. 15.1897) she quoted memorable words from her pamphlet, *The Progress of Colored Women*:

Believing that it is only through the home that a people can become really good and truly great, the NACW shall enter that sacred domain to inculcate right principles of living and correct false views of life . . . More homes, purer homes, better homes is the text upon which our sermons to the masses must be preached.³

¹ Angela Davis, *Women, race and class*,(New York: Vintage Books,1981),p133

² Mary Church Terrell, *National Association Of Colored Women* (Library Of Congress ,Folder In Box 28, Speeches And Writings, 1891-1904) , p34

³ *ibid*

Black activists of N.A.C.W worked for poor, children and the black race as whole. When they spoke in defense of the black women, they automatically spoke in defense of all black people. Like Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune was representative of black womanhood, and the eightieth president N.A.C.W who planned nine tours in European countries in 1927, so that black women could understand national and international politics through foreign experiences. These black female leaders showed that race segregation was a worldwide reality that pushed them to act wisely as thinkers, solution founders and black race members who spoke in defense of all the blacks around the world.¹

6.2 The International Council of Women of Darker Races I.C.W.D.R (1922-1940)

It was constructed by Margaret Murray Washington; Booker T. Washington's third wife. Margaret was known for her good servitude, she was a woman who touched hundreds of lives with her spirit and grace. The main objectives of the I.C.W.D.R organization were to promote knowledge of the darker race in history and conditions of black women throughout the world. It had to work for educational scope, for instance literature of the black people in various countries. Most of the I.C.W.D.T.R's female leaders were writers, they wrote many articles and pamphlets on universal issues, particularly on the status of black women in the world. The organization members built a strong political outlook and they spent their efforts on providing world's peace. They planned to make foreign policy relationships in order to attain change and make difference. The I.C.W.D.R remained an elite organization throughout its life. By 1935 the council continued to survive indirectly under the National Council of Negro Women.²

¹ Angela Davis, op cit, p115

² Fatma Ramdani, "Afro-American Women Activists as True Negotiators in the International Arena (1893-1945)", *European journal of American studies* Vol 10, (European Association for American Studies, 30 septembre 2016),P 07

6.3 The National Congress of Negro Women-N.C.N.W (1935)

It was Mary McLeod Bethune an American stateswoman and the first lady of the black community who organized new Afro-American women association and the one who handled the responsibility to take care of all people who suffered violation. The N.C.N.W set the tone for international dimension through the annual meetings they prepared and the touching topics they expelled such as *The Role of the Negro Woman in Peace and Time Planning*, *the Participation of the Negro Woman in the War Effort*. Black women of The N.C.N.W unified their voices to address economic, social, cultural and spiritual needs of their families and communities. The N.C.N.W's encouraged the legacy of social uplift. Community health, education and economic empowerment service were major objects of The N.C.N.W. Black women members of the organization contributed together in order to find peaceful solutions to the problems of black race welfare and rights.¹

7. Black women in the Core of American Politics

Black women came across several obstacles during their political and social fight. White men racism, black men patriarchy and white women segregation denied their voices. Black women decided to take step to define themselves rather than expecting someone to step in and help them.

7.1 Black women vs. Black Men

Sojourner Truth was the most out spoken black female who called for the right to vote to all black men and women. She emphasized on the importance of black women political right.²

¹ibid, p08

² Bell Hooks *Ain't I a woman : Black women and feminism*,(Bosten : South End press,1982), p90

She stated: “ There is great stir about colored men getting their right, but not a word about colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before. “

Black men and women struggled together to gain liberation and racial equality as well as changing the negative stereotypical images about the black race. After the Civil Right Movements, black men received full American citizenship but black women were still ignored in politics. Black women were non accepted everywhere on street, shops and work place, they were directly abused at the hands of the white society. When black women urged white women suffragists to help them to protect black womanhood, they fell on deaf ears. Black women’s progress was ignored, even if successive black females appeared as well educated member (lawyers, teachers). Marriage between black men and white women was tolerated but no white men could couple black women regardless her social statue. They even couldn’t ever be “ladies”. The change in the American public attitude rewarded black male only, they were given the right to vote. Nineteen century black male like Frederick Douglass, Charles Remond and James Forten supported black womanhood and they encourage black women efforts to gain political rights. ¹

Black male couldn’t free black women from force work; they were not as strong as black females expected them or wanted them to be. The twentieth century black men leaders like Malcolm X, Martin Luther king, and Amiri Baraka assured the necessity of black women position in the American community. Writings, speeches and critical essays announced black women power and their ability to access to the core of the black movement. ²

¹ibid, p95

² ibid

Black Feminism was the leading hand behind black women change to assert the idea of strong black women and make their own history. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Jacobs and Ellen Craft were ex slaves and future black history leader; their diaries and narrative accounts were vivid experiences of a real black women activism.¹

African American women faced opposition from several fronts. They tried to promote positive social change through different political acts where they have expanded both their presence and power. The black president of USA Barack Obama asserted (September 21, 2015):

Black women have been a part of every great movement in American history even if they weren't always given a voice. When women of color aren't given the opportunity to live up to their God-given potential, we all lose out on their talents; we're not as good a country as we can be. We might miss out on the next Mae Jemison or Ursula Burns or Serena Williams or Michelle Obama. We want everybody to be on the field. We can't afford to leave some folks off the field.²

7.2 Black Women vs. White Suffragists of US

In 1848, at the Seneca Falls Convention, white American women's movement constructed its position during "Declaration of Sentiments" or what is called "Women's Declaration of Independence" a term used by the leader of American suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The document listed a number of political and social points and included rights that lacked white women. The nineteenth century witnessed the most significant shift that accompanied the progress of American white women.³

¹ ibid

² Kelly Dittmar, *Voices. Vote. Leadership: The Statue Of Black Women In American Politica*, (Rutgers University, 2015), p01

³ Caitrin Smith, "Intersectionality And Socialism: Black Women Navigating Racism And Sexism In American Social Movements", Diss, (Rocky Mountain College, 2015), p54

Organizations like the N.W.S.A and the A.W.S.A were found to promote white women rights. The Civil War and World War I brought about greater rights for women. They were given the opportunity to different occupations. Black men fought together with American suffragists in order to gain the right to vote. White women and blacks organized a March (1965) from Selma, Alabama, to Montgomery to gain the right to vote. However, only African American men were granted voters registration (1870) with the passage of the 15th Amendment. White women protested against white men who ignored their demands. Many black women supported the N.W.S.A, including Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. After a series of political representations, they earned the right to vote in 1920 (the act of 19th Amendment).¹

White women disallowed black sisters from speaking openly at conferences. They turned down their addresses in many occasions. White activists did not support the progress of black women. However, coloured women challenged the situation and reacted to the benefit of their own. Black women demands were neglected, they were experiencing daily facts of racism and sexism across America alike south and north. The first wave feminism in US acknowledged the bourgeoisie class women and marginalized the positions of colour women and poor white women. The 19th amendment brought white women into the front; they enjoyed the right to vote. However, black women were still subjected to physical violence. Black women felt the spaces left behind in the wake of the progress of black men and white women.²

¹ Courtney Hoffberger, *Nineteenth Century Reform Movements: Women's Rights* (Baltimore, 2007), P01

² Ibid, p25

Black men and women were totally different. Black women recognize that they were only liberated from plantation slavery in the South, to become subordinated to their males. They were fighting to free themselves from white slavery to fall again to black patriarchy (Emasculating)¹

Black males saw that racial conflict was about white men and black men. When black men won the right to vote in 1869, they considered it as victory to the whole black race without taking into account the oppressed black women who were subjected everywhere. Black women were poisoned on an empty space marked by silence. Frederick Douglass case illustrated the phenomena when he said: “This hour belongs to the Negro”, in which Elizabeth Cady Stanton the American white suffragist replied, “Do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males?”²

Although the obstacles black females faced, genteel black women spread up self-reliance norms and the sense of creation in order to maintain the progress of all black females. Wealthy black women and middle-class black females shaped good behavior and fashionable appearance. They supported one another through black women clubs network.³

8. Black Women in Electoral Ballot

Anna Julia Cooper a black talented author and one of the fame liberal activists, emphasized on black women voting request to improve that black men’s experiences and needs were the same as theirs.⁴

¹ Ibid

² Patricia McKissak and Frederick McKissak, *Sojourner Truth: Ain't I a Woman?*, (New York, NY: Scholastic, 1992), p153.

³ Lindsey Turnbull, “White And Black Womanhoods And Their Representations In 1920s American Advertising”, Master Degree,(University of Central Florida, 2012),p 95

⁴ Midge Wilson and Kathy Russell, *One Of Divided Sisters: Bridging The Gap Between Black And White Women*, (Anchor Books, 1996), P26

She declared: “Only the Black woman can say when and where I enter in the quiet undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence or special patronage; then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.”¹

Black women were excluded from voting right claiming that the 19th amendment did not register all women to the electoral ballot, Denise Oliver Velez, an adjunct faculty member at the State University of New York’s asserted in *The Ballot and Black Women* book:

Unwelcome in the mainstream suffrage movement, African American women formed their own suffrage organizations. They viewed the ballot as a powerful tool for improving their lives and communities. They also wanted to reclaim the political power lost by Black men in Southern states that were violating their constitutionally protected right to vote.²

The nineteenth amendment enabled some African American women to vote in only significant numbers from the Black Women Club. They acknowledged the ballot in 1920s but they were few in number in comparison with white females. Blacks of South America faced difficulties in voting. Obstacles such as poll taxes³ and literacy tests, denied them from the right to vote. They rescued physical violence and linguistic insults, when they tried to register or vote especially black females.⁴

¹ ibid

² Ann D Gordon, eds, *African American Women and the Vote 1837-1965*, (H-Net Reviews, January, 1999), <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2631>, accessed in 20.04 .2017

³ **Poll tax:** is a tax that must be paid by anyone wishing to cast a vote the price high enough to make voting uneconomical for poor people. US constitution online, <http://www.usconstitution.net/constamnotes.html#Am24> , February 3, 2011, accessed in 05.05.2017

⁴ ibid

Black protestors in Mississippi were attacked by troopers although they were on a peaceful march. The murder news spread through media and television, it brought national attention and stimulated the American President Johnson to react immediately and construct effective voting rights legislation. As result poll taxes had been abolished by the 24th amendment (1964). The passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 marked the access of African American women in electoral ballot.¹

9. Jim Crow Era in the South

The passage of the fourteenth amendments (March 30, 1870) argued black people's full citizenship to America. They were finally protected by law. Blacks of the South were living under Jim Crow policy, in which whites treated blacks through legal or illegal forms in order to determine their political and cultural aspects. Whites and blacks were kept separate from each other in restaurants, schools, voting offices, bus stations and all most life spheres. No social interaction has been made between the two races. Discrimination under Jim Crow policy extended to reach public accommodations. Black woman survived physical rape, and immoral behavior and lynching through the Ku Klux Klan operations. They faced segregation, and terrorism from white American society.²

Black women of the south were strong enough to face white Americans. Although whites limited the voting right opportunity for the blacks through poll tax and literacy test, black females studied hardly and fought together to promote their existence within the American community.³

¹ U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=100> accessed in 21.04.2017

² The American Civil Rights Union, *The Truth About Jim Crow*,(ACRU, 2014),p 10

³ Patricia A. Broussard, "Black Women's Post-Slavery Silence Syndrome: A Twenty-First Century Remnant of Slavery, Jim Crow, and Systemic Racism--Who Will Tell Her Stories?", *Gender Race & Jus,t* (Scholarly Commons @ FAMU Law, Spring 2013),p401

10. Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement

The role of black women in the Black Power Movement was inspired by the black female Rosa Parks when she refused to give her seat to a white man in a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama. She was violated by the state police. The Bus Boycott event lead by Martin Luther King, Jr was the result against Rosa Parks' violation. King preferred nonviolence method to address black's issues the boycott lasted for more than one year. It was a black woman who stimulated the American black movement. Some black women had to walk up to ten kilometers each day, to reach their workplaces. Although they were physically exhausted, their souls were filled with hope and glory.¹ Black women were key participants in the Civil Rights Movement, groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P) and the Black Panther Party (B.P.P) made great contributions and successive steps in the African American movement. Black women intellectuals worked side by side for the benefit of the whole black race, they have been more successful than black males in speaking up about their rights along with the rights of all.²

11. Black women's New Image

Black women were afraid of being rejected because of their skin colour (blackness). The twentieth century marked an embarking change in the Afro American women life style. Novelists of the period tried to show how the surrounding facts affected the cultural and the social aspects of African American females in the United States.³

¹ Joseph Gloria, *The Role of the Black Women in the Black Liberation Movement and the Women's Movement and on to Transnational Feminism*, (Freiburger FrauenStudien, 1999), p 79

<http://nbnresolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-315718> accessed in 21.04.2017

² *ibid*

³ Kibble Matthew, "Toni Morrison", *Literature Online Biography*, Literature Online <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk>, 3 Mar. 2006 accessed in 04.05.2016

Black woman `rejected the idea of being only passive black women in the white society. They tended to develop their personality through time. To be a woman of color, aware of the fact that engaging to many things has been forbidden for her, was itself a great challenge. ¹

Toni Morrison was a novelist and professor; she was interested in black women issues. Morrison writings were highly valued by both black and white critics. She drew attention to black women rebirth and the formation of new modest black females' generation. Through her novel *The Bluest Eye 1969*, she presented a story of a teenager black girl who wished to have blue eyes in order to be beautiful. She thought that if she would have blue eyes, she might own a respect as white girls of her age. The novel discussed how black female saw oneself.²

The American historian Franklin John argued: “the great test of America`s democratic tradition was the acceptance of blacks into the mainstream of American life”.³

A new culture embraced African American women who started to shape their new identity, embodying changes to their life. They worked long and hard; they made many sacrifices in order to build black women future without gender discrimination. Black women asserted themselves in many factors, though they were harshly stereotyped. They appeared as wise decisions makers and success founders. They confessed that nothing came without experience.⁴

¹ibid

² ibid

³ Franklin, John and Alfred Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom. A History of Negro Americans*,(New York: Knopf, 1988),p 384

⁴ Melanie L. Campbell, *Black women in the United States 2016 : Power of the sister vote*,(Black Women's Roundtable, 2016) ,p 10

Black women number increased profoundly, they encouraged positive social change in their communities. During the mid-1960s black women entered white colleges. They were among the first major students; they faced many obstacles, likely their struggles were not without a cost. Black women worked both in public sector and government jobs in order to uplift their race. Black middle class women headed charities and community organizations; they constructed powerful position in the US society. Black women's presence in many occasions was not only necessary but essential.¹African American women have been portrayed as strong burden- bearers of the black race, the American historian Harris (1995) stated:

The superficial attractions of strength have dominated portraits of black women to the detriment of other possibilities and potentially stymied future directions for the representation of black women. This tradition of portrayal, therefore, has created as well as become its own form of illness²

Black females developed their own means of survival by participating in different labour forces. They were socialized as active family supporters and good friendship holders. In the late 1960s and 1970s, statistics showed that positive attitudes were viewed toward blackness. The role of black women in the United States changed dramatically over time. They faced challenges on health issues and educational obstacles. They tried hardly to achieve their goals. Recent studies showed an increasing number of black women who earned higher learning level, and obtained academic degrees.³

¹ibid

² Harris. T, "The disease called strength: Some observations on the compensating construction of black female character", *Literature and Medicine*, 1995, p110

³ Rolanda Booker, *Struggle Of The Black Women*,(Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute,2016), <http://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/curriculum/units/1997/3/97.03.01.x.html> accessed in 22.04.2017

Black women became involved in economic business, and employed in top positions. They had overcome stereotypes which have been placed upon them they did not want their daughters to undergo the same painful pathway that they had faced. They built up successful careers; many of them had received prizes and awards for being powerful black women who enlightened the American history. ¹

12. Black Women and Fashion Changes

Through time fashion and style formed the culture of African Americans society. Black slave women wore special clothing available only in beige and brown colours; they were not allowed to wear respectful dresses except in sundays when they could dress freely. The term “sunday best” is still used in African American culture to describe one’s finest clothing. The Post bellum period marked the rise of free blacks from middle class generation, exactly in New York City. Blacks refashion themselves to suit their social and political occupations. Harlem Renaissance occurred simultaneously with the Jazz Age. Blacks began to dress in a manner that reflected freedom and liberty desires. Black females appeared in beautiful and fascinated look, furs coats, flappers and various kind of jewelry, covered their blackish body with well-coiffed hair. Flowers had always decorated their hats as well as their dresses. ²

Zoot suits functioned as formal political black women official suits, within straightened hairstyle. Other active black women groups such as The Black Panther Party chose one black uniform which represented their unity. ³

¹ *ibid*

² Samii Lashanta, “The Fashion Choices Of Black Women Of The Hip Hop Generation In The Atlanta Metropolitan Area”, Master Degree ,(Georgia : B.S., South Carolina State University, 2011),P08

³ *ibid*

On the other hand, the Pan-African Movement, were inspired by green and red colours as symbol of empowerment .women's fashion changed through social development. The rise of new music genre as blues, gospel, jazz, rock and roll influenced stylists. Female black hip hoppers used references to rape, violence and other social messages through their hip hop cloths and music lyrics. Black's flat noses and thick lips began to be viewed as beauty. "Black is Beautiful" became a popular slogan that characterized black American citizens. Music and style were part of the black community culture; they had been their voice in which they express their real identity.¹

Black hair was an interesting topic. Black women were characterized with thicker, curlier, and often frizzier black hair. The history of black hair narrated self complexity that black females had faced. In the fifteenth century, Africa hairstyles indicated one's statue, age, and identity, for instance, enslaved female hair was to be hidden, whereas domestic slaves had to wear wigs. In the 1960s the invention of "the hot comb" received black consumer addiction. Beauty for black women was not just nonsense; it was something that conveys symbolic messages. It was the power of how others treat you, and in turn, how you feel about yourself.² For many decades black hair had been under attack, Jacobs Huey a Professor of Anthropology in American Studies and Ethnicity said:

Hair in 1976 spoke to racial identity politics as well as bonding, between African American women. Its style could lead to acceptance or rejection from certain groups and social classes, provide the possibility of a career³

¹ Ibid, P10

² Cheryl Thompson, *Black Women and Identity: What's Hair Got to do with It?*, (Michigan Feminist Studies, 2008), p80

³ Jacobs Huey, *From the Kitchen to the Palor: Language and Becoming in African American Women's Hair Care* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p05

Black females had never really been respected from childhood to womanhood they tackled range of issues that perturbed their lives but they had had great ambition to overcome several difficulties ¹

13. Black Women Image in Media

Written press, television, cinema and media technology had created positive black women image. Global flows of the American media spread the black beauty model around the world. Mass media images of blacks impacted how people in other countries viewed black women .The transition of black females created by mass media raised black beauty consciousness. Black women celebrities influenced African American females across the world. Black women were often documented as strong and independent; they were changing to better portraits and living the American dream. TV shows depicted happy black families. American blacks acquired an understanding about their statues, race, class and identity through watching other blacks. Black women celebrities were leading exemplifying life and career that reflected self image to other black females. ²

Black women continue to increase achievements in many domains their spirit had been always part of the black culture advancement. Today's black women leaders, celebrities, university professors or in house taking care of their family members proved female empowerment through time. They worked and shared experiences with all community activities to gain a fuller understanding of each other. ³

¹ ibid

² Cherish Green, *Understanding the effect of mass media 's prtrayals of black women and adolescents on self-image*, (Ohlone college), p03

³ ibid

World's most powerful black women like the American TV mogul Oprah Winfrey, the American singer Beyonce, the former first USA lady Michelle Obama and other black powerful women exemplified the leading lights who established the real means of successive modern black American women .

14. Oprah winfry, Media Mogul, U.S.A

Oprah Winfrey is a black woman celebrity who influenced the whole American society. Time magazine list her as one of the most influential people of the 20th and 21st Century. She is one of the wealthy women in the world, she is well known for her popular talk shows on the American television as “People Are Talking” and “Oprah Winfrey Show”. Winfry raised millions of dollars for charities and children literacy. She experienced sexual abuse during her childhood by a number of male relatives and friends of her mother, in Mississippi. She was raped at the age of nine and becoming pregnant at 14 but her son died in infancy. She was offered a role in the fame American movie *The Color Purple* in Steven Spielberg 1985 film. She became a black female model for all girls around the world.¹

Oprah created “A Book Club” as part of her talk show, the books that had been chosen for her reading public and TV viewers were classified as the top of the bestseller of 2009. Winfrey was best known for her Angel network Communications that raised more than \$51,000,000 for charitable programs including girls’ education in South Africa. She had spent \$100 on the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa. President Clinton signed a law contract that Winfrey had proposed to protect abused children.²

¹ Oprah Winfrey, Biography.com, <http://www.biography.com/articles/Oprah-Winfrey-9534419>, Retrieved 02:55, Sep 3 2011, accessed in 23.04.2017

² ibid

Winfrey is the richest African American women billionaire. She earned a private network (OWN). She is considered as one of the world's most generous women According to Forbes magazine. Winfrey was the most powerful black women celebrity in 2007 to 2008 when she came into close contact with the president Barak Obama.¹

Oprah Winfrey is complex mosaic composed of artist, philanthropist, television host, actress, author, producer, advocate, teacher, business woman, and media-popular voice. She is collective body of work. Oprah did not allow her past to determine her future regardless the obstacles she faced. She said: "You have to know what sparks the light in you so that you, in your own way, can illuminate the world."²

Oprah is one of the most persuasive people in the world; she even pushed everyone to pick up a book. She shared with her viewers her own and personal experience, stories about her struggle with poverty, weight loss and abuse, and they were in turn connected with her because they had similar problems too. Oprah created Christmas Kindness project in South Africa where she and her team volunteers helped poor children, she said:

I realized in those moments why I was born, why I am not married and do not have children of my own. These are my children. I made a decision to be a voice for those children, to empower them, to help educate them, so the spirit that burns alive inside each of them does not die³

Oprah Winfrey is classified as the greatest black philanthropist in American history and one of the most influential black women in the World.

¹ Craig Garthwaite and Tim Moore, *The Role of Celebrity Endorsements in Politics: Oprah, Obama, and the 2008 Democratic Primary*, (University of Maryland College Park, August 2008), p08

² Libby Hendren, *The Oprah Effect: How Oprah Winfrey Persuades Viewers*, (University of South Florida St. Petersburg, April 16, 2012), p 07

³ Business Heros, <http://myhero.com/hero.asp?hero=oprahhero> accessed in 25.04.2017

15. Michelle Obama, First Lady of U.S.A

Michelle was introduced as 44th America's first lady in the White House and the wife of the African American president Barack Obama. Lot of questions took place when her husband ruled USA, how would the American society receive her? Would they treat her according to cultural and racial differences? The Obama's family fall in race stereotypes, lady obama was called "Obama's baby mama", but she could stole public attention and mass media lenses from her first appearance because of her unique fashion sense. She was a new black female figure who represented all American women, especially black females who were for long time neglected and disrespected. ¹ She showed that the black family may take many different successful forms, just as the white family did, she asserted:

For me [our image] is a reminder of what is already the reality. The women in videos and the stereotypes are just not the truth of who we are as a community ... So [maybe our family] can be are minder that all you need to do is look around your own community and you will see this same family in churches and in schools.²

Michelle declared that being a model was not one of her interests; she always introduced positive vision about American women not just blacks because she was raised in a family that believed in the American dream. She had been described as fairy wife, tolerationist mother and hard worker. She was no longer a woman angry at a country that still considered people of her race to be outsiders. She did not consider herself as exception, but one of the middle-class black communities, just an American who come in different colours.³

¹ Alisa K. Braithwaite, *First Lady Fashion: How the U.S. Has Embraced Michelle Obama*, (the Massachusetts Institute of Technology,2008),p05

² Angela Burt-Murray, "A Mother's Love," *Essence*, May 2009, p113.

³ The Biography.com website, <http://www.biography.com/people/michelle-obama-307592> , accessed in 25.04.2017

Fashion had always attracted ladies, in particularly women of value. Michelle was a fashion icon who appeared in many occasions in attractive look but being popular did not forbid her from re wearing her clothes several times. She was dressing like any American woman, mixing between casual and official suits. She stated number of speeches and articles that addressed poverty, children and the challenges facing woman of colour. She spoke openly with emotions. “Hope” was a useful term that characterized her persona, followed by “love” and “success”, her image stands in stark contrast to the stereotypes associated with blacks. On January 13, 2017, lady Obama made her final speech in which she addressed young Americans:

I want our young people to know that they matter, that they belong. So don't be afraid. You hear me, young people? Don't be afraid. Be focused. Be determined. Be hopeful. Be empowered. Empower yourself with a good education. Then get out there and use that education to build a country worthy of your boundless promise. Lead by example with hope; never fear.¹

Michelle Obama, as an intelligent and intellectual black woman who had aroused large public reaction, especially black women who have seen her as a vivid symbol of black women liberation. She was a sort of inspiration to all American women. She was almost like being mother of the nation. Michelle has truly and directly represented black American women from the working class and underclass, she introduced a new round of black women awareness.²

¹ ibid

² Zen Liwen, *Michelle Obama has Not and is Not Going to Flout the White Standard of Beauty*, (Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2008), p05

Conclusion

Black women had experienced bondage and hard times, they were misjudged and ignored. During the rise of the Civil Right Movement, they began to articulate how oppressed they were through literary texts, formal speeches, political organizations and several forms of protests in order to address and protect black women rights. They fought for emancipation to improve black women's rights and the black race as well. Black women intellectuals such as Alice Walker, Sojourner Truth, Zora Neale Hurston and Ida B. Wells-Barnett were collection of well educated black females who represented coloured women issues and spend long time on addressing black women problematic. They came across different difficulties; they faced both white men and women ignorance, and even black males who hid their voices. In fact black females were strong enough to create their own black power. They fought against racism and sexism. Black activists have been the driving force of the black American movement; they put all their focus on educational matters and voting act that would protect them from various unjust. They have been working for the benefit of the entire black race. Whatever forms of struggles black women had had, they contributed greatly in the social uplift of the American community. The portraits of African American women changed to highly positive position that stimulated many other coloured women around the world.

General Conclusion

African American women faced oppression during their life timeline; they participated heavily to bring back their rights as full American citizens. They constructed their own image positively. The current research of Afro-American women examined the successive role of black women in US through their particular experiences, their seminars, their publications and their speeches. They showed that liberty of the black race was not only the intent of the black men, rather the great wave of black females. We can say that they challenged series of public and state barrier .They struggled not only for their community's equal rights, but also for all the human rights agenda. Their long trip toward freedom had strengthened relationships of the black communities.

Black women were discriminated during slavery; they were powerless and not strong enough to voice their oppression. They witnessed several forms of sexual abuse in the vast American plantation and they were subjected to mental and physical violation. Black women's primary social role was a slave mother. They were seen as central sources of new slaves' reproduction. Black women submitted to their white masters for long period but they were not able to stay in a passive state. They started to resist in their own way, they rescued their life in order to get rid of the white's discrimination. Black women awareness spread over America; they stimulated each other in well organized structure. Black females realized that education was a vital solution that could help them to acknowledge their rights and demands.

Black women abolitionists and intellectuals' refused racial injustice and violence. They organized political and social institutions which protected the whole black females. Literary texts, journals, and novels carried black women shared experiences from which many black females get inspired. Political events played crucial role in the progress of black women. The voting right act brought many changes in the African American society. After the 19th amendment, black women enjoyed life in US. They learned and constructed knowledge in order to protect themselves. Black women learn how to identify and ensure their existence through strategies and tactics that initiate their proper rights publicly.

The findings of this study confirm that the radical movement that black women had made themselves is not just “a fight for fight's sake” but a fight that brought prosperity to the whole black race in America. Along this research we have come to some results about the great changes that black women did. The fact that today's black women like Michelle Obama received high level occupations and engaged in many international conferences is itself a great challenge of the Afro American women and there are lots of other example of powerful black women who insured their competence and ability in political, economical, astronomical and artistic tasks and who proved that the non lasting struggles of African American females had arrived to a happy end.

Appendices

Appendix One

AIN'T I A WOMAN? By Sojourner Truth

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

-source: Feminist .com. Articles and speeches www.feminist.com/sojour.htm
_Accessed in 16.04.2016

Appendix Two

“Speak the Truth to the People” By Mari Evans

Speak the truth to the people

Talk sense to the people

Free them with honesty

Free the people with Love and Courage for their Being

Spare them the fantasy

Fantasy enslaves

A slave is enslaved

Can be enslaved by unwisdom

Can be re-enslaved while in flight from the enemy

Can be enslaved by his brother whom he loves

His brother whom he trusts whom he loves

His brother whom he trusts

His brother with the loud voice

And the unwisdom

Speak the truth to the people

It is not necessary to green the heart

Only to identify the enemy

It is not necessary to blow the mind

Only to free the mind

To identify the enemy is to free the mind

A free mind has no need to scream

A free mind is ready for other things

To BUILD black schools

To BUILD black children

To BUILD black minds

To BUILD black love

To BUILD black impregnability

To BUILD a strong black nation

To BUILD

Speak the truth to the people

Spare them the opium of devil-hate

They need no trips on honky-chants.

Move them instead to a BLACK ONENESS.

A black strength which will defend its own

Needing no cacophony of screams for activation

A black strength which will attack the laws

exposes the lies, disassembles the structure

and ravages the very foundation of evil. Speak the truth to the people

To identify the enemy is to free the mind

Free the mind of the people

Speak to the mind of the people.

Speak Truth

-Source: Chicken Bones: A Journal.

<http://www.nathanielturner.com/speakthetruthtothepeoplemarievans.htm>.

Accessed in 04.05.2017

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