

Black American Women’s Struggle for Civil and Political Rights (1920-1960)

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Dedications

To my beloved parents

To my husband El Houari and to my sons, Belhadj and Ilyes

To my sister Djamila and to my brother Mehdi

To all my friends and colleagues.

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List of Acronyms

ANC	Aid to Needy Children
AWSA	American Woman Suffrage Association
BPP	Black Panther Party
BSPC	Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters
CBC	Congressional Black Caucus
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MFDP	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NACW	National Association of Colored Women
NAWSA	National American Woman Suffrage Association
NBFO	National Black Feminist Organization
NCNW	National Council of Negro Women
NOW	National Organization for Women
NWPC	National Women's Political Caucus
NWRO	National Welfare Rights Organization
NWSA	National Woman Suffrage Association
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
UN	United Nations
UNIA	Universal Negro Improvement Association
WCTU	Women's Christian Temperance Union
WJWC	Women Journalists Without Chains
WPC	Women's Political Council
WWI	World War First
WWII	World War Second

Abstract

The United States was founded by people with clear ideals. People from all over the World came to take profit from this land of freedom; however, the importation of Black slaves from Africa in colonial times was followed by the harshest forms of discrimination, which were opposite to the ideals proclaimed by the founding fathers. The American society was supposed to be based on life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, all of which benefited for whites only.

Black women were brought to the American colonies against their will; enslaved and harshly exploited by white people, they had spent an existence dominated by race and gender oppression that lasted for more than four centuries. Being long denied their basic civil rights, these women struggled to advance their race.

African American women fought for the inclusion in the women's suffrage, and their activism would lead to the Civil Rights Movement, that revealed an important role played by Black women. Beginning from the fifties, they sought to achieve voting rights, equality in public places, and political power.

This dissertation aims first at examining the changing status and roles of Black women during the major events that changed American society in the twentieth century. Next, it will investigate the development of their social, economic and political lives during the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties. It will also reveal their actions to found a Black Feminist Movement. This work has also the purpose of demonstrating that even if Black women have remained a long time second class citizens, it was their activism in the Civil Rights Movement, and their resistance to persistent discrimination, which finally gave them the opportunity to be considered as full American citizens.

Résumé

Les Etats Unis ont été fondés par des hommes avec des idéaux clairs. Des populations de tous les coins du monde sont venues tirer profit de cette terre de liberté et d'égalité. Néanmoins, l'importation d'esclaves d'Afrique a été suivie par d'innombrables formes de discrimination, ce qui était contraire aux principes proclamés par les Pères Fondateurs.

Les femmes noires furent ramenées aux colonies contre leur volonté. Elles ont été durement exploitées et opprimées par les blancs, durant plus de quatre siècles. Privées de leurs droits civils les plus élémentaires, ces femmes noires durent se battre longtemps pour réclamer leurs droits et défendre leur race.

Les femmes noires Américaines se sont battues pour le droit de vote à partir de 1920, surtout que les femmes blanches avaient déjà obtenu ce droit. Elles voulaient aussi assurer l'égalité dans le traitement des noirs et des blancs, notamment dans les places publiques, tels que bus, écoles, restaurants, hôpitaux. Par ailleurs, elles ont largement contribué au combat pour les droits civils durant les années 1960, dans l'espoir d'avoir une place dans la politique.

Cette dissertation vise à examiner le statut et le rôle des femmes noires Américaines durant les principaux événements qui ont changé l'Amérique durant le 20ème siècle. Le but est aussi de suivre le développement social, économique et politique des femmes Afro-Américaines durant le combat pour les droits civils des années 1960. Ce travail révélera l'action menée par les femmes pour fonder leur propre féminisme. Enfin il faut dire que même si ces femmes noires sont restées longtemps considérées comme des citoyens de deuxième classe, ce fut leur activisme et leur détermination à combattre le racisme, qui leur octroya le droit d'avoir la citoyenneté Américaine complète.

ملخص

تأسست الولايات المتحدة من قبل أشخاص يحملون مثلاً عليا. لقد جاء الناس من جميع أنحاء العالم قصد الاستفادة من هذه الأرض، أرض الحرية غير أن تصدير الرقيق السود من إفريقيا أثناء الفترات الاستعمارية كان متبوعاً بأقصى صور التمييز التي كانت عكس المثل العليا التي كان الآباء المؤسسون ينادون بها. من المفروض أن يؤسس المجتمع الأمريكي بناءً على الحياة و الحرية و مواصلة السعادة التي استفاد منها البيض.

لقد أرغمت النساء السود على المجيء إلى المستعمرات الأمريكية حيث استعبدت و استغلت من قبل البيض. و لقد قضين حياة سادها العرق واضطهاد الجنس و التي دامت أكثر من أربعة قرون، و نظراً لهضم حقوقهن المدنية الأساسية لفترة طويلة، كافحت هذه النساء من أجل استعادة مكانة عرقهن. ناضلت النساء الأمريكيات الإفريقيات الأصل من أجل ضمان حقهن في التصويت، و كان نضالهن سيؤدي إلى حركة الحقوق المدنية الذي أبرز دوراً هاماً لعفته النساء السود. ابتداءً من الخمسينيات حاولن نيل حقوق التصويت و المساواة في الأماكن العمومية و السلطة السياسية.

تهدف هذه المذكرة إلى دراسة تطور مكانات و أدوار النساء السود أثناء الأحداث الأساسية التي غيرت المجتمع الأمريكي في القرن العشرين، كما تهدف إلى دراسة تطور الحياة الاجتماعية و الاقتصادية و السياسية ضمن حركة الحقوق المدنية خلال الستينات، و ترمي هذه المذكرة إلى إبراز نشاطاتهن الخاصة بتأسيس حركة السود الأنثوية.

و أخيراً، تحاول هذه الرسالة أن تبين أنه حتى لو بقيت النساء السود في درجة ثانية من المواطنة، فإن نضالهن في حركة الحقوق المدنية و مقاومتهم للتمييز المستمر قد أدى بهن في الأخير إلى الحصول على المواطنة الأمريكية الكاملة.

General Introduction

The story of Black women began in the seventeenth century, when they were brought from Africa to the American colonies. They had always been considered inferior to white American women; moreover, they were treated as animals for more than two hundred years. Before coming to America, Black women were respected, and assumed leadership roles within their communities; however, from their arrival to America, they endured the most terrible forms of exploitation, and humiliation, simply because they were Black, and without defense. They survived under a system which exploited them physically, and psychologically; they were sold to American slavers, separated from their children or husbands, and were severely punished if they tried to rebel.

In spite of all these sufferings, Black women found the courage to protest slavery. From the early nineteenth century, they worked for Abolition, denounced the atrocities of slavery, and helped slaves to run away. Since the Abolition of slavery, Black women had made great efforts to exercise their rights as full American citizens; however, they were still considered as unequal to white people who continued to dominate them. Therefore, they sought to advance their race, and have equal rights to whites.

They fought during the Civil War, and the First World War by doing voluntary work as nurses, soldiers, or spies. They worked longer hours than white women, and suffered from poor housing, inferior income, and inferior education to white people. Gradually, they were claiming for the same rights as white women, and began to work actively for the right to vote. When white American women were given the right to vote in 1920, African American women were still excluded from this right. They formed their own organizations, playing roles in the (NAACP)¹, (SCLC)², and (SNCC).³ These Black organizations sought to change segregation laws, and to register voters. The movement for suffrage, also called first wave feminism, was followed by a series of battles in which Black women were involved. They wanted to put an end to the racist exploitation of Black people.

¹ NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It was formed in 1909, and played an important part in the Civil Rights Movement. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, 2005, p. 316.

² SCLC: Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It was founded in 1957, by Martin Luther King, and aimed at working for civil rights through direct non violent action. From: James Ciment, Atlas of African American History, 2007, p. 1.

³ SNCC: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. It had begun in 1960 by Black and white students in Raleigh, North Carolina. It was one of the active African American Organizations during the Civil Rights Movement. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, p. 460.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, most African American women lived in the South; they were still denied the right to vote; moreover, they suffered from discrimination in public places like restaurants, parks, hospitals, and theatres. Even schools were segregated and Black people could not have access to white schools. As a result, they asked for Civil Rights; their goal became clear: to replace racism and discrimination by equality between Blacks and whites.⁴

The protests carried out by Black women, finally gave birth to the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties. On December, 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a 42 year old Black woman had refused to give up her seat to a white man. She represented an ordinary person among a minority group, who had contributed to the achievement of an extraordinary movement.⁵

During the fight for civil rights, Black men leaders were the most cited, whereas Black women's names had been forgotten, even though they were the catalysts for this movement. Since the Civil Rights Movement was considered as the most important event of the twentieth century, our aim is to discover Black women's activism to gain civil and political rights.

Being long excluded from political power, these women wanted to improve their social, economic, and political situation within American society. For them freedom meant to be free from segregation in public places, to have the right to vote, to hold political office, and to have equal pay for equal jobs to white women.⁶ They wanted equality, as they were conscious that it was a legal right to be earned, not by force, but by law.

The late 1960's and early 1970's witnessed the emergence of Second Wave Feminism, and other movements carried out by young people, students, and women of all races. It was a period of high protests in the United States, mainly against the Vietnam War; women started the Women's Liberation Movement, demanding equality for oppressed groups, among them Blacks, and women.

⁴ M.J. Heale, The Sixties in America, 2001, p. 33.

⁵ Douglas Brinkley, Rosa Parks, 2000, p. 116.

⁶ Eric Foner, Give Me Liberty, 2005, p. 969.

Black women felt that the Black Liberation Movement of the 1960's served the interests of Black men; moreover, they realized that their issues were ignored by white, middle class women of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970's. As a result, they reacted to white female's racism, and Black male's sexism by starting a Black Feminist Movement, and forming Black Feminist Organizations.

This research work attempts to tackle the following questions: First, what is the role of Black women in Abolition, reform, and the Civil Rights Movement? Second, what were the leadership and organizational skills they brought to the movement? Third, what were the circumstances that provoked the Black Feminist activism of the 1960's? Finally, if the Black Civil Rights Movement⁷ was associated with Black men, and the Women's Liberation Movement⁸ with white women, how did Black women define their roles in these movements?

Our objective is to focus on the role of Black women in the Black Liberation Movement, and in the Black Feminist Movement that grew out of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. By placing Black women within the Afro-American context, and integrating them in the American womanhood, our aim is to discover the achievements of Black women in both Black and Women's history.⁹

My dissertation will comprise three chapters. The first chapter will be devoted to the Black American woman in slavery. It will tell us about her sufferings before the Abolition of slavery, her role during the Civil War, and will reveal the fight of Black women to end lynching. In the second chapter, the focus will be on Black women's struggle for equality, and justice. These two words evoked in the Declaration of Independence, are indeed the basis of American life. During two hundred years, Black women would continue their struggle to defend their civil and political rights, long denied to them. This chapter will make clear the role of Black women in the Suffrage Movement of the 1920's, in the Great Depression, in the Second World War, and mainly in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's.

⁷ Black Civil Rights Movement: The background of the revolutionary Civil Rights Movement lay in the willingness of Blacks to confront and protest racial oppression in the 1930's. In 1954, The US Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. This decision set the stage for continued Black protest against other forms of segregation. From: Encyclopedia Americana, 2006, volume 4, p. 28 K.

⁸ Women's Liberation Movement: The Women's Rights movement in the US grew out of Abolitionism; it began with the Seneca Falls Convention, on July 19th 1848, and continued with the ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920. Having won the right to vote, American women continued their struggle for equality until the period of the 1960's. In that period, the Women's Rights movement became known as the Women's Liberation Movement, borrowing the term liberation from other radical movements of the sixties. From: Encyclopedia Americana, volume 29, p. 109.

⁹ Mary Beth Norton, Major Problems in American Women's History, 1996, p. 15.

Knowing that feminism was first led by white women in Western Europe and North America, the third chapter will be consecrated to the emergence of Black Feminism in the United States that grew out of the Black Liberation Movement, and the Women's Movement. It was mainly the result of Black women's activism during the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties, and had an impact on Black women in Africa, and other Third World countries.

Finally, one can say that the sixties witnessed profound changes in American life. It was a decade in which minorities emerged, among them poor people, students, and Black women who asked for civil and political rights. When the Civil Rights Movement began in the fifties, Black women could no longer bear to be seated at the back of buses, and their main objective was to achieve equality and justice.¹⁰

Despite their status as Black, as Women, and as socially marginalized, African American women had contributed to great changes in the social and political life of Black people which occurred in twentieth century America. It was their revolutionary spirit, and courageous acts that fostered the advent of the Civil Rights Movement; moreover, their struggle would benefit Black people all over the World.

¹⁰ Ruth Warren, A Pictorial History of Women in America, 1975, p. 196.

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Introduction

In her native Africa, the Black woman had spent a respectful existence, with strong family ties. In America, as a slave, she had suddenly lost all the privileges she had enjoyed in Africa.¹¹ Reduced to less than human status, the Black woman was subjected to the hardest labor, to the separation from her family, to the harshest punishments, and to ignorance. Lacking status and rights, she became not only an easy target to men, both white and Black, but also suffered from the hatred of white women.¹²

Despite all these hardships, she survived, generation after generation, by applying her African traditions to her life under the slave system. Her resistance to slavery constitutes a long, painful, and proud struggle in which she sought to achieve freedom. The Black woman took part in all the movements that protested slavery; she worked for abolition, and for women's rights. So, how was her life during slavery? What role did the Black woman play in the Abolitionist movement, and in the Civil War? How did she contribute to the Anti-lynch struggle? This chapter will be devoted to bring an answer to these interrogations.

¹¹ Mabel. M. Smythe, The Black American Reference Book, 1976, p. 341.

¹² Bell Hooks, Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism, 1981, p. 17

1.1 ORIGINS OF BLACK WOMEN

Black African women were brought to America in the late seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries; the majority came from West African societies.¹³ When they were established into American society, they were adults with ideas and beliefs that were determined by their African past. To America, they brought with them their languages, religious beliefs, musical styles, cooking practices, and many other aspects of their societies.¹⁴

It is well known that West African women were traders. They participated in the making and selling of goods of various kinds such as cloth, or pottery. They were also responsible for planting crops and preserving them. They worked both as farmers and merchants. Moreover, their role as mothers was their most important function. In Africa, women were considered like gods, because they bore children. As a result, their presence would guarantee the future of the nation.¹⁵

African women were raised in a society in which the concept of motherhood was very important. In fact, for them, to be a mother was more important than to be a wife. However, they were independent, and had the control over both their families and their markets. African societies valued women for both their productive and reproductive abilities. They were used to perform a high variety of tasks, in the fields as well as in the domestic household; a role which would be well assumed later on the American plantations.¹⁶ African women were easily captured by white slavers who often kidnapped women important to the tribe like the King's daughter, but most were warriors, or artisans. They became easy targets for white slavers, as they could not resist capture in the hands of kidnappers.¹⁷

¹³ Gail Collins, *America's Women*, 2003, p. 140.

¹⁴ Rodgers Rose, *The Black Woman*, 1980, p. 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁷ Bell Hooks, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

For African women, the middle passage¹⁸ from Africa to America was a terrifying one-way trip from which they didn't expect to return. They had no idea about both their destination, and the reason of their deportation.¹⁹ They represented one-third of the human cargo aboard most ships. They were given the worst food, and no chance to move.²⁰ When the crew had found that some had died, their bodies were thrown to the sea. They were physically weak, and totally unarmed to try to rebel. Indeed, white slavers could exploit and brutalize them without fear of revenge.

African women entered a land which viewed them not as humans with rights, but as property controlled by others; however, the system of slavery did not destroy the African concept of the family. As a matter of fact, Black women worked in the homes of white families, raising their children, while also raising their own children. They worked long hours to gather the food, and more important, they continued to teach their descendants the ways and traditions of their African ancestors.²¹

African women contributed to the edification of the plantation system in America. They were exploited, and their energies benefited to the construction of wealth to their owners.²² Their labor was both forced and unpaid. They were human property, humiliated and abused. Being most of the time overworked and underfed, their life chances were very limited, and few could expect to acquire freedom;²³ however, African women managed to survive. They escaped and rebelled, challenging the power of their masters. Their existence was not only a story of extreme suffering, but also a story of the struggle for the survival of their race.

¹⁸ The middle passage: the journey across the Atlantic by ship as part of the slave trade. Ships travelled from Britain to Africa, where the slaves were brought and then taken to be sold in America or the West Indies. Conditions on the journey were terrible and many slaves died during it. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, 2005, p. 300.

¹⁹ Bell Hooks, op. cit., p. 17.

²⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, A History of African Americans, 2000, p. 78.

²¹ Rodgers Rose, op. cit., p. 20.

²² Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 79.

²³ Bell Hooks, op. cit., p. 41.

1.2 BLACK WOMEN BEFORE THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

Black women who were transported to the New World had been separated from their families. They were traumatized during the voyage, being harshly treated by the white slaver who wanted to destroy the dignity of African people, and to eliminate any sign of African heritage.²⁴ He used various methods of torture and punishments to dehumanize African women, so that they would adapt easily to the white colonizer's supremacy.

During their journey from Africa to America, Black women were often whipped and brutalized by their masters. They were also raped and tortured in the most violent manner, and for them it was better to be dead than to live in these horrible conditions.²⁵ A lot of women gave birth aboard ship, and most of them died during childbirth. White slavers also tortured children to see the torment of their mothers; for example, a child who refused to eat was either put in a pot of boiling water, or thrown over-board.²⁶

When African women arrived to the New World, they were sold at slave auctions. Being often exposed naked, they were rudely examined and dehumanized. This was to indicate to the public that they were not humans who had feelings and dignity, but rather sub-humans.²⁷ Once they were purchased by their owners, they were brought to the plantations in which they had to work long hours from dusk until dawn. Black women worked in the fields: they planted crops, cultivated rice, cut cane and tobacco, and picked cotton. They were expected to do three quarters of the field work a man could do; they did the same jobs as men, using heavy iron tools to hoe. Black women cooked, cleaned, did laundry, sewed, and cared for infants, but were never rewarded. Instead, they were often insulted, whipped, or even sexually assaulted.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁶ Ibid., p.19.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

During her working life, a Black woman could spend much of her time pregnant,²⁹ because she risked sale if she remained without children;³⁰ moreover, medical care was usually unavailable for pregnant slave women. Black women were neglected because they were thought to be stronger, gave birth more easily, and needed less care than white women. On plantations, women had to take their babies with them to the fields; they put them on their backs, and worked without caring for them, otherwise, they would be whipped.³¹

Slave women did their best to stabilize their families; the mother, rather than the father was the dominant figure, as very often, the slave father was sold away from his family. Indeed, couples were most often separated, and children could be sold away from their parents. In addition to the sale of their children or spouses, Black women were raped by their owners. Rape was a method to terrorize and de-humanize Black women. If they resisted their master's sexual exploitation, they were forced to appear naked before male whippers, and were publicly whipped.³²

Nineteenth century White female humanist Lydia Marie Child spoke about the status of Black women during slavery with the statement:

The Negro woman is unprotected either by law or public opinion. She is the property of her master, and her daughters are his property. They are allowed to have no conscientious scruples, no sense of shame, no regard for the feelings of husband or parent: they must be entirely subservient to the will of their owner on pain of being whipped as near to death as will comport with his interest or quite to death if it suits his pleasure.^[33]

²⁹ Gail Collins, op. cit., p. 143.

³⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 196.

³¹ Gail Collins, op. cit., p. 153.

³² Bell Hooks, op. cit., p. 26.

³³ Ibid., p. 26.

The rape of slave women was in fact a political act as well as an act of violence.³⁴ The political aim of the humiliation of Black women represented an indirect attack upon the slave community as a whole. It was a proof of the white imperialistic rule. Most Black women bore mulatto³⁵ children as a result of being raped.³⁶ Since the white master's principal profit depended on the increase of their slaves, some slave holders used to breed Black women with white men, as mulattoes were easily sold and provided a better price on the market. As a matter of fact, slave breeding³⁷ had an economic focus, an increase in quantity and profits; it also made difficulties to couples to establish stable family relationships.³⁸

Frederick Olmstead, a Southern white observer of the practice of slave-breeding, pointed out:

In the states of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, as much attention is paid to the breeding and growth of horses and mules. Further South, we raise them both for use and for market. Planters command their girls and women (married or not married), to have children; and I have known a great many girls sold off because they did not have children.^[39]

Children descending from slaves were not considered members of the white family. Only offspring of a man with his white wife were legitimate heirs to carry on his name.⁴⁰ Moreover, white men did not feel responsible for their mulatto children. Black women were required to work as long, and often as hard as male slaves; they were also required to reproduce for their master's profit. They were not only subjected to breeding, but also could become victims of the white man's sexual assault at any time.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

³⁵ Mulatto: an individual of mixed white and African –American parentage. From: William. O. Kellogg, American History, the Easy Way, 2003, p. 41.

³⁶ Bell Hooks, op. cit., p. 39.

³⁷ Slave breeding: one of the most approved methods of increasing agricultural capital. From: John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, JR., From Slavery to Freedom, 2004, p. 131.

³⁸ Bell Hooks, op. cit., p. 41.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 203.

Black women experienced sexual exploitation, endured child bearing and the slave holder's sexism. They worked as hard as men, but could not rely on men for protection;⁴¹ so they had to protect themselves against white, and Black men the best way they could. In fact, Black men could never intervene to protect their abused wives, sisters or daughters, because violence done on the Black woman's body was not considered as a crime.⁴²

The only means for Black women to protect themselves was to rebel. Some women murdered their masters and mistresses, others burned their master's homes, and many pretended to be ill in order to escape from the harshness of their owners. Black women were resistant and self-reliant; they survived generation after generation, always finding a way to protest slavery.

Running away was the best solution for Black women to escape from slavery.⁴³ The most famous runaway slave was a woman, under the name of Harriet Tubman.⁴⁴ She was the granddaughter of Africans; she was born on a plantation in Maryland, and lived in slavery for twenty eight years. When she was about thirty years old, she heard that she was going to be sold away from her husband and family. She decided to escape.⁴⁵ Harriet knew that escaping from slavery was dangerous as she heard that those who were caught were severely beaten or sold away from their parents. Despite the risk of being caught, Harriet dreamt of freedom; she was called the "Moses of Black people",⁴⁶ because like the Bible's Moses, she led her people to freedom.

⁴¹ Bell Hooks, op. cit., p. 24.

⁴² Gail Collins, op. cit., p. 156.

⁴³ Nell Irvin Painter, Creating Black Americans, 2007, p. 105.

⁴⁴ Harriet Tubman: (1820-1913), in her lifetime, Harriet was called General Tubman and Moses because she rescued more than 300 enslaved African Americans. She believed God had commanded her to help free the slaves. During the Civil War, Tubman served as a nurse, a cook, and a spy, crossing Confederate army lines to get information from slaves in South Carolina. From: Sheila Keenan, Scholastic Encyclopedia of Women in the United States, 2002, p. 57.

⁴⁵ Gail Collins, op. cit., p. 157.

⁴⁶ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 194.

This Black woman could neither read nor write, but she had the courage and perseverance to free other slaves. She not only escaped, but also made nineteen successful trips into the slave territory to lead 300 other slaves to freedom via the Underground Railroad.⁴⁷

The Underground Railroad was a secret route of hiding places for slaves escaping to the North and Canada. This system began in 1838, and was used by white and African American abolitionists.⁴⁸ Slaves prepared to escape by taking provisions from their owners, and disguised themselves: men as women, and women as men.⁴⁹

It is said that Harriet Tubman (1821-1913), spent several months to raise money in order to convey slaves to freedom. In 1849, when she heard rumors that she was going to be sold away from her family, she escaped to Philadelphia and worked in a hotel.⁵⁰ Then, she worked as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman was well known in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, where she delivered three hundred slaves to freedom.⁵¹ She led them to Canada after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850.⁵² She not only brought her brothers and sisters to freedom but also her parents in 1857.

Slave owners promised forty thousand dollars reward for her capture, but Harriet never resigned.⁵³ She continued travelling on the Underground Railroad and said "she never lost a passenger."⁵⁴ She travelled only by night, to avoid being captured. She believed God had ordered her to help free the slaves. Her deep faith allowed her in taking very important decisions, although she faced a lot of dangers.

⁴⁷ John Hope Franklin, Alfred A. Moss JR, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴⁸ Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 57.

⁴⁹ Robin .D. G. Kelley, and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 194.

⁵⁰ Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 57.

⁵¹ Charles M. Christian, Black Saga, the African American Experience, 1995, p. 142.

⁵² John Hope Franklin, Alfred A. Moss JR, op. cit., p. 210.

⁵³ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 109.

⁵⁴ Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p 57.

The Major Routes of the Underground Railroad⁵⁵



Source: <http://www.tneweb.com/ugrr.html>

⁵⁵ The origin of the Underground Railroad goes back to the eighteenth century, when runaway slaves were being helped in a number of towns in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The name "Underground Railroad" was coined shortly after 1831, when steam railroads became popular. All Underground Railroads led North. They began on various plantations in the South and ran vaguely and dangerously up rivers and valleys to some point on the Ohio, or upper Mississippi in the West, and to points in Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the East. From: John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, JR, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-207.

1.3 THE ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT

Slavery was the most important political question between 1830 and the Civil War.⁵⁶ It was also a moral issue which involved both white and Black women into politics. Black women participated in the struggle to end slavery and racial oppression in the United States of America. They took part in all the movements which protested slavery and worked for Abolition.⁵⁷

The Abolitionist movement provides an opportunity to understand how race and gender have had an impact on Black women's lives. For them, Abolition meant much more than ending the institution of slavery; they worked with white women, writing, speaking, petitioning and participating in anti-slavery programs. They devoted time and money to the cause;⁵⁸ however, they were victimized by both the sexism of the anti-slavery movement and the racism of the white women's movement. They established a Black female activism based on their own experience.

Black women's activism would become important a century later with the struggle for civil rights. Black social, political and economic equality were focused on in their agenda. From the beginning, racial equality was their primary goal, including the emancipation of all slaves. Black women abolitionists wanted to oppose slavery's expansion in the South, the fact which led to the Civil War. They also believed in equal suffrage, and equality not only between the races but also between the sexes.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Gail Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁵⁹ Mabel M. Smythe, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

One of the most prominent Black women who worked for abolition was Sojourner Truth (1797-1883). She was born Isabella Van Wagenen, in New York's Hudson Valley.⁶⁰ She was sold when she was only nine years old. Like most slaves, she had never been taught to read and write; however, she became the first Black woman anti-slavery speaker; she was also an Abolitionist, and a champion of women's rights.⁶¹ In 1851, she delivered an unforgettable speech at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention by declaring:

*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 them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out to Jesus with my mother's grief none but Jesus heard me. And ain't I a woman?*⁶²

Sojourner Truth became committed to the Abolitionist movement, becoming one of its strongest advocates. She spoke out against slavery, with Frederick Douglas⁶³, another great African American Abolitionist and former slave. He escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1838, and joined Garrisonian Abolitionists⁶⁴ as a speaker in 1841. He remained as a leader of women and Blacks' rights until his death in 1895.⁶⁵ Within the Garrisonian wing⁶⁶ of the movement, female Abolitionists became leaders of the nation's first independent feminist movement, crucial in the organization of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Gail Collins, op. cit., p. 177.

⁶¹ Melinda Tims, Perspectives on the Making of America, 2002, p. 190.

⁶² Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 56.

⁶³ Frederick Douglas: (1817-1895), an American slave who escaped in 1838; he wrote the story of his life as a slave, and later went to England, where friends gave him enough money to return to America and buy his freedom. He became the leading African American working to end the system of slavery, and was the US government's representative to Haiti from 1889 to 1891. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, 2005, p. 129.

⁶⁴ Garrisonian Abolitionists: Led by the Boston Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, they believed in Universal reform, including temperance, pacifism and extension of Women's rights. Under Garrisonian Control, the American Anti Slavery society advocated the dissolution of the Union with slave holding states. Women played key roles in the American Anti Slavery society after 1840, among them Sojourner Truth, and Elizabeth Caddy Stanton. From: Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 83.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

⁶⁶ Garrisonian wing: By 1840, women allied with the Garrisonian wing of the abolitionist movement, and had won positions within the American Anti-slavery society. From: Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, Major Problems in American Women's History, 1996, p. 184.

⁶⁷ Seneca Falls Convention: was held in New York, July 19-20 1848. It was a series of discussions about the role of Women in Society, regarding Women's right to vote. It was viewed as a revolutionary beginning to the struggle by Women for complete Equality with Man. It was organized by Local New York Women, Lucretia Mott, a Quaker famous for her speaking ability, along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a non Quaker who followed logic more than religion. From: Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, op. cit., p. 186.

Sojourner Truth followed her career as a public speaker. She was strong enough to surmount both burdens of being a woman, and being a slave. She was convinced that she had a divine mission: to tell the truth to her people.⁶⁸ Her name reflected her occupation; indeed the literal meaning of Sojourner Truth is travelling preacher.⁶⁹ She used her oratorical skills for the cause of abolition and women's rights. She supported political rights for Black men, and also worried about the destiny of Black women, if equal rights were not given to them as well. In 1843, she escaped from slavery, and began lecturing in favor of Abolition. She was not only an advocate of Black liberation, but of women's liberation as well. Dr Benjamin Quarles, said on the historic role of Black women:

America has sometimes been defined as the land of permanent revolution. Black women have always been in the forefront of this permanent revolution, particularly of that aspect which aims to make this country a land of liberty and justice for all. Throughout long years, Black women have sought two forms of revolution, racial liberation and women's liberation... In her day (Sojourner Truth's) women could not sue in the Courts and could not vote or hold public office. For over a third of a century, Sojourner Truth sought to put an end to all discrimination based on sex or color. If women today have come a long way they owe much to their earlier sisters who, like Sojourner Truth, challenged long-standing abuses.^[70]

During the 1867 American Equal Rights Association Convention in New York, Sojourner Truth declared:

I am above 80 years old..., it is about time for me to be going. I have been 40 years a slave, and 40 years free... and would be here 40 years more to have equal rights for all... We (Black women) do as much, eat as much, want as much... I suppose. I am about the only colored woman that goes about, to speak for the rights of the colored woman...^[71]

As a conclusion, we have to say that although white America was determined to destroy Black women's rights as citizens, the latter were firmly resolved to fight for equality in political rights, in civil rights, and in social and civil privileges as with the rest of the American people.

⁶⁸ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 190.

⁶⁹ Gail Collins, op. cit., p. 178.

⁷⁰ Mabel M. Smythe, op. cit., p. 360.

⁷¹ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 190.

1.4 THE ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN DURING THE CIVIL WAR

The American Civil War (also called the War of Secession), was the most devastating conflict that occurred in the history of the United States, and slavery was one of its main causes.⁷² In the mid nineteenth century, America was divided into two separate entities: on the one hand, the North with developed industries and agriculture; on the other hand, the South based on the plantation system, and relying basically on slavery.

It is said that the Civil War's main objective was to rebuild the Union.⁷³ African Americans took part into this War which ended by the elimination of slavery, and the emancipation of all slaves.⁷⁴ Over two hundred thousand Black men fought, and thirty seven thousand died to put an end to slavery in the United States. The nine tenths of African Americans who had been enslaved, men, women, and children became free.⁷⁵ They had served in the Union Army and Navy, by spying, guiding, working for, and nursing Union soldiers. As free people, Black Americans sought to reunite their families, and establish their own institutions, such as schools, colleges, and churches.⁷⁶

It is also well known that Black women played an important role during the Civil War. They served as spies, scouts, guides, workers, and nurses.⁷⁷ They worked in hospitals or camps. They formed groups designed to raise money for the families whose men were at war, to buy flags for the regiments, or to buy food for convalescent soldiers. Black women suffered during the War, and also after the War. They were widowed, often becoming the only support for their children. Some mothers had lost four or even six sons during the war. Others were forced to leave their homes. Black women, who often fled toward the Union Army, found little welcome when they got there. They were left with their children, homeless, in the cold.

⁷² Ibid., p. 71.

⁷³ Nell Irvin Painter, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 142.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

During the Civil War, for example, Sojourner Truth fought to desegregate public transportation; a white conductor had told her to get off the local tramway. When she refused, the conductor hurt her arm; she made a complaint and took the conductor to the Court.⁷⁸ She urged African Americans to fight for the Union, and she collected food and clothing for Black soldiers. In 1864, she was received by President Abraham Lincoln in the White House.

It is said that the African American nurse Susie King Taylor (1848-1912) served with Clara Barton⁷⁹ in South Carolina. She published "*A Black Woman's Civil War Memoirs* ", in which she recounted her service during the Civil War.⁸⁰ Susie King Taylor was born a slave in Georgia. She had a wise grandmother who provided her with an education, although it was illegal for slaves to be literate before the Civil War. Later, she taught African American soldiers to read and write. In 1862, Susie fled to Sea Island, which was under the control of the Union.⁸¹ That same year, she married Edward King, a soldier working within the Colored Troops. During the War, she worked as a cook, and laundress. Then, as the number of injured soldiers augmented, she started caring for them, becoming the first African American nurse in the Union Army. She was a gifted nurse, and spent most of her time caring for the wounded.

Harriet Tubman, who helped slaves to escape through the Underground Railroad, was prominent during three years of service as a scout for the Union Army in South Carolina and Florida.⁸² She served as a nurse, spy, and guide. African American women like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Jacobs, author of "*Incidents in the life of a slave Girl*" , worked in Washington D.C, by helping Black people to get food, clothing, shelter, and work.

⁷⁸ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 190.

⁷⁹ Clara Barton: (1821-1912), born in Oxford Massachusetts, she was always a hard worker. In 1852, she founded one of the first public schools in New Jersey. She was in Washington when the war broke out. She helped Union soldiers returning from the battlefield, and recruited women to prepare supplies for the front lines. She worked in the Civil War's worst battles. She cooked for, gave medical aid to, and comforted the thousands of soldiers she called "my boys". From: Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 30.

⁸⁰ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 129.

⁸¹ Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 55.

⁸² Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 130.

Although the Civil War was officially a struggle against disunion or Secession, its greatest achievement was that it was considered as a human revolution. Indeed, before the War, Black women were defined as property, but after the War, they were recognized as human beings.

1.5 THE ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE RECONSTRUCTION ERA

The Reconstruction period, also called “The Second American Revolution”⁸³ was an era in which African Americans sought to make progress in American society in both the economic and political fields. It was also the story of the struggle of African Americans to be integrated into Southern American society.

African American men and women were not yet given their basic civil rights. For them, emancipation meant liberation from the hard work of the plantation system, and many Black women did not work in the fields anymore.⁸⁴

In 1866, the first Civil Rights Act was passed by Congress, including the right to own property, the right to make contracts, and the right to access to the Courts.⁸⁵ The African American community wanted land, economic independence from whites, political power, and social equality. Freed from slavery, African Americans were gaining more political power, which would be sustained until the mid twentieth century with the modern Civil Rights Movement. Therefore, one may say that the Reconstruction period evolved as the basis for the Civil Rights Movement of the twentieth century.⁸⁶

⁸³ James Ciment, op. cit., p. 87.

⁸⁴ Eric Foner, Give Me Liberty, 2005, p. 551.

⁸⁵ James Ciment, op. cit., p. 96.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 88.

Although most Blacks had emerged from slavery illiterate and ignorant, they became famous politicians. They sought to modernize the economy, to build their own institutions such as schools, hospitals, churches, and also to activate social reforms.⁸⁷ Many former slaves won office and were represented at different levels of government, such as governor, treasurer, or secretary of state.⁸⁸

Reconstruction was a period in which the image of Black women was reconstructed. For them, it was time to achieve their identity in regard to race, gender, and society.⁸⁹ The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed all people born in the USA, including African Americans, citizenship and equal protection under the law, and the Fifteenth Amendment gave Black men the right to vote, but not Black women, who were still denied basic civil rights.⁹⁰

Susan. B. Anthony, a famous white woman Abolitionist and suffragist, opposed the Fifteenth Amendment, because it did not give women the right to vote. She had big hopes that women would gain the vote. The first wave of feminism had begun, asking for women's equality in employment, education, and politics. Black women began their demands for civil rights, including the right to vote. Their goal was political freedom and economic independence; however, the word freedom was still a privilege, not a right. It implied neither economic autonomy, nor civil and political equality.

During Reconstruction, Black women stabilized their families, and devoted more time to them than in the period of slavery;⁹¹ moreover, they asked for equal access to education, and created their own educational and religious institutions. In Natchez, Mississippi, Black women founded three schools during the War.⁹² In 1860, about 90 percent of Black people were illiterate, but by 1900, only 44.5 percent of African Americans were illiterate.⁹³

⁸⁷ James Ciment, op. cit., p. 88.

⁸⁸ Eric Foner, op. cit., p. 573.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 570.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 571.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 552.

⁹² Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 145.

⁹³ Ibid., p 147.

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955), the daughter of former slaves in South Carolina, had a big dream: to open her own school. She rented an old cottage, and opened the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro girls. This school became the Bethune-Cookman College in 1923, and Mary served as its president for many years.⁹⁴

It is said that after the Civil War, Black women formed benevolent church-based organizations, which provided charity for sick people. They also cooperated with white women's organizations in America, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)⁹⁵, that was considered as the largest benevolent organization in America.⁹⁶ Black churches became the largest public meetings where Black women could participate in political discussion, and have an influence on politics. They were also places where women could worship freely. Indeed, Black churches were a symbol of emancipation, and political involvement for women.⁹⁷

The Civil War ended slavery but it did not end racism; indeed, the Reconstruction Era was the most violent period in American history during which white supremacists used all means of terror to destroy Black political power. A secret organization, called the Ku Klux Klan⁹⁸ emerged. It was led by people who were against Black economic and political gains. The Klan used physical abuse and violence to achieve its ends.⁹⁹ Black women were also beaten, raped or murdered, and the purpose of this violence was to prove that Black men could not protect their wives, sisters, or daughters.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ George Sullivan, The Day The Women Got The Vote, 1994, p. 49.

⁹⁵ WCTU: Women's Christian Temperance Union. An organization of nonpartisan, Christian women dedicated to educating America's youth about the harmful effects of alcohol, narcotic drugs, and tobacco on the human body and society. The National WCTU was organized in Cleveland, Ohio, in November 1874, as a result of the Woman's Temperance Crusade of 1873-1874. It has approximately 50,000 members, organized in some 4,000 local groups in every state. From: Encyclopedia Americana, 2006, volume 29, p 107.

⁹⁶ Adam Fairclough, Better Day Coming, 2002, p. 35.

⁹⁷ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p 147.

⁹⁸ Ku Klux Klan: a secret American organization opposed to equal rights for African Americans. It was first formed in Tennessee in 1866, after the Civil War, and was responsible for lynchings, especially in the South. It had nearly five million members in the 1920's. The Klan became strong again in the 1960's when it opposed the Civil Rights Movement. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, 2005, p. 255.

⁹⁹ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 258.

¹⁰⁰ Paula Giddings, When And Where I Enter, 1984, p. 28.

Black women who migrated to the industrial North, were often refused a job because of their color. In fact, Black and white people went to separate schools, ate in separate restaurants, stayed in separate hotels, and sat in separate sections on trains and buses.¹⁰¹ Signs were put in front of every institution, and we could read: COLORED or WHITES ONLY. This kind of segregation, named Jim Crow laws¹⁰², was an official system of racial segregation that spread across the South after the Civil War.

Beginning around 1875, Blacks and whites were legally separated on streetcars, trains, and every mode of transportation as well as schools, hospitals, restaurants, hotels, or theaters. All public places were limited to white people, and this was done on purpose, in order to keep the Black race from coming into contact with the white one.

Segregation was part of everyday life especially in the South. Black people were assaulted, killed, or lynched. The war against racism would be the next step for Black women to acquire their full citizenship. In the South, the 1890s and the early twentieth century, witnessed perhaps the most violent kinds of torture and executions known as lynchings.¹⁰³ One hundred Blacks were killed every year between 1882 and 1901.¹⁰⁴ The period after the Civil War promised a future of Black freedom and civil rights. Indeed, Black women were determined to carry on their struggle, and would lead a long crusade against lynching.

¹⁰¹ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁰² Jim Crow Laws: created between the 1870s and 1910, and remained in force for decades. They would not be overthrown until a successful legal campaign by a new generation of African American activists led to the US. Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown. v. Board of Education* and to the Civil Rights Movement that followed it. From: Robin D. G. Kelley, and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 302.

¹⁰³ Lynchings: The term "lynch" originated in Western Virginia, deriving from the activities of Colonel Charles Lynch, during the Revolutionary War. He presided over an illegal court that hanged "Tories", or colonists who remained loyal to the Crown, without the right to trial. This arbitrary form of justice became known as lynch law, and was used to describe the hanging of mostly Black people by white mobs in the South during the Post Reconstruction period. From: Ron Field, *Civil Rights in America*, 2002, p. 35.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

1.6 BLACK WOMEN AND THE ANTI LYNCH STRUGGLE

Black people, who wanted to exercise their citizenship rights, hold political office, or vote, were violently tortured or murdered. It constituted an illegal system of punishment and hostility toward African Americans.¹⁰⁵ Lynching was a result of the progress Blacks were making throughout the South.¹⁰⁶ Afro Americans were a threat and lynching was the only means to exterminate them. Their only crime was perhaps the fact of being politically active. Lynching emerged in the late nineteenth century and continued until the middle of the twentieth century.

A great number of lynchings took place in Mississippi, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama.¹⁰⁷ The victims were executed in public, and people were brutally murdered, hanged, burnt alive, mutilated, and suffered from all forms of torture. African American men were the most concerned with this kind of suffering, but women were also robbed, beaten, raped or even killed;¹⁰⁸ however, they did not remain silent in face of the injustices of lynching.

Among the most important Black women who stood against lynching was Ida B. Wells (1862-1931). She was born a slave during the Civil War; ¹⁰⁹ she went to university and became a teacher. In 1878, both her parents died of a yellow epidemic fever, orphaning her at the age of sixteen. In 1881, she taught in rural schools for three years; then, she got a teaching job in Memphis.¹¹⁰ Her salary was not sufficient although her job granted her a middle class status. Investigating and protesting the poor conditions of schools for African Americans, Ida. B. Wells was dismissed from her job in 1888.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 306.

¹⁰⁶ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 180.

¹⁰⁸ Robin D. G. Kelley, and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 306.

¹⁰⁹ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 29.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p 31.

For Ida B. Wells, teaching young children became boring and unrewarding; she was more interested in journalism, and in 1889, she had a job as an editor in the “Memphis Free Speech”. Named “Princess of the Press”¹¹², she was determined to protest over injustice. She wrote about the rising violence against African American men and women; she also wrote essays condemning the lynching of three friends of her in Memphis.¹¹³ As a result, a mob destroyed her newspaper by burning it, and she was menaced that she would be killed if she were to return. Being forced to leave Memphis, Wells never retreated. She moved North where she became the nation’s leading anti-lynching protester.¹¹⁴

She wrote:

Lynching was merely an excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus keep the race terrorized and keep the nigger down.^[115]

“So great is Southern hate and prejudice.”^[116]

Therefore, lynching illustrated the inferiority of Black Southerners at the hands of white supremacists. It also viewed Blacks as brute and savage people;¹¹⁷ moreover, white supremacists accused and punished Black men who raped white women. Ida. B. Wells could never bear this accusation, and continued her campaign against lynching.

Nobody in this section of the country believed the thread bare lie that Negro men rape white women, she challenged.^[118]

¹¹² Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 30.

¹¹³ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 309.

¹¹⁴ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 31.

¹¹⁵ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 28.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹⁷ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 25.

¹¹⁸ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 29.

Ida B. Wells continued her attack on lynching in the pages of the New York Age edited by T. Thomas Fortune. She denounced lynching as racial terror. On June 5, 1892, an important article was published on the front page, on her most recent findings about places, and circumstances of hundreds of lynchings.¹¹⁹ Under the title of “The First inside Story of Negro Lynching”, the article had a great effect in the streets of Memphis, as Thomas Fortune published thousands copies about the concern.

Ida B. Wells advocated that lynching be considered a federal crime. She argued that lynchers should be punished and that the victims’ families be indemnified by the authorities. In 1899, she became secretary of the Afro-American Council, which was a new presentation of Fortune’s Afro-American League.¹²⁰ Under the leadership of T. Thomas Fortune, African Americans met in Chicago, and were determined to fight all forms of discrimination. Wells was also called for a conference that led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).¹²¹

The issue of lynching became first a national, then an international issue.¹²² Wells made tours in Northern and Western states in America, and organized lectures on the horrors of lynching; moreover, she carried her anti-lynching campaign to Great Britain in 1893, because she was convinced that an international pressure would contribute to the anti-lynching cause.¹²³ She gave anti-lynching lectures in front of large audiences, through which she helped organize the British Anti-Lynching society.¹²⁴ Wells gained respect from the British public opinion which condemned lynching as “barbarous”.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

¹²⁰ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 38.

¹²¹ NAACP: An American organization that supports the rights of African Americans. It was formed in 1909 and played an important part in the civil Rights Movement. One of its greatest achievements was to bring a legal case which led to the US Supreme Court’s decision in 1954 against segregation in schools. Its main office is in Baltimore, Maryland, and it had more than 500,000 members in 2003. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, 2005, p. 316.

¹²² Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 23.

¹²³ Ibid., p 33.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p 38.

¹²⁵ John Hope Franklin and August Meier, Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century, 1982, p. 42.

Ida B. Wells had contributed to the Civil Rights struggle. She was an anti-lynching leader and Civil Rights activist, who extended her reformist activities to the struggle for the suffragist cause. Her anti-lynching crusade meant a new role for women in the fight for racial justice.¹²⁶

Historian David M. Tucker said:

In the long struggle against lynching, Ida B. Wells deserves more credit than any other individual for having brought this practice before the eyes of the World, and, in so doing having accelerated the establishment of law and decency in the American South.^[127]

Another Black woman who dedicated her life to the fight against lynching was Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954). She was also the daughter of a former slave. She lived in Memphis in the 1880's. She was a teacher at Wilberforce University in Ohio, then in Washington D.C, in 1887.¹²⁸ She resigned after she married Robert Terrell in 1891, because married women were not permitted to teach.¹²⁹ In 1892, when friends of hers and Wells' were lynched in Memphis, Mary Terrell, and the famous orator Frederick Douglas decided to bring the issue of racial violence to President Benjamin Harrison. He listened to them but did not give any solutions to this problem. In 1896, Mary Church Terrell was elected president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW),¹³⁰ one of the most influential organizations in the country. In 1899, she was elected for a second term President of the NACW.¹³¹ In 1909, she was one of the founding fathers of the NAACP. Throughout her life, Terrell fought for her right as an African American and as a woman. She also worked for woman suffrage.

¹²⁶ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 38.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

¹²⁸ Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 93.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

¹³⁰ NACW: In 1897, the National Association of Colored Women had over five thousand members devoted to women's advancement and justice and equality for all Blacks. Black women leaders of this organization included Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, Harriet Tubman, and Ida B. Wells. It had been central to Black suffragists' efforts and had linked Black clubwomen in communities across the nation. It included more than 200,000 members in forty one states in the mid 1920's. From: Zita Allen, Black Women Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, 1996, p. 14.

¹³¹ Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 94.

1.7 THE BIRTH OF THE BLACK WOMEN'S CLUB MOVEMENT

It was in the first half of the twentieth century, that the Civil Rights revolution was launched by hundreds of Black women, who created the Black Women's Club movement in order to uplift their race out of poverty, and to eradicate social and political inequality.¹³²

For African Americans in the early twentieth century, the struggle consisted first in the building of institutions such as schools, businesses, or clubs within the African American World. The second step was the fight for integration into white institutions, represented in schools, workplaces, public accommodations like hotels, restaurants, and finally councils of government.¹³³

Having a long history of slavery, African Americans had relied on both their families and their religion to seek emancipation.¹³⁴ Indeed, religion provided the basis for their activism, and the church was the gathering place where people could discuss about the building of a school or speak freely about the threat of lynching.¹³⁵ They would also think about the migration to the "Black towns", in Northern cities. The Church was also a means of family support for Black people, providing them with solutions to problems like unemployment.

Throughout the North and the South, Black churches published newspapers, provided social welfare services, and helped people find jobs. These activities needed time and money. In most Black churches the greatest contribution for volunteer work was provided by women. They had played active roles in the National Baptist Convention¹³⁶, where they represented two thirds of the membership.¹³⁷

¹³² Zita Allen, op. cit., p. 17.

¹³³ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 366.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 367.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 368.

¹³⁶ National Baptist Convention: was the largest Black institution in the United States, with more than two million members. From: Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 367.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 368.

Black women wanted to create an organization within the Church that would provide them with some kind of independence. As a result, the Woman's Convention, created in 1900, grew to one million members.¹³⁸ Black women's experience in the Women's Convention had made them active in the emerging Women's Club movement.¹³⁹

It is assumed that Ida B. Wells had received important help from other Black women.¹⁴⁰ She had also played an important role in the birth of the Black Women's Club movement itself, which emerged later in the 1890's.¹⁴¹ Wells' journalism led Black women's clubs and prominent men to organize anti-lynching campaigns. Anti-lynching meetings in Boston, New Haven, Chicago, and elsewhere also influenced the formation of Black women's clubs.¹⁴²

These clubs reinforced Wells' anti-lynching work. They organized public meetings, arranged speaking tours, and raised money to finance the publication of her New York Age articles in pamphlet form, entitled: "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases", in October 1892.¹⁴³

Black women's clubs were different from white women's clubs, because they worked under a double burden of sex discrimination and race discrimination. Black women's activities were varied: they founded schools, orphanages, clinics, hospitals, homes for the aged, and institutions for young delinquents. They ran kindergartens, organized mother's clubs, and organized public health campaigns.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 369.

¹³⁹ Women's Club Movement: Women's use of voluntary organizations to work for social and political change in their communities, and at the state and national levels, most notably from the 1860's through the 1930's. Although women in the US did not win the vote until 1920, they used alternative means to exert influence in public life before then. In the mid nineteenth century, women formed their own groups to lobby for the abolition of slavery, the temperate use of alcohol, and a broader extension of political rights. During the Civil War, women also cooperated with one another to provide relief, and to raise money for the needs of soldiers. With strengthening numbers, clubwomen tried to solve social problems of their day. In the early twentieth century, women pressured government to establish mothers' pensions, infant and maternity health care, child labor laws, public libraries, pure food and drug laws, and in 1914, woman suffrage. From: *Encyclopedia Americana*, volume 29, p. 108.

¹⁴⁰ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁴³ Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 310.

¹⁴⁴ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 36.

Black Women's Clubs advocated woman's suffrage in the early twentieth century. In fact, by the end of the nineteenth century women activists transformed their women's rights into the women's suffrage movement. They wanted to get their right to vote. Once white women gained the ballot, Black women continued to struggle until the period of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to gain such a right, as racist policies had kept them out off the Suffragist Movement.

In 1896, the National Association of Colored women (NACW) was formed¹⁴⁵, and by 1914, it had some 50,000 members in 1000 clubs.¹⁴⁶ Its founding platform included the goal: "To secure and enforce civil and political rights for ourselves as one group", and the slogan adopted by the NACW was: "Lifting as we climb".¹⁴⁷ The NACW had borne a middle class that was more confident and better educated. It also asserted female autonomy, and the moral awakening of the Black community. Its goal was "to secure and enforce civil and political rights for ourselves and our group".¹⁴⁸ Members of the NACW consisted of an urban elite mainly teachers and wives of professionals, ministers, and businessmen. These Black women wanted to ban racism and were aware that they were excluded from white institutions.¹⁴⁹ They were also confronted to many hardships with white women's reform organizations such as the Suffrage Movement or the Temperance Movement.¹⁵⁰

Black organizations devoted to Black Civil Rights, such as the Niagara Movement of 1905-1908, which denounced white racism and demanded full citizenship for Blacks, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) formed in 1909, that carried out the campaign against lynching in the twentieth century.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁴⁶ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 181.

¹⁴⁷ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 34.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁴⁹ Robin. D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 369.

¹⁵⁰ Temperance Movement: or anti-alcohol movement. Founded in 1874, the Women's Christian Temperance Union became the largest female organization by 1890. From: Eric Foner, op. cit., p. 661.

¹⁵¹ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 181.

The barbarity of lynching made the era of the twentieth century even worse than the period of slavery.¹⁵² Black men lost their right to vote, and all over the USA, men, women, and children found themselves excluded from public spaces. They worked hard during the Jim Crow Era of segregation, violence, and repression. These Jim Crow Laws were intended to isolate and intimidate Blacks, and remained effective in most Southern states until the 1960's.¹⁵³ The struggle for racial equality would last another half century, during which Black women will survive by organizing all kinds of protests.

1.8 THE INFLUENCE OF BOOKER.T.WASHINGTON ON THE BLACK WOMEN'S CLUB MOVEMENT

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, and after the period of Reconstruction, the status of Black people had declined, especially in the South. They were denied their rights, and were deprived of voting. Segregation in schools was so widespread in the South that Blacks remained at their lower social status.¹⁵⁴

In this context of deteriorating conditions, emerged prominent African American leaders, especially in the South: they wanted Blacks to gain an education, and achieve economic independence. The most influential of these leaders was Booker. T. Washington (1856-1915). Born during slavery, Washington began teaching in 1880, and founded the "Black Normal School Tuskegee", in Alabama, in 1881.¹⁵⁵ He gave Blacks the opportunity to gain both educational and economic progress through struggle, and asked whites to help Blacks in social and economic advancement.¹⁵⁶ Tuskegee Institute was the largest Black educational institution in Washington's era. It taught self determination, and economic independence in a region dominated by a system called sharecrop agriculture.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p.183.

¹⁵³ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁵⁴ John Hope Franklin and August Meier, op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

Under this system, Blacks had never been able to buy land, so they became sharecroppers.¹⁵⁸ They would rent their lands to whites and be paid only at the end of the year when the agricultural goods were produced and sold. This system created more poverty and dependence of Blacks upon whites who would take a larger percentage on the farm production.¹⁵⁹

Booker T. Washington advised African Americans to remain in the South, on their farms, and accept the society as it was. Obviously, he did not tolerate racial prejudice and discrimination, but he believed that the best way to fight it was by improving the economic and educational level of Blacks, not by protesting or asking for civil rights.¹⁶⁰

In 1900, Washington founded the “National Negro Business League”.¹⁶¹ By 1915, the league became a Black Chamber of commerce¹⁶², which had six hundred state and local branches. Women’s clubs considered the league a source of power, and many women became businesswomen like Madame C.J Walker¹⁶³ and others.

Black Women’s Clubs were proud of Washington’s oratory skills.¹⁶⁴ They also deeply believed in his philosophy of Black self-help and racial pride. They supported his ideas of industrial education, as was the case of Mary McLeod Bethune, the school founder, who considered that industrial education was indispensable for the economic survival of her school.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ Sharecropper: one who shares the crops he raises with the owner of the land in return for the right to farm the land. It provides a tenant relationship without exchange of cash, as crops are used instead. From: William O. Kellogg, *op.cit.*, p. 155.

¹⁵⁹ Melinda Tims, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁶⁰ Eric Foner, *op. cit.*, p. 660.

¹⁶¹ John Hope Franklin and August Meier, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁶² Paula Giddings, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁶³ Madame C.J. Walker: (1867-1919), she was a shampoo manufacturer in Indianapolis. With more than 5000 female employees, it became the country’s largest African American owned business. She was generous with her money, contributing to the NAACP, and to Mary McLeod Bethune’s school. From: Sheila Keenan, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

¹⁶⁴ Paula Giddings, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Booker T. Washington created an annual Negro Conference, to discuss Black problems; however, he was criticized for his 'Compromise Speech' in 1895¹⁶⁶, where he said that Black Americans should accept their 'inferior position' and qualified them as a 'child race'. As a result, many Black Women's Clubs broke with Washington, as he showed ambiguity in politics. Although he claimed human rights, as well as material advancement for Blacks, Washington opposed the Grandfather Clause¹⁶⁷ and did not support Universal Suffrage.¹⁶⁸

In addition, he did not believe in Woman Suffrage. Washington's philosophy to oppose equal and social rights for Blacks, led Black Women's Clubs to revolt against him.¹⁶⁹ Both Mary Church Terrell, and Ida. B. Wells broke with him because they were against his policies. They began to speak in favor of W.E.B Dubois, another Black African American leader, as a rivalry emerged between both activists.¹⁷⁰

Booker T. Washington made Tuskegee Institute the centre of news information about lynching; however, he did not succeed to stop lynching, to help Black people to gain their right to vote, or to break down Jim Crow laws.¹⁷¹ His message that Blacks should accept segregation, and focus on self determination, was criticized by Black activists such as W.E. Dubois, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, and others.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Melinda Tims, op, cit., p. 90.

¹⁶⁷ Grandfather Clause: states that anyone whose father or grandfather had been qualified to vote in 1867 did not have to pass literacy or citizenship tests or to be subjected to other hurdles to registration. From: Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 304.

¹⁶⁸ John Hope Franklin and August Meier, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁶⁹ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 105.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁷¹ John Hope Franklin and August Meier, op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁷² John Murrin, Liberty, Equality, Power, 2006, p. 770.

1.9 THE EMERGENCE OF THE NAACP

William Edward Burghardt (WEB) Du Bois (1863-1963), was the first African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard University. In 1899, he became a professor at Atlanta University.¹⁷³ He was in disagreement with Booker .T. Washington's analysis and his policy of accommodation; and with other Black activists, he helped create the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

The first NAACP meeting was held on Lincoln's birthday, February, the twelfth 1909.¹⁷⁴ Dubois was a founding member of this militant association which sought to promote Black rights such as the right to vote, to end segregation, and to give complete equality and economic opportunities for Blacks.

In May 1910, the NAACP was officially established.¹⁷⁵ It was the nation's oldest and largest organization dedicated to fighting racial discrimination and prejudice. It also marked the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement. From the beginning, its goal was to integrate the races. It adopted the use of the Constitution and the Court system of the United States in order to achieve civil rights for African Americans by legal means.

At that time, Black women were making social advances. Some were acquiring education and became teachers, doctors, or lawyers. The first Black woman doctor, Rebecca lee, got her diploma in 1864 in Boston, and Charlotte Rey became a lawyer from a Black University in 1872.¹⁷⁶

Many Black women became members of the NAACP. Mary Church Terrell was officially invited to the founding conference in 1909, and became a member of the NAACP's executive committee.¹⁷⁷ She organized a Washington .D.C branch, and became its Vice President.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 771.

¹⁷⁴ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 90.

¹⁷⁵ John Murrin, op. cit., p. 772.

¹⁷⁶ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 90.

¹⁷⁷ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 107.

Another woman participated at the NAACP founding conference; her name was Ida. B. Wells Barnett. She was among the first Black women to join the NAACP.¹⁷⁸ Rosa Parks, another twentieth century civil rights activist, worked a long time for this association.

The NAACP was an organization in which Black women publicized the horrors of lynching.¹⁷⁹ They helped raise money for the passage of the Dyer Anti-lynching Bill in 1922, which was first introduced in 1918 into the House of Representatives by Congressman Leonidas Dyer.¹⁸⁰ The NAACP firmly supported the Dyer Bill, and was its primary sponsor. The NAACP began campaigning against lynching in 1909, and the Dyer Bill¹⁸¹ was one of the most successful attempts to publicize the atrocity of lynching.

Black women will continue their anti-lynching campaign, started by Ida. B. Wells in the 1890's¹⁸², until the mid twentieth century. They gained the support of white women in their movement against lynching, as many of them were lynched during this period, though in smaller number. Black women were dedicated to the cause of lynching by raising funds for the NAACP; they succeeded in uniting one million women in the battle against lynching, Black and white women.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) played a central role in the Civil Rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁸³ After decades of continuing struggle, the NAACP's victories were won after the Supreme Court passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁸⁰ John Hope Franklin and August Meier, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁸¹ Dyer Bill: Black women's efforts to end lynching led to the passage of the Dyer Anti-lynching Bill. From: Mary Beth Norton, Ruth M, Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

¹⁸² William O. Kellogg, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

¹⁸³ Adam Fairclough, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we have to say that from their arrival on the American shores, Black women had been victims of dual oppression in the American political system; the first resulting from racial oppression, and the second from gender oppression. During slavery, they resisted all kinds of hardships, including the separation from their families by sale, beatings, whippings, and the sexual assault of their masters. In spite of their sufferings, Black women had made a great contribution to the Abolitionist Movement.

As they participated in this movement, they acquired important skills in speaking, organizing and promoting social changes, and therefore creating the Women's Rights Movement. They played a crucial role during the Civil War. They were finally considered as American citizens after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment which abolished slavery, but were still denied basic civil liberties enjoyed by white citizens. With their fight against lynching, Black women created their own organizations to defend their rights. They worked hard by struggling for the right to vote, and sought to make of this right a universal reform.

Chapter 2

***Black Women's Struggle for
Equality and Justice***

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Introduction

It is assumed that Black men have always been the leaders in the fight for civil rights; Black women have also played a vital part in the movement and deserve recognition in the long list of Black activists. In the struggle for civil rights, a large number of heroines emerged, but they were not given as much importance as Black men.

It is well known that these Black women suffered a lot; they were beaten, arrested, and violently abused. Most of them risked their lives and that of their families; in spite of this, they found both the moral courage and the physical force to carry out a long fight for equality and justice.

A few examples of civil rights activists included Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Mary McLeod Bethune, Coretta Scott King, and many others. These women fought for civil rights in order to improve Black women's existence, and to acquire more political power. They refused to be dependent on whites who still considered them as an inferior race. For Black women, equality and justice meant the same economic opportunities as white women, the eradication of segregation and violence, and more political rights. They sought to reclaim the unfulfilled promises of the Declaration of Independence for Liberty and freedom. As Ella Baker had said:

You must let the oppressed define their own freedom.^[184]

¹⁸⁴ Eric Foner, The Story Of American Freedom, 1999, p. 279.

2.1 THE ORIGINS OF CIVIL RIGHTS

In the seventeenth century, philosophers in Britain and America developed the theory of natural rights. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) assumed that human beings were naturally free, equal and independent. John Locke (1632-1704), an English political theorist, viewed that people had the right to establish their government and reject any of its authoritative power. Locke's views had inspired the American Revolution and the writing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, which proclaimed that:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.^[185]

The US Constitution (1789) and the Bill of Rights (1791) were the extension of the concept of natural rights; therefore, they sought to guarantee civil and political rights to American citizens. Unfortunately, these rights were enjoyed only by white American citizens; African Americans fought and died for the independence of the new nation, for the Civil War, but they were not given their basic civil rights. After fighting many injustices caused by the brutality of the Ku Klux Klan¹⁸⁶, and the Jim Crow laws¹⁸⁷, African Americans would gain full recognition of their rights a hundred years later, during the Civil Rights Revolution of the 1960's. The civil rights and liberties enjoyed by American citizens are taken from The Bill of Rights, which is represented by the ten Amendments of the American Constitution. The First Amendment guaranteed freedom of speech, press, assembly, and to practice religion freely. The Fourth Amendment protected the privacy and security of the home and personal effects, whereas the Fifth Amendment stipulated that "no one shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without the intervention of the law".

¹⁸⁵ Ron Field, Civil Rights in America, 2002, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ Ku Klux Klan: Organized in Tennessee in 1866, to terrorize former slaves who voted and held political offices during Reconstruction. The organization was revived in the 1910s and 1920s, and stressed white, Anglo-Saxon, fundamentalist Protestant supremacy. The Klan revived a third time to fight the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the South. From: Ron Field, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁸⁷ Jim Crow: a show character whose name became synonymous with racial segregation. Jim Crow laws refer to all forms of discrimination in public places such as schools, restaurants, theaters, where Blacks were separated from whites. From: Ron Field, op. cit., p. 45.

The civil rights cited within the Bill of Rights were applied to every American citizen, but not to the 500,000 slaves living in the United States at that time.¹⁸⁸ Some Free Blacks had been given civil rights during their fight for the American Revolution, but they were suddenly taken their rights, and by 1840, 93 per cent of the Black population in the United States had been refused the right to vote. During that period, African Americans were also excluded from the skilled and better paid jobs.¹⁸⁹

The thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, more precisely known as the Civil War Amendments, were designed to give civil and political rights to the former slaves. In 1866, The Civil Rights Bill defined that “all persons born in the United States were to enjoy their rights, without regard to race”. No States could apply laws like the Black codes¹⁹⁰, which discriminated between Black and white citizens.

The thirteenth Amendment prohibited slavery and was adopted in 1865. The fourteenth Amendment, adopted in 1868, stipulated that all persons born on the American soil were American citizens and were under the equal protection of the laws. The fifteenth Amendment, adopted in 1870, gave all Black men the right to vote; however, in the South, Blacks remained disenfranchised.¹⁹¹ During the Reconstruction Era, Congress passed a Civil Rights Act in 1876, providing all people regardless of race or color, equal accommodation in public places like hotels, theaters and other places; however, this act did not give the opportunity for Blacks to gain neither economic power, nor improve their social status. Southern states found ways to deny Blacks their right to vote, for example the Grandfather Clause¹⁹² said that if your grandfather had not voted, you could not.

¹⁸⁸ Ron Field, op .cit., p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ Black Codes (1865-1866): were laws passed in Southern States to restrict the rights of former slaves. These laws forced Blacks to carry special passes and severely limited their freedom of movement. They were also completely excluded from certain jobs or schools. They were not able to buy land. From Ron Field, op. cit., p.15.

¹⁹¹ To disenfranchise: to remove the right to vote from someone. Franchise is used in political science and history to refer to the right to vote. From William O. Kellogg, American History The Easy Way, 2003, p. 156.

¹⁹² Grandfather Clause: gave the vote to all male adults whose fathers or grandfathers had voted before first January 1867. From: Ron Field, op. cit., p. 49.

The Black Codes stipulated that Blacks were prohibited from voting or serving in juries. They could not own or carry guns, were forbidden to marry white people, and were excluded from occupations where they would be in contact with whites. African Americans were also deprived of their lands, which were still held by their former owners. As a result, they worked as sharecroppers¹⁹³, the fact which made them still dependent on whites. Neither their social status nor their economic situation had been changed by the Civil War or the Reconstruction period.

The Ku Klux Klan was an organization which emerged in 1867. It used terror and violence to intimidate Blacks¹⁹⁴. Moreover, the Jim Crow laws were recognized to have extended the meaning of segregation in the South. Being deprived of their civil rights, Black people lived under a racial system that would last until the 1950's.

This widespread segregation and discrimination were the context in which African Americans would struggle to gain civil and political rights during the twentieth century. They organized boycotts, held meetings, challenging the segregation laws of the South; therefore, Blacks showed resistance by opposing a racist system imposed upon them. It is assumed that it would take them another century of struggle to secure fully their civil rights as American citizens.

¹⁹³ Sharecropper: One who shares the crops he raises with the owner of the land in return for the right to farm the land. It provides a tenant relationship without exchange of cash, as crops are used instead. From: William O. Kellogg, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

2.2 BLACK WOMEN AND POLITICS IN THE 1920's

2.2.1 THE GREAT MIGRATION

It is said that the Great Migration caused by World War I contributed to the growth of African American communities in Northern cities. From 1914 to 1920, between 300,000 to 500,000 African Americans left the rural South to the North, in search of economic opportunities offered after WWI.¹⁹⁵ African American women migrated to the North, because they were searching for a new life. Tired from working in kitchens and farms, they hoped to find work in Northern factories. For the first time, they were given the opportunity to be employed in jobs rather than domestic work. However, they suffered a lot as they found themselves barred from most industrial and commercial employment.¹⁹⁶

Black women were permitted to work in factories, and many were entering social work. They became clerks, storekeepers, policewomen, and officers. Others found jobs in health services as nurses or doctors. Although Black women were hired in many industrial fields, they had to perform the most difficult and the dirtiest jobs. They were often refused to be recruited by white employers, the fact which made them accept any job offered to them. Of course, they did the most tiring tasks as the cleaning or the lifting of heavy things, which were the lowest paid jobs.¹⁹⁷ White women also discriminated against Black women and refused to work side by side with them; moreover, Black women were paid between 10 to 60 percent less than white women.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ John Mack Faragher, Out of Many. A history of the American People, 1997, p.708.

¹⁹⁶ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 142.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 144.

Although the percentage of Black women who entered industry had increased, they represented only 6.7 percent of the working force. Because they were inexperienced and suffered from discrimination, Black women sought to find work in Black owned businesses, which represented a minority compared with the majority of white businesses.¹⁹⁹

Black women worked in hostile conditions, and were largely excluded from many industries. Instead, they gained many jobs in the medical and nursing professions; however, despite the progress they made in the 1920's, their employment opportunities remained the same as before the War, as they still held positions in domestic services.²⁰⁰

Lynching and other forms of racial violence persisted in the South, the fact which overwhelmingly contributed to the Great Migration. Blacks who migrated to the North lived in poor and overcrowded cities, facing many diseases and a high death rate resulting from extremely deteriorating living conditions. But the opportunity to earn more and the chance to get rid from racial violence encouraged Blacks to migrate to Northern cities. There, they acquired a new sense of consciousness and activism against discrimination. As they were disappointed by their treatment during and after the War, they tried to find new cultural and political strategies to fight against injustice.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 145.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁰¹ John Mack Faragher, op. cit., p. 708.

One of the most famous Black communities of the North was the New York City's Harlem, the cultural capital of Black America; during the years between 1920 and 1930, approximately 90,000 Black people arrived in Harlem. Although they lived in overcrowded flats, in unsanitary conditions, and holding the least paid jobs, Blacks in Harlem became artists, musicians, and intellectuals. Indeed, they sought to develop a culture of their own, from the experiences of African American people, creating therefore the Harlem Renaissance.²⁰²

In the 1920's, Harlem witnessed the emergence of new leaders and also new movements and organizations, like the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), created by Marcus Garvey²⁰³. The latter was a Jamaican immigrant who moved to Harlem in 1916; he created a movement which focused on Black unity, self-determination, and activism among the Black communities of the United States, and Africa.²⁰⁴

There was also the women's branch of Marcus Garvey's UNIA. Amy Jacques Garvey, Marcus Garvey's wife, was its leader. She was a feminist who dedicated herself to the struggle of Black women in America. She was also concerned with the problems of Third World women. She wanted Black women in the United States to fight for social justice, and racial discrimination by liberating themselves from white oppression; however, her ambitious program was stopped by Marcus Garvey's deportation in 1927.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Ibid., p. 746.

²⁰³ Marcus Garvey: (1887-1940), he was a Black Nationalist leader. Garvey's message was in essence Black chauvinism. African Americans must restore their self-respect through pride in a glorious past, and they must assure a promising future by creating Black-owned enterprises. The Blacks of the world must also be literate and develop the African homeland. From: Encyclopedia Americana, 2006, volume 12, p. 316.

²⁰⁴ John Mack Faragher, op. cit., p. 747.

²⁰⁵ Mary Beth Norton, Major Problems in American Women's History, 1996, p. 352.

2.2.2 BLACK WOMEN IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

The Progressive Era²⁰⁶ was a period in which American society improved through education, political reform, social welfare and business reform, but Blacks were still discriminated against, lynched, and disenfranchised. Racism was widespread in the Progressive Era; President McKinley was assassinated by a Black person. President Theodore Roosevelt, his successor, was also against the progress of Blacks, because he considered them as an inferior race.

It is assumed that when Woodrow Wilson became President, he passed other progressive reforms but did nothing to suppress the sufferings of Blacks. Instead, he established the Jim Crow laws, with separate accommodations for Blacks or “Colored Only”.²⁰⁷ During the Progressive Era, whites were ready to punish any African American, male or female, who showed too much importance to challenge the principles of white supremacy.²⁰⁸

Although menaced by whites, Black women had stressed their perseverance and determination to provide leadership roles in their communities. Indeed, the Progressive Era witnessed the transformation of traditional roles of women. More and more women were working for wages. In the South, Black women were still working as domestics or in Southern cotton fields. In the North instead, they worked in low paying factory jobs.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Progressive Era: the years between 1901 and 1917, that witnessed progressive political reforms, progressive business methods, progressive farming techniques, and progressive education. From: Virginia Bernhard, Firsthand America, A History of The United States, Volume 2, 1994, p. 669.

²⁰⁷ Ron Field, op. cit., p. 50.

²⁰⁸ John Murrin, op. cit., p. 758.

²⁰⁹ Eric Foner, Give Me Liberty, 2005, p. 685.

In 1920, the working woman, either white or Black, immigrant or native, became a symbol of female emancipation. Women had suffered from wage discrimination and exclusion from many jobs. In spite of this, they developed a sense of independence, and a strong personality; therefore, they performed their functions as wives and mothers, and contributed to the improvement of female condition.

It was during the Progressive Era that the word feminism appeared in the political vocabulary. In 1914, questions about feminism were dealt with first in New York, where a meeting was held in the presence of female professionals, and social activists. Feminism meant women's emancipation; it also meant gaining the right to vote, to have greater economic opportunities and a free discussion on sexuality. This movement toward sexual freedom was the consequence of the economic, professional, and educational restrictions imposed on women, stopping therefore their social advancement.²¹⁰

The Progressive Era was primarily concerned with the plight of women who were still excluded from political participation. These women wanted to improve their condition and that of immigrant communities.²¹¹ Black women worked for social reform; they built schools for children, libraries, and focused their energies on improving educational opportunities for Blacks. They also established employment bureaus and health clinics. Female activism spread throughout the Nation. Being kept in poverty, most Black women were among the lowest of the working classes. They were more concerned with racist issues than in feminist ones. During the 1920's, the status of Black women remained the same, but they continued to form Black women's organizations to advance their cause.²¹²

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 698.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 705.

²¹² John Murrin, *op. cit.*, p. 758.

Famous Black women organized themselves to fight against lynching like Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell. They combined the fight against sexism with the fight against racism, and continued to focus on these issues. Both of these women spoke against lynching, and were ready to challenge the Jim Crow laws in public places.²¹³

During the 1920's, Afro American women leaders and their organizations focused on both Black men and Black women's rights.²¹⁴ The NAACP was unable to protect the rights of Black women who suffered from race problems. This did not prevent them from holding conferences, in which they sought to raise the status of Black women in the South. They claimed for better housing for Blacks, fair treatment in public accommodations, and the prevention of lynching; however, neither their economic nor their social status improved during the 1920's.²¹⁵ As their civil and political rights were ignored, Black women would join suffrage organizations and assume the role of political actors, in order to gain their right to vote.

2.2.3 THE CAMPAIGN FOR SUFFRAGE

At a time when woman suffrage was mainly a white female concern, Black women's most urgent problem was to gain the ballot. Even if they were excluded from that dream by white women, Afro American women had a well- defined goal: to gain political equality.²¹⁶ The fight for women's equality started in the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, in July of 1848, white women gathered in New York to discuss their problems in a meeting called "The Seneca Falls Convention". It was organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was considered as the most eloquent feminist of the first generation of women's rights activists. With Susan B. Anthony, she founded the "National Woman Suffrage Association" or (NWSA), just after the Civil War.²¹⁷

²¹³ Mary Beth Norton, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

²¹⁷ Melinda Tims, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

In November, 1869, the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) was founded, and by 1890, it became the (NAWSA) or National American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Stanton and Anthony.²¹⁸

It is assumed that white women had a segregated attitude on the right to vote for Black women. Although white women ignored them and excluded them from white organizations, Black women supported the cause of woman's suffrage. For both Black and white women, the vote represented the key for gaining political power; however, white women wanted to gain the vote for themselves, and keep Black women far from this goal. They were discontented about Black women's eventual enfranchisement; indeed, the Black woman suffrage campaign after WWI was a battle in which Black women had to confront white women.²¹⁹

Black women were determined and well prepared to demand their rights for full citizenship, on economic, social, and political terms. They assumed that the right to vote would solve race problems among them: segregation, and lynching. The right to vote would also enable them to work for the right of education in the South, to improve their working conditions, and to raise the status of Blacks, both male and female. W.E.B. Du Bois had declared: *Votes for women means votes for Black women.*²²⁰ For him, the Black race would acquire political power only with the participation of Black women.

The suffrage movement was undertaken by different people and organizations that worked together for the goal of votes for women. The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) had organized the vote on a state by state basis.²²¹ American women had finally gained the right to vote on August, 26, 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment joined the Constitution.²²² Twenty six million American women gained the ballot, but this victory still deprived many Black women from the right to vote.

²¹⁸ Stanton and Anthony: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony were the leaders of the movement for women's rights in the nineteenth century. Both women were hardworking Abolitionists. After the Civil war, Anthony and Stanton had great hopes that both African Americans and women would get the vote. In 1868, the two suffragists started publishing "The Revolution", a weekly women's newspaper. From: Sheila Keenan, Scholastic Encyclopedia of Women in the United States, 2002, p. 29.

²¹⁹ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 159.

²²⁰ Paula Giddings, op. cit., 1984, p. 121.

²²¹ George Sullivan, op. cit., p. 38.

²²² Ibid., p. 66.

Black women knew that it was the beginning of a long struggle in order to be able to vote in this country.²²³ In many Southern states, they were prevented from voting; in spite of the discrimination they faced, Black women were registering in large numbers in the South, especially in Georgia and Louisiana; however, they were not allowed to vote in Virginia and the Carolinas. They had to wait on long lines until white women registered. They were even required to pay taxes, and to have educational tests.²²⁴ Any woman who failed to read, who could not sign her name, who did not own a minimum amount of property, or who could not pay a tax, lost her right to vote. Most women failed these tests because they were the poorest and the least educated, especially in the South.

White suffragists were discriminating against Black women in the Suffrage campaign and wanted to pass an amendment to eliminate them from the vote.²²⁵ Black women were also discouraged by white suffragists to apply for membership in Black organizations such as the NAWSA, and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), which were mainly concerned with the vote of Colored women. The NAACP was another important organization that helped Black women to carry on their fight. They worked in the NAACP's suffrage department, and their job consisted in designing voter education programs, denouncing cases of discrimination, and focusing on Black women's desire to vote.

It is said that Black suffragists wanted reforms in social life. They assumed that the right to vote would ameliorate social problems such as lynching or discrimination. They organized suffrage clubs, participated in demonstrations, and supported their cause by writing essays. Suffrage clubs were founded across the country including Tuskegee, St Louis, Los Angeles, Boston, and New Orleans.²²⁶

²²³ Paula Giddings, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

²²⁴ John Murrin, *op. cit.*, p. 765.

²²⁵ Paula Giddings, *op. cit.*, 1984, p. 160.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

It was during the second half of the twentieth century, that Black women accomplished the greatest effort for suffrage. More than twenty Black women suffrage associations were formed such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the National Federation of Afro American Women, and the Northeastern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. They supported woman suffrage and were represented by thousands African American women.²²⁷ It is assumed that in New York, a Black woman, Anna K Lewis was elected vice chairman of the New York Women's Suffrage Party. In that state, seventy five thousand Black women were registered.²²⁸

Afro American women in the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) had a special suffrage department in which forty thousand Black women worked; moreover, the NACW was highly concerned with the vote of Colored women. Ida B. Wells had founded the Alpha Suffrage Club in Chicago, in 1913.²²⁹ It was the first Black women's suffrage club in Illinois.

Harriet Tubman and Mary Church Terrell were also determined to fight for the enfranchisement of Black women. It is said that in 1919, Mary Church Terrell had informed that white suffragists in Florida were discriminating against Black women in the suffrage campaign. She also said that Alice Paul²³⁰, the head of the Woman's Party was against Black women's vote in the state of Carolina.

White women wanted to pass an amendment in order to eliminate Black people from the vote.²³¹ Black women attended a meeting with Alice Paul, challenging her by saying:

We have come here as members of various organizations and from different sections representing five million colored women of the country. We have come today to call your attention to the flagrant violations of the intent and purposes of the Susan .B. Anthony amendment in the election of 1920. We cannot believe that you will permit this amendment to be distorted in its interpretation, that it shall lose its full power and effectiveness. Five million women in the U.S cannot be denied their rights without all the women of the U.S feeling the effect of that denial. No women are free until all women are free.^[232]

²²⁷ Mary Beth Norton, op. cit., p. 349.

²²⁸ Paula Giddings, op. cit, p. 130.

²²⁹ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 120.

²³⁰ Alice Paul: (1885-1977), she split from NAWSA in 1913, and formed the National Woman's Party in 1917. Her efforts were important to the passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, which gave women the right to vote. She also wrote the first Equal Rights Amendment, and got it introduced into Congress in 1923. From: Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 83.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 160.

²³² Ibid., p. 169.

The experience of Black women in the suffrage movement showed that although they shared common goals with white women, they faced many difficulties to work together as long as the race problem persisted. They would carry on their fight with different and opposite aims, but they were aware that the contribution of women, both Black and white, will finally give them both racial and political equality.²³³

2.3 BLACK WOMEN IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

2.3.1 THE DEPRESSION AND THE NEW DEAL

It is commonly recognized that after women had won the right to vote in 1920, they would be confronted to more serious problems. Indeed, with the emergence of the Great Depression, hard economic conditions hit the country, making poverty, unemployment and economic reforms the most urgent political issues.²³⁴

It is well known that African Americans suffered during the Great Depression of the 1930's, particularly from unemployment and starvation. By 1932, Black unemployment represented over fifty per cent, and colored people did not succeed to keep their jobs. Black women faced difficult times. They worked more than fifty hours each week, and were menaced to be fired if they complained.²³⁵ In the South, Black people could not hope to find jobs until white people were employed. This form of discrimination had made them apply only for low-paying and dirty jobs.

²³³ Ibid., p. 170.

²³⁴ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 146.

²³⁵ Robin D. G Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 411.

When Franklin. D. Roosevelt became President in 1933²³⁶, he promised a “New Deal”²³⁷ for the American people in order to help the nation to work. He realized that the Depression was an economic disaster, which required a series of New Deal programs.²³⁸ African Americans still suffered from discrimination, especially women. Indeed, Black people received the least benefits from government, which included work, housing, and social security programs. African American women were the worst affected by the Depression; hence, they needed to have a voice during the New Deal of Franklin. D. Roosevelt.²³⁹

They deepened their struggle, launched movements to confront Jim Crow laws, and have access to the larger economic, political, social and cultural life of the Nation. After their long efforts in the Women’s Club Movement, then, in the suffrage movement, and finally against lynching, Black women continued to be discriminated against during the 1930’s.²⁴⁰

Segregation was still present during the New Deal; Black workers were often refused to be employed by white-owned departments;²⁴¹ as a result, they formed their own organizations to protect themselves. The most powerful example of these organizations was the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSPC).²⁴² Philip Randolph²⁴³, who was viewed as the architect of the Civil Rights Movement in America, had been the leader of this organization. He forced the labor movement to accept Blacks into their unions, and treat them fairly. He urged Blacks to fight for freedom and justice; he focused on an eight point program which asked for the right to vote for Blacks, the abolition of taxes, and the abolition of segregation in transportation, schools, housing, public accommodations, and the armed forces. Working women were often fired from their jobs, and by the end of the Depression, more women than men were unemployed.

²³⁶ Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 98.

²³⁷ New Deal: the program begun by US President Franklin D Roosevelt in the 1930’s to end the Great Depression. It introduced new economic and social measures, and made the national government more powerful. New organizations were created to manage it, including the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Works Progress Administration. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, p. 327.

²³⁸ Adam Fairclough, op.cit, p. 146.

²³⁹ Robin D. G Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 416.

²⁴⁰ Mary Beth Norton, Ruth M Alexander, op. cit., p. 354.

²⁴¹ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 148.

²⁴² BSPC: an organization formed in 1925 to protect the rights of Black workers. It was the first Black labor union. Sleeping Car Porters were men, almost always African Americans, who attended to passengers in the overnight Pullman train cars. From: Diane Mc Whorter, A Dream of Freedom, 2004, p. 91.

²⁴³ Philip Randolph: (1889- 1979), he forced the organized labor movement to accept Blacks into their unions, which led to the formation of a Black middle class in America. From: Sheila Hardy and P. Stephen Hardy, Extraordinary People of the Civil Rights Movement, 2007, p. 17.

Franklin. D. Roosevelt had finally admitted that lynching was a murder, and by 1939, African Americans began to improve their economic situation with the New Deal social programs. Roosevelt saw the growing importance of the Black vote; therefore, he appointed a great number of African Americans to federal posts. At least forty-five Blacks were appointed in various New Deal agencies and cabinet departments. “The Black cabinet” had improved African Americans’ positions in a variety of New Deal programs.²⁴⁴

The First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt played a crucial role in increasing her support of civil rights issues for African Americans. She established close contacts with Black women leaders, and contributed to help them in their struggle against lynching. She also offered help to Black institutions especially schools, and supported racial justice to advance the cause of African Americans.²⁴⁵

She held press conferences to which only women were invited; moreover, she urged her husband to appoint more women to government posts. In 1934, Eleanor Roosevelt started taking an active stand on racial issues; she supported Black leaders and organizations, the fact which gave more significance to the Civil Rights Movement. She was also widely respected by the Black community for her determination in opposing racial discrimination.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Robin. D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 417.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 418.

²⁴⁶ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 219.

2.3.2 THE ROLE OF MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE

For the first time, a Black woman was heard by the President of the United States, and was strongly helped by the First Lady, who was not only concerned with women's issues, but also with Black issues. In 1936, Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) was named by President Roosevelt as the Negro Affairs Director for the National Youth Administration.²⁴⁷ Bethune was also the founder of the Bethune Cookman Institute in Daytona, Florida, and had been a leader in the Black Women's club Movement since the early 1920's.²⁴⁸ She was mainly concerned with the future of Black women. She taught in different American schools, and had a desire to do missionary work in Africa. This desire originated from her religion and her African heritage. She was proud that the African blood flowed in her veins, and that her mother was a descendent from royal African ancestors.²⁴⁹

It is said that Mary Bethune was one of the most active leaders in the club movement. She was elected president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) from 1924 to 1928.²⁵⁰ She had fought against lynching, helped rural and working women, and contributed to the founding of schools.

Although Black women had little impact on political life, Mary Bethune assumed an important role in national politics. She helped Black people acquire jobs during the Depression. She also became considered as the leader of "The Black Cabinet", under the presidency of Roosevelt.

²⁴⁷ George Sullivan, op. cit., p. 49.

²⁴⁸ Zita Allen, Black Women Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, 1996, p. 24.

²⁴⁹ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 214.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 200.

In 1935, she created a new Black women's organization²⁵¹, which was called the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW).²⁵² Even if the country was in a Depression, and a number of Black organizations already existed, Mary Bethune insisted on the founding of that organization. She wanted to help those Black women workers who were dismissed from their jobs, those who were not paid, or did not receive their wages. Because their husbands were unemployed, those Black women became the only support for themselves and their families.²⁵³ Bethune had declared in an audience of the Chicago Women's Federation in 1933, that:

In recent years, it has become increasingly the case...the mother is the sole dependence of the home, while the father submits unwillingly to enforced idleness and unavoidable unemployment.^[254]

It is assumed that Mary Bethune was helped by Eleanor Roosevelt²⁵⁵ to solve issues concerning Black women. She wanted them to have a greater representation in Federal bureaus. Within the NCNW, she held meetings with other Black women leaders, and wanted them to be elected in administrative positions, in the Federal Housing Administration, and Social Security Board. In addition, she wanted to design a Black administrator to the Red Cross.

Bethune's main goal was to provide equal opportunities for Blacks, youth, and women.²⁵⁶ She was appointed by Franklin D. Roosevelt as the director of the Negro Division of the National Youth Administration. With this new position, she had become the most powerful African American woman within the Roosevelt Presidency.

²⁵¹ Zita Allen, op. cit., p. 24.

²⁵² NCNW: founded in 1935, this organization wanted the appointment of Black women to administrative positions in the Federal Housing Administration and Social Security Board. In addition, it called to enlarge the Black staff of the bureau of Public Health and for President Roosevelt to suggest to the American Red Cross to hire a Black administrator. From: Mary Beth Norton, op. cit., p. 355.

²⁵³ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 204.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 205

²⁵⁵ Eleanor Roosevelt: (1884-1962), she was concerned not only about women's issues, but also Black issues. She spent twelve years as the First Lady of the US, from 1933 to 1945. She would devote her life to countless causes and organizations. After the death of her husband, she was appointed by President Harry Truman as the US delegation to the UN. From: Charles Gulatta, Extraordinary Women in Politics, 1998, p. 79.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 221.

Mary Bethune was determined to raise the position of Black women. She was faithful in their achievements and always encouraged them in their battles to gain their right places,²⁵⁷ moreover, she succeeded to admit Black women into the women's division of the Navy, Army, and Air force.²⁵⁸

She was indeed passionate by four issues: Race, Women, Education, and Youth.²⁵⁹ Under the control of Bethune, the NCNW had made of public affairs, unemployment, citizenship, family life and religion their most urgent concerns. The NCNW, with other organizations like the NAACP, the National Urban League²⁶⁰, and the League of Women voters had worked together in order to suppress racism and sexism.²⁶¹

It had been proved that Black women, even during those difficult times, were improving their socio-economic situation. By 1930, the number of women graduates was increasing. The number of professional workers also increased of more than one hundred per cent since 1910.²⁶² Bethune was aware of the progress Black women were making, and she believed in their possibilities.²⁶³

In helping Black women to ask for integration into the mainstream of American life, Mary McLeod Bethune greatly contributed to Black women's rights during the Roosevelt Administration; moreover, by using her position as head of the NCNW, she became very close with the First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. She carried on her activity over the last half of the twentieth century, by being the representative of the NCNW, in the founding meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco, in June 1945.²⁶⁴ In 1949, when she left office, the NCNW represented the greatest Black women's organization in the Civil Rights activity.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 228.

²⁵⁸ Zita Allen, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁵⁹ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 222.

²⁶⁰ The National Urban League: founded in 1911, the league relied heavily on the networks developed by Black women in the club movement, and other community organizations. Women were fund raisers, and membership boosters. By 1919, it had 27 branches, and 34 by 1930. From: Zita Allen, op. cit., p. 23.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 26.

²⁶² Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 205.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 229.

²⁶⁴ Zita Allen, op. cit., p. 26.

2.4 THE ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN AFTER WWII

It is said that the years following the Second World War were a turning point in the life of African Americans in the US. WWII ended the Depression, and was the beginning of thirty years of economic development.²⁶⁵ The War years were especially important for Blacks, who were recruited in an expanding labor force; Black women constituted 600,000 of the million Blacks who were employed. During the War, Black women migrated to urban areas where there was a high demand for workers. As a result, the percentage of Black women working in factories rose from 6.5 percent to 18 percent.²⁶⁶

Black women who wanted to work now had the chance to do so. Before the war, almost three fourths of working women were domestics, and twenty percent worked on farms. During the war, Black women found jobs in factories; they also began to be accepted in jobs that had previously been reserved exclusively for whites; for example, they were recruited in health care and clerical fields; however, discrimination persisted as many Black women were often refused to be hired by white companies. They were excluded from most production jobs because all these jobs were monopolized by whites.²⁶⁷

Black women had escaped poverty of the rural South to work in an urban, industrialized society. During and after the war, Black women entered the urban female labor force in large numbers, but they occupied only the lowest posts. They remained in the unskilled and low paid fields of domestic and agricultural labor.²⁶⁸

It is assumed that between 1940 and 1944, five million women were recruited, first to replace the men who had gone to fight the war, second to fill the demands of war production. The government had encouraged women to join the labor force, but after the war, most women were fired from many of the jobs they had held.²⁶⁹ African American women became auto mechanics in 1943, at the Bethune Cookman College in Daytona Beach Florida. The college was a school for Blacks; it was founded by Mary McLeod Bethune, a well known member of Franklin Roosevelt's Black cabinet.

²⁶⁵ Nell Irvin Painter, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

²⁶⁶ Mary Beth Norton, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

²⁶⁸ Nell Irving Painter, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

²⁶⁹ Virginia Bernhard, *op. cit.*, p. 796.

Bethune used to provide federal programs to train Blacks in the skilled professions. Black women acquired skills in auto mechanics, a masculine field, because of the war's urgent claims.²⁷⁰

Black women also contributed to the baby boom of the post war years. Black families became larger, with four babies per family. This was due to Black economic gains in that period. It was after WWII that many African Americans attained the middle class status.²⁷¹ It is well known that by 1947, a large number of Black women were in colleges, and more and more Black women went to universities. By the early fifties, a great number of Black women had masters' degrees, and were included in professions from which they were excluded in the past.²⁷² In spite of this, the vast majority of Black women were still hired in domestic jobs; higher positions were assumed by white women, who earned more than the double wage of Black women. In 1950, the average Black woman earned about thirteen dollars a week. Refusing to bear this kind of injustice, Black women would fight for economic equality.²⁷³

In the early fifties, sixty percent of Black people still lived in the South. Black people who wanted to register to vote were mutilated or murdered just because they wanted to exercise their full civil rights. No law would punish white people who committed these crimes. Throughout the violent Post-War years, Black activists kept guns in their homes, and protected themselves against the mobs that attacked them.

A new era in the struggle for civil rights had begun, and Black Americans were ready for active protest.²⁷⁴ After the war, the battle for civil rights became a national issue. Blacks in the South were still deprived of their right to vote; to gain this right would represent an absolute necessity if Black people wanted to achieve any kind of success in their struggle for racial equality.

²⁷⁰ Mary Beth Norton, op. cit., p. 378.

²⁷¹ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 240.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 245.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 256.

²⁷⁴ John E. Findling, Frank W. Thackeray, Events that Changed America in the Twentieth Century, 1996, p.157.

This situation motivated a number of women civil rights activists in the forties and fifties to rebel, and to lead campaigns throughout the country, especially in the South where Black people suffered a lot. There was Daisy Bates, who would become president of the NAACP in Little Rock, Arkansas. There was also Rosa Parks, one of the first women to join the Montgomery, Alabama's NAACP branch, as a secretary. Finally, there was Ella Baker, who was leading the New York NAACP branch, where she took action against segregation in the school system. Such women had a profound determination, and an immense courage to defend their race.²⁷⁵

It is assumed that during the war, NAACP membership increased from 50,000 to nearly 500,000. The "Congress of Racial Equality" (CORE)²⁷⁶ founded in 1942, organized sit-ins in northern cities in order to desegregate restaurants and theaters. A Black woman in Memphis was fired from a factory, after she tried to enter a city bus before white passengers; Black workers at the factory decided to go on a strike until she was reintegrated.²⁷⁷

Black Americans assumed that the war represented a great opportunity for the demand for equal citizenship. They claimed primarily for the end of discrimination in schools, for better housing, employment, and the end of lynching.²⁷⁸ Black people faced discrimination while fighting in the Armed services. They were badly treated by white soldiers who refused to fight side by side with Blacks. They were considered as lazy and incapable in combat. As a result, they wanted to revolt against these false revelations.²⁷⁹

There were also cases of segregation in public transportation, when Black passengers defied white drivers by refusing to give up their seats to white people. A Black soldier's wife wrote a letter in which she told:

We're fighting a war now to insure freedom of opportunity to everybody... If the American Negro is not going to enjoy equally the fruits of democracy, why then should our men in the Armed Services be maimed or die on foreign soil... [280]

²⁷⁵ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 257.

²⁷⁶ CORE: It had been founded in 1942, by a group of students at the University of Chicago. Deeply influenced by the Indian nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi's teachings of non-violent resistance, Core sought to integrate restaurants, snack bars, lunch counters, and public restrooms throughout the North, and the Upper South. From: Ron Field, op. cit., p. 86.

²⁷⁷ Eric Foner, op. cit., p. 882.

²⁷⁸ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 185.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

²⁸⁰ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 192.

Because of the persistence of Jim Crow laws, soldiers died in fighting against segregation. They served in the Armed services, hoping to achieve the true principles of democracy, represented in freedom and equality. To this end, they became strong advocates of the Civil Rights Movement.²⁸¹

It is assumed that the Second World War was clearly important. It created a new vision for Black people who had fought it, by enabling them to ask for their citizenship rights; at the same time, it inspired people of all races to continue the struggle during the 1950's. After the war, The United States became the most powerful nation, and the founding of the United Nations²⁸² (UN) contributed to defend human rights for people all over the World.²⁸³

The United States became an international model of democracy, and African Americans addressed their demands for Civil Rights to the UN. However, poverty, inadequate housing, schooling, and other forms of segregation were still facts of African Americans' lives. Obviously, the War years witnessed the birth of the Civil Rights Movement, during which Black people would finally gain civil and political rights.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ United Nations: an international organization, based in New York, which aims to preserve peace around the World, and solve international problems. It was formed in 1945, and replaced the League of Nations. Most of the World's independent states are members, and each has one vote in the General Assembly. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, 2005, p. 492.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 193.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 185.

²⁸⁴ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 25.

2.5 THE ROLE OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

2.5.1 ORIGINS AND CAUSES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT OF THE 1960's

The African American Civil Rights Movement was a series of reform movements, which aimed at protesting against racial discrimination from which African Americans suffered. It lasted from 1954 to 1968, and had occurred for many reasons represented in the rigorous economic, social, and political oppression against Black people. Although African Americans struggled for their rights since before the Civil War, they achieved political equality until the period of the 1960's with the modern Civil Rights Movement.²⁸⁵ After the events of WWII, there was a contradiction between American ideals of democracy, and the treatment of Blacks in the United States. Indeed, during the Second World War, African Americans had faced discrimination in the military services and in the workforce. At the end of the war, about twelve million African Americans left Southern farms for Northern cities, where they hoped to find better jobs.²⁸⁶ They faced not only serious housing problems, but also whites were determined to keep them in the worst living conditions.

In the 1950's, Black people in the South, were still denied their basic civil and political rights. Most of them could not vote, and those who tried to register were severely punished; they lost their jobs, were chased from their lands, were aggressively beaten, or lynched. Jim Crow segregation laws were still found in trains, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and employment.²⁸⁷ In the 1950's, the United States had become a powerful and rich Nation. The baby boom was the consequence of WWII, and the most urgent concern for Black people was the Civil Rights Movement.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Modern Civil Rights Movement: it is often dated from 1955, when Rosa Parks of Montgomery, Alabama, was arrested for refusing to give her seat to a white bus rider. This incident became a rallying point for the African American community, which boycotted the buses for over a year. From: The Concise Encyclopedia of Democracy, 2000, p. 107.

²⁸⁶ Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 98.

²⁸⁷ Eric Foner, op. cit., p. 964.

²⁸⁸ Adam Fairclough, op. cit., p. 185.

Black Americans continued to support Civil Rights organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and radical Black organizations such as the Black Panther Party.²⁸⁹ Blacks questioned themselves after WWII: What was the true meaning of Democracy? Did Black people have the same rights as white people in America, the land of freedom and democracy, or were they considered as second class citizens? Could they eat in the same restaurants as white people? Could they sit in the same theater as whites? Was lynching a lawful practice in a country defending human rights?

Because of their bad treatment during and after the war, Black people adopted new political and cultural initiatives. It is assumed that the Civil Rights Movement was the result of the struggle of Black Americans to regain their rights long denied to them. Blacks sought to end decades of discrimination in economic, social, educational and political fields; therefore, a new era in the struggle for civil rights had started. Feeling inferior to whites, and alienated from modern American society, Black people launched a series of protests, and activism would be the most powerful weapon in the fight for civil rights.²⁹⁰ They demanded equality and justice for the Black community through energetic actions, demonstrations, sit-ins, and marches in order to spread their ideas throughout the Nation.

2.5.2 THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

The Modern Civil Rights Movement was marked by Rosa Parks' refusal to surrender her seat to a white man; indeed, her action was at the origin of the Civil Rights Movement, during which Black women were deeply involved since the early fifties. As we have seen, Black women had established their own organizations in order to improve the conditions of African Americans. Throughout the country, they were introduced into political action by participating in meetings, marches, and sit-ins, all of which gave them a voice to express their anger towards discriminating policies. In the 1960's, Black women were considered as the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Black Panther Party: An organization of African Americans with extreme views, formed in 1966. It supported legal action and even violence to gain better conditions for Black people. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, p. 44.

²⁹⁰ John E. Findling, and Frank W. Thackeray, op. cit., p. 157.

²⁹¹ William H. Chafe, The Unfinished Journey, 2007, p. 295.

The Jim Crow system in the South made African Americans suffer from extreme forms of segregation in every aspect of daily life, including public transportation; for example, bus companies forced Blacks to sit in separate sections from whites, and obliged them to sit at the back of buses, whereas white people sat at the front. Black people, who took the bus to go to work, had to bear this hard reality nearly every day; moreover, bus drivers who were all white, assaulted and humiliated Black people, particularly Black women. The Black community complained about that unjust situation, and Rosa Parks was one of them.²⁹²

Rosa Parks (1913-2005), a good Christian Black woman, had learnt from the Bible that people should fight for their rights.²⁹³ Following the same beliefs as Sojourner Truth, she fought for equality and justice in the South. From an early age, she witnessed the supremacy of white people, and was offended by the living conditions of Blacks in the South. She was also horrified by the violence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), that Southern terrorist organization that menaced and tortured Black people.²⁹⁴

Rosa Parks lived in Montgomery, Alabama, where African Americans represented the majority of inhabitants; however, they were offered the worst jobs, were forbidden to have access to libraries, universities, theaters, parks, and were denied the right to vote.²⁹⁵

Working as a secretary of the NAACP, her primary goals were first the desegregation of the city buses in Montgomery, and second to gain the right to vote for Black citizens. She was very proud of her blackness, and gained much respect from her community.²⁹⁶ She found physical and moral strength to protest, and was determined to ameliorate Black people's lives. In 1943, she tried to register to vote, but was refused this right because she did not succeed in a literacy test.²⁹⁷ In 1946, Parks met Ella Baker; they were both determined to carry on civil rights activities within their communities.²⁹⁸

²⁹² Diane McWhorter, op. cit., p. 40.

²⁹³ Douglas Brinkley, Rosa Parks, 2000, p. 15.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p 24.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p 41.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p 86.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p 56.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p 68.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, a seamstress, refused to give up her bus seat to a white man.²⁹⁹ She was not only tired after work, but also tired to give her seat to white people. Her act of defiance symbolized resistance against racial discrimination, and led her to be known as one of the leading figures of the Civil Rights Movement. When Rosa Parks refused to obey Jim Crow laws, she was arrested and had to pay ten dollars. Her arrest generated the historic Montgomery Bus Boycott, which lasted more than one year, and was the longest protest organized by Black people in the twentieth century. People who supported the boycott were poor; they often risked their jobs in order to prove to everybody that Black citizens wanted to improve their lives in Montgomery.³⁰⁰

Black women were the central figures in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The most famous leaders were Rosa Parks, and Jo Ann Robinson. A professor of English at the University of Alabama, and a member of the Women's Political Council (WPC),³⁰¹ Jo Ann Robinson organized the Montgomery Bus Boycott to protest the humiliation of African Americans on the Montgomery buses. She distributed 50,000 copies, explaining the conditions of Parks' arrest, and urging all African Americans to follow the boycott. Unfortunately, people who supported the boycott were punished, by being killed either in their homes, or inside churches.

The boycott had proved that Black Americans were ready to sacrifice their jobs and their lives, to defend their rights, and to show their dignity. For more than one year, Black citizens of Montgomery walked, boycotting all buses, with the strong desire to make their voices heard. Rosa Parks thought that it was unbearable to consider Black citizens as inferior to whites. She wanted to know if she had civil rights.³⁰² She was persuaded that she was right, and white people were wrong. After her arrest, she lost her job as a seamstress; even her husband had to leave his job because everybody knew about his wife's arrest.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁰⁰ Nell Irvin Painter, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

³⁰¹ WPC: Women's Political Council; an organization of middle class, professional women that sought to raise the status of Blacks by organizing voter registration. From: Mary Beth Norton, Ruth M. Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

³⁰² Douglas Brinkley, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

She was a woman living with the double burden of being Black and female in a segregated America.³⁰³ However, she became a heroine, and a symbol of courage in the history of Black America. She declared:

I was determined to achieve the total freedom that our history lessons taught us. When I decided to give up my seat, it was not that day, or bus, in particular. I just wanted to be free like everybody else. I did not want to be continually humiliated over something I had no control over: The color of my skin.^[304]

Rosa Parks remains as a symbol of freedom around the World. She was an ordinary woman, who found the moral courage to defy the injustices of the segregated South. Her act was legendary, and gave her the name of “The Mother of the Civil Rights Movement”.³⁰⁵

It is said that the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a turning point in the history of Black America because it gave the opportunity for African American people to expose their daily sufferings, and try to end the humiliation they endured.³⁰⁶ It was also viewed as the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s, and the first step toward freedom, which allowed millions of African Americans to gain their rights and achieve dignity. A year after the boycott, in November 1956, the Supreme Court made segregation in public transportation unlawful.³⁰⁷ The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a huge success because it inspired other revolts throughout the South; however, it did not solve all problems from which African Americans suffered. New methods of protest would be needed by Black Americans to get rid of Jim Crow racist policies.³⁰⁸

The Montgomery Bus Boycott gave Rosa Parks international recognition. Nelson Mandela, the South African Leader had said of Rosa Parks:

She is who inspired us, who taught us to sit down for our rights, to be fearless when facing our oppressors.^[309]

Finally, we have to say that it was the women who managed to keep the protest going on; however, a prominent leader emerged from the Montgomery Bus Boycott; his name was Martin Luther King.

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 111.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 118.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

³⁰⁶ Eric Foner, op. cit., p. 969.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 969.

³⁰⁸ William H. Chafe, op. cit., p. 158.

³⁰⁹ Douglas Brinkley, op. cit., p. 157.

2.5.3 THE DIFFERENT STEPS IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN REVOLUTION OF THE 1960's

The fifties had witnessed one of the greatest movements in American history; this movement was characterized by an unprecedented explosion of Black rebellion all over the South led by young people who refused to bear the discrimination imposed on their communities.³¹⁰ Inspired by Rosa Parks' and Martin Luther King's activism, young students organized sit-ins³¹¹ all around the South, in restaurants, churches, and libraries; hundreds of students formed a new organization called SNCC, or Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.³¹² These young people decided to act by non violent means; they organized sit-ins, marches, and voter registration campaigns, with the aim of destroying the Jim Crow system in the South.³¹³ These events saw the participation of hundreds of thousands of Black citizens who were victims of extreme violence: they were arrested by white policemen, beaten, injured or shot.³¹⁴

Black college students became involved in the Civil Rights Movement in 1960, when a group of students organized a sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. One Monday in February, four Black students wanted to be served at that lunch counter, where only white people ate. Obviously, they were refused to be served, but they came and came again, being joined by other Black students. A lot of them were arrested, and the others organized a boycott of other public places. These demonstrations were extended to other cities, and as a result, many lunch counters were open to Blacks.³¹⁵

³¹⁰ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 289.

³¹¹ Sit-ins: are demonstrations in which protesters occupy seats and refuse to move until they are recognized, and their demands are met. It was used by the Civil Rights Movement to break down segregation in public places. From: William O. Kellogg, op. cit., p. 297.

³¹² William H. Chafe, op. cit., p. 291.

³¹³ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 289.

³¹⁴ Stephen Whitefield, *A Companion to 20th Century America*, 2004, p. 195.

³¹⁵ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 2001, p. 452.

With the growing number of sit-ins throughout the South, thousands of Black people were put in jail; but thousands others persisted in their activity, and by 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed by young Black activists. Their determination to found this independent organization gave the Civil Rights Movement a new meaning. Within weeks, the sit-ins became a social movement that involved thousands of students who were devoted for the cause of civil rights.³¹⁶

Many demonstrations were carried out by Black people in Albany, Georgia, where over a thousand Black demonstrators were arrested, just because they marched in order to protest discrimination. In Birmingham, in 1963, thousands of Blacks were attacked by white policemen, with tear gas and dogs. Birmingham was the most segregated city in America. King had defined the goals of the Birmingham protest, which were primarily to desegregate lunch counters, department stores, and other public places, the hiring of Blacks in industrial and commercial activities, and the protection of demonstrators.³¹⁷ Over a thousand Black people went to jail in Birmingham. While imprisoned, King himself had declared:

All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality... it's better to be in jail with dignity than accept segregation in humility.^[318]

Another famous demonstration was the March on Washington. Organized on August, 28, 1963, this march was primarily for jobs and freedom, and had gathered more than 250,000 people of all races before the Lincoln Memorial.³¹⁹ Led by famous Black leaders, among them Martin Luther King, the march aimed at the passage of the Civil Rights Act,³²⁰ which would help to ban segregation in public accommodations.

³¹⁶ William O Kellogg, op. cit., p. 297.

³¹⁷ Flip Schulke, Martin Luther King, Jr., 1976, p. 69.

³¹⁸ Ibid., p70.

³¹⁹ James A. Henretta, W. Elliot Brown Lee, America's History since 1865, 1997, p. 938.

³²⁰ The Civil Rights Act: was signed into law on July 2, 1964, entitled all persons to equal access to public accommodations; it also barred discrimination in the hiring, promotion, and wages of employees. From: Thomas E. Patterson, We the People, 2008, p. 175.

King's famous "I have a dream" speech thrilled demonstrators who considered this dream as their own, and King as the leader who would lead them to freedom. The hope given by the March on Washington did not last, and in September of the same year, four African American girls were killed by a bomb thrown at their church by white extremists.

The South was the center of Black activism, and the right to vote was the primary cause for which they would fight.³²¹ Voter registration was considered a "white people's business" and a few Blacks were concerned with it; therefore, it became the primary goal for SNCC activists to gain this right; they organized an alternative political party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). It had 80,000 members the vast majority of them were Black. Fannie Lou Hamer, and Ella Baker became the movement's most important leaders.³²²

The Student Movement gave birth to another movement: the Freedom Rides.³²³ Freedom Riders engaged in different activities: they visited families in their houses, most of the time at night, advising them to register. They told them the advantages of voting; however, Freedom Riders were attacked, beaten, or jailed. In spite of this, they resisted by protesting racism, and demanding their rights.³²⁴

In the spring of 1964, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)³²⁵ started a campaign to register voters in Alabama. King and the members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)³²⁶ were asked to help them in this campaign. In early 1965, a white minister, who supported Martin Luther King was killed by white people in Selma; therefore, the African American community organized a march of protest from Selma to Montgomery. The march was blocked and marchers attacked by white policemen with tear gas.

³²¹ Sheila Hardy, and P. Stephen Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

³²² William H. Chafe, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

³²³ Freedom Rides: It was the brainchild of a 20 year-old civil rights organization called CORE (The Congress of Racial Equality), which had staged restaurant sit-ins in Chicago, in the 1940's. From: Diane McWhorter, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

³²⁴ Robin D. G Kelley and Earl Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 498.

³²⁵ SNCC: An independent organization, emphasizing on voter registration and "Freedom Schools" in the South. From: Sheila Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

³²⁶ SCLC: A group committed to work for nonviolent change. Dr King was its President, and Ella Baker its executive director. It also worked to register voters, and organize sit-ins. From: *Ibid.*, p. 45.

The Selma March was a crucial moment in the struggle for civil rights in the US. It contributed to the passage of an important law: The Voting Rights Act of 1965. The act was signed on August 6, 1965, and forbade states from imposing literacy tests or paying taxes for the registration of Black voters.³²⁷ The number of Black voters increased after the signing of the Voting Rights Act, reaching about 230,000 new African American voters throughout the Nation.

2.5.4 BLACK WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN THE 1950's

Black women also joined the fight, and their primary role would be to organize, and coordinate these kinds of protests. Ella Baker was a famous organizer of the SNCC.³²⁸ When the SCLC was established in 1957, after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Baker was recruited as its secretary. After resigning from the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), she became very interested in the sit-in movement, and did voluntary work as the SNCC adviser. She persuaded SCLC to give 800 dollars to the SNCC.³²⁹ During the 1960's, Baker presented her organizational skills and material support to SNCC. Black women assumed activist roles in the SNCC. Thanks to their absolute sense of independence and self-confidence, that organization became the most dynamic and powerful in the history of civil rights.

Other Black women devoted much of their time to the SNCC; for example, Diane Nash³³⁰, and Ruby Doris Smith, had left school to work for SNCC.³³¹ Black women were finally considered as the main organizers of the Civil Rights Movement. Ella Baker had declared:

The movement of the fifties and sixties was carried largely by women...It's true that the women who carried the movement is much larger than that of men.^[332]

³²⁷ Robin D. G Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 517.

³²⁸ John Hope Franklin, Alfred A. Moss JR, op. cit., p. 527.

³²⁹ Zita Allen, op. cit., p. 76.

³³⁰ Diane Nash: A native of Chicago, she led the local campaign to desegregate department store lunch counters. She organized sit-ins, and trained students in nonviolent resistance. From: James Ciment, op. cit., p. 160.

³³¹ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 279.

³³² Ibid., p. 284.

It was Black women who made the most difficult decisions within the different organizations; while protecting demonstrators, they risked to be jailed, or to be victimized by the worst punishments. For example, Ella Baker was very important to the Student Movement in the sense that she helped students define the goals and take control of the Student Movement.

Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977), was another Black woman activist who transformed the movement. She became first an active member of the SNCC, then, in 1963, had been elected as its secretary.³³³ She was 43 when she registered; unfortunately, when she tried to vote in the State's primary election, she wasn't allowed to do so because she didn't pay taxes for two years. The year she registered was indeed the most violent of the Civil Rights Movement. As she helped other people to register, she was severely beaten and jailed;³³⁴ however, she never abandoned, and her action and speeches would inspire other people to register to vote. Hamer remained a prominent civil rights activist in Mississippi until her death in 1977.³³⁵

Septima Clarke (1898-1987), a Black woman, a South Carolinian teacher, had led many actions to equalize salaries for white and Black teachers. She was a member of the NAACP, and helped thousands of African Americans to speak out against injustice. She also helped African Americans to become registered voters in South Carolina.³³⁶ Being an active member of the SCLC, she established citizenship schools in the South, which helped to register approximately two million African American voters in the South. The success of the Civil Rights Movement owed much to Clarks' activism, and made her known as the "Queen of the Civil Rights Movement".³³⁷

³³³ Zita Allen, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

³³⁴ William H. Chafe, *op. cit.*, p. 293.

³³⁵ Nell Irvin Painter, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

³³⁶ Robin D. G. Kelley, and Earl Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

³³⁷ Sheila Hardy and P. Stephen Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

Coretta Scott King (1927-2006), Martin Luther King's wife, was also an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement. She became a member of the NAACP, and was mainly concerned with the improvement of the conditions of African Americans. In 1954, the couple moved from Boston to Montgomery, where a year later the Montgomery Bus Boycott marked the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.³³⁸ To help her husband, she always joined him during marches and rallies, gave speeches, in order to spread King's message of nonviolence. Coretta was known as the First Lady of the Civil Rights Movement³³⁹; her dream was the same as her husband's: a dream that their children will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.³⁴⁰

2.6 THE INFLUENCE OF MARTIN LUTHER KING ON THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Martin Luther King emerged as a remarkable leader during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He witnessed the worst aspects of racism, and was destined to help Black people to eliminate Jim Crow laws. He lived at a time when Blacks were not permitted to use the same stores as whites, to stay in the same hotels, and to attend the same schools. Racial oppression was evident throughout America, especially in the South.³⁴¹

Martin Luther King was the ideal leader to challenge these laws. As he was both a Southerner and a preacher, he did his best to befriend Blacks and whites. On the first night of the boycott, he made a speech by saying:

I'm happy it happened to a person like Rosa Parks, for nobody can doubt the boundless outbreak of her integrity, nobody can doubt the height of her character, nobody can doubt the depth of her Christian commitment, but there comes a time that people get tired. We are here this evening to say to those who have mistreated us so long that we are tired, tired of being segregated and humiliated; ... We have no alternative but to protest.^[342]

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 135.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

³⁴¹ William H. Chafe, op. cit., p. 157.

³⁴² Douglas Brinkley, op. cit., p. 139.

A revolution had started, involving Black people who were fighting for their civil rights. Martin Luther King was not well known before the boycott, neither his philosophy of non violence.³⁴³ Indeed, it was only after the boycott that he would become the nation's predominant leader. The boycott which lasted more than a year would make the names of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King linked for life.³⁴⁴

When Rosa Parks was arrested in 1955, after refusing to relinquish her seat to a white person, King took charge of the situation; he organized protests that led to the boycott of all public transport. After one year, the Supreme Court proclaimed that segregation was unconstitutional.

King became the President of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which was created during the boycott. The MIA gave the power to citizens to carry out the boycott. It also demanded that Black passengers be treated politely; moreover, volunteers were recruited to transport the boycotters to their work.³⁴⁵ Rosa Parks became later a member of this association.

Inspired by the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Martin Luther King had formed an organization called the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, which was dedicated to non violent protest against discrimination.³⁴⁶ King had been influenced by the non violent principles that Gandhi used against the British in 1947 to achieve independence for India.³⁴⁷ Rosa Parks became an active member of the SCLC.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 141.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 140.

³⁴⁵ Sheila Hardy, and P. Stephen Hardy, op. cit., p. 224.

³⁴⁶ Flip Schulke, op. cit., p. 37.

³⁴⁷ James Ciment, op. cit., p. 159.

As they were unequally treated to whites in education, employment, and housing, Black people protested against this. For example, in Birmingham, Alabama, there were demonstrations in 1963, where at least fifteen thousand people were arrested. Martin Luther King was also jailed during nine days in Birmingham because he encouraged these demonstrations.³⁴⁸ From his cell, he wrote a revealing letter, "Letter from Birmingham Jail", in which he recounted the abuses faced by Black Southerners who were daily humiliated and brutalized by white policemen. Images had been diffused on television, the fact which produced a wave of revolt throughout the World. These protests made of Birmingham the center for the Civil Rights Movement.³⁴⁹

On August 28, 1963, more than 250,000 Black and white Americans converged to the Lincoln's memorial, in the famous March on Washington. Their demands were to reduce unemployment, to increase the minimum wage, and to ban discrimination in employment.³⁵⁰ King impressed his audience by his most famous speech in which he declared:

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood... I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.^[351]

King's struggle would become more and more radical, as the American nation was divided into two societies: one white, and one Black; however, he had accomplished new victories in America, which had resulted with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.³⁵² King was not fighting only for Black people, he fought for poor people as well. On December 1964, he received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway. He was the youngest man ever to win it.³⁵³

³⁴⁸ Eric Foner, op. cit., p. 983.

³⁴⁹ M.J. Heale, op. cit., p. 117.

³⁵⁰ Eric Foner, op. cit., p. 984.

³⁵¹ Flip Schulke, op. cit., p. 98.

³⁵² Diane McWhorter, op. cit., p. 143.

³⁵³ Flip Schulke, op. cit., p. 122.

Martin Luther King would spend all his life, fighting for civil rights for Black Americans, until he was assassinated on April 4th, 1968, at Memphis. He was only thirty-nine when he died, but in his short life, he had become a hero thanks to his oratory and leadership skills. Unlike most famous American heroes, such as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, who have realized great achievements in American history, Martin Luther King was an ordinary citizen, who gave a lesson to Americans, Blacks and whites, that they had to be unified by peace and love.³⁵⁴

King and his movement had realized an overwhelming victory. Without King, the Civil Rights Movement would not have the same effect on American society. During his struggle, he sought to accommodate every American citizen to any other people, with no regard to their color, origin, religion, and status; moreover, his activism will continue to inspire future generations.³⁵⁵ Martin Luther King had given a speech in Montgomery on December, 5, 1955, in which he declared:

Right here in Montgomery when the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say: there lived a race of people, a Black people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights...We, the disinherited of this land, we who have been oppressed so long, are tired of going through the long night of captivity. And now we are reaching out for the daybreak of freedom and justice and equality.^[356]

2.7 THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The Civil Rights Movement gave the opportunity to Blacks to gain their full citizenship. It also made the American society aware that certain groups, including students, women, and other minorities were excluded from American freedom.

After Kennedy's assassination in 1963, President Lyndon Johnson asked Congress to enact the Civil Rights Bill, which proclaimed to ban discrimination in all public accommodations;³⁵⁷ this was considered the primary goal of the Civil Rights Movement.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 208.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 212.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

³⁵⁷ William O. Kellogg, op. cit., p. 307.

In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act,³⁵⁸ forbidding racial discrimination in employment, and all public institutions like hospitals, schools, hotels, theaters, and restaurants. This act had also created a series of measures for African Americans, called Affirmative Action policies, giving them job opportunities in different fields, and enrolling them in many colleges and universities.³⁵⁹

In 1965, political power had been extended for African Americans. Indeed, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, giving finally the right to vote to Black Southerners.³⁶⁰ The Civil Rights Movement succeeded to establish equality between the races, by eradicating the status of second class citizenship to Black citizens.³⁶¹ The United States was considered as a country made up of many races, religions, and nationalities. Because of this concept, it was clear that the Civil Rights Movement encouraged immigration, and made of America a pluralistic society.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's encouraged President Lyndon Johnson to take more initiatives for the improvement of American citizens' social status. These measures, known as the "Great Society", provided health services for the poor, and the elderly, in the new Medicare, and Medicaid programs.³⁶²

During the mid sixties, government spending, and a tax cut on individuals and businesses, led to a rapid economic expansion; moreover, the main goal of the "Great Society" was to eradicate poverty, and to define the real concept of equal citizenship. It largely elevated the status of Blacks, who were long excluded from advantages reserved to white people, such as social security. The percentage of poverty among American families decreased from 22 percent to 13 percent during the sixties.³⁶³

³⁵⁸ Civil Rights Act: signed by President Johnson into law on July 2, 1964, the bill created by the Kennedy administration would be the first meaningful civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. Its most controversial feature, known as the "public accommodation section" removed the ugliest physical symbols of segregation, the white-only barriers against African Americans in restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, sports arenas, and other public facilities. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 also outlawed job discrimination on account of gender as well as race, religion, and national origin. From: Diane McWhorter, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

³⁵⁹ Melinda Tims, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ Eric Foner, *op. cit.*, p. 992.

³⁶² Eric Foner, *op. cit.*, p. 992.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 994.

The Civil Rights Movement had inspired not only African Americans but also other African nations asking for their independence from European countries that colonized them. In 1956, Martin Luther King declared:

The Great struggle of the twentieth century has been between the exploited masses questing for freedom and the colonial powers seeking to maintain their domination. ^[364]

African Americans became interested in movements for independence in India, and Africa, and also in the battle against Apartheid in South Africa, that extreme form of segregation, which was parallel to Southern American Jim Crow system. Black people all over the World were unwilling to tolerate these forms of injustice.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 970.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we have to say that the fifties was an era of segregation, violence, and economic distinctions between white and Black people. It was also a period in which African Americans were engaged in a Civil Rights Revolution through marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, and boycotts. The Civil Rights Movement had finally defined the true meaning of freedom. The latter had many meanings: for Blacks, it meant enjoying the same political rights and economic opportunities as whites; it meant banning segregation, violence, disenfranchisement, and job discrimination. It also meant to be served in restaurants and department stores, with the same rights as whites.³⁶⁵

Black women emerged as the catalysts of the Black Civil Rights Movement. From the early fifties, they were asking for change in their communities. Their activism was shown in the different roles they played during this revolutionary period. They often risked and lost their lives, in order to gain their basic human rights such as the right to vote; moreover, they acted courageously in their combat against racial discrimination.

Although King was considered as the leader of the movement, and attracted much more the media attention, those Black women like Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker, were viewed as the backbone of the movement.³⁶⁶ They organized freedom schools, marches, sit-ins, boycotts, and helped millions of segregated people to understand the real meaning of freedom. Their courage inspired other movements to challenge the concept of liberty and freedom throughout the American nation, including the Second Wave of Feminism and Women's liberation.

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³⁶⁵ Eric Foner, op. cit., p. 277.

³⁶⁶ Zita Allen, op. cit., p. 90.

Chapter 3

***From the Struggle for Equality
and Justice to Black Feminism
in the United States***

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Introduction

Feminism is defined by the political, economic, and social equality between men and women. For over two hundred years, women had sought to define the principles of liberty and equality. To this end, they dedicated their lives to analyze the basic human relationships with men. Early feminists wanted to replace male voices by those of females; they were also determined to assert their roles, and achieve complete equality with men.

American feminism dates back to the late nineteenth century when middle class white women and Black women were ready to challenge the laws of slavery. Therefore, we can say that the feminist movement was born out of the anti-slavery campaign in the US. At first feminists were mainly concerned with the abolition of slavery, and the right to vote. After the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment³⁶⁷ in 1920, not all American women gained the ballot. Indeed, most Black women were denied this right.

The word feminism appeared since the “Progressive Era”.³⁶⁸ It was defined by women’s emancipation, which meant the right to vote and more economic opportunities for women.³⁶⁹ Feminism made people aware of the role of women in society and also of family issues, such as marriage, sexuality, and abortion. It started with the battle for suffrage and was called “The First Wave of feminism”.

Black women had also a strong desire to participate in politics. One of them was Sojourner Truth, the abolitionist and preacher, who fought against injustice, defying therefore white feminists. Sojourner Truth was not viewed as a feminist, but her activism created an anti-racist and an anti-sexist political movement, which now characterizes Black American feminism.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Nineteenth Amendment : Amendment to the Constitution that gave all American women the right to vote in 1920. From: The Concise Encyclopedia of Democracy, 2000, p. 283.

³⁶⁸ Progressive Era: the years between 1901 and 1917, which witnessed progressive political reforms, progressive business methods, and progressive education. From: Virginia Bernhard, Firsthand America, 1994, p. 669.

³⁶⁹ Eric Foner, op. cit., p. 698.

³⁷⁰ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 190.

Black and white women continued their fight until the sixties, giving birth to the “Second wave of feminism”³⁷¹. They organized meetings to discuss their daily sufferings from the fact of being female in a society dominated by men. Feminism made “The Personal Political”³⁷², which meant that it concerned women at a deeply personal level, giving them political power, and new opportunities to defend their rights. It also made people aware of family issues, and the role of women³⁷³.

The Civil Rights Movement of the sixties encouraged Black women to start a new, radical, feminist movement, which clearly defined their new roles in American society. They created a Black feminist movement, challenging the male-dominated Black power³⁷⁴ movement, and white-dominated women’s rights organizations. They fought for voting rights, organized protests, and motivated other minorities to ask for freedom and equality. With the Civil Rights Movement, Black women had to accomplish a divine mission which involved them in the long struggle for equality and justice. As such, Black feminism is seen as emerging later than white feminism

³⁷¹ George Sullivan, op. cit., p. 66.

³⁷² The Personal Political: referred to the personal experiences and awakenings of the sixties. It refers to the idea that feminism challenged Americans to rethink the most fundamental aspects of personal as well as political life. From: Lois P. Rudnick, Judith E. Smith, and Rachel Lee Rubin, *American Identities*, 2006, p. 183.

³⁷³ Ibid, p., 179.

³⁷⁴ Black power: In the mid-1960’s, “Black Power” became the slogan of militant Blacks who rejected the nonviolence of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the moderate goals of the early civil rights movement. Stokely Carmichael, the head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1966, popularized the Black Power slogan that summer during the civil rights protest march to Jackson, Mississippi. Black Power grew out of frustrations caused by the limited progress of the civil rights movement, desperation at the poverty most Blacks suffered, urban race riots beginning in 1964, and the powerful ideas of Malcolm X, a Black Muslim who rejected integration and advocated self-defense. From: Harvard Sitkoff, *Postwar America*, 2000, pp. 39-40.

3.1 THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINISM IN THE US

During the Nineteenth century, American women did not have much political power. They were mainly fighting against slavery in a movement called Abolitionism. Women met in July 1848, in New York, in a meeting called “The Seneca Falls Convention”.³⁷⁵ Led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton³⁷⁶, and Lucretia Mott³⁷⁷, this meeting was the starting point of what came to be known as “The Women’s Liberation movement”³⁷⁸, which aimed at promoting the cause of racial and sexual equality. The delegates of “Seneca Falls” declared that American women were denied the same rights as men among them: the right to vote, equal education, and employment opportunities.

Another woman, named Susan. B. Anthony³⁷⁹ was a friend of Elizabeth Cady Stanton; she was struggling for the right to vote and did not bear that women could not vote, because after all, women were also American citizens. Both women had big hopes that Black and white women would gain the ballot. Susan voted on November 5th, 1872, but was arrested two weeks later, and fined one hundred dollars.³⁸⁰ She spent all her life fighting for equal rights until her death in 1906. These efforts toward woman suffrage had given their fruits when American women were finally granted the right to vote in 1920.

³⁷⁵ George Sullivan, op. cit., p. 22.

³⁷⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902): was an ardent champion of sexual equality and co-founded with Susan. B. Anthony the “National Woman Suffrage Association” just after the Civil War. She joined the Temperance and anti-slavery movements. In 1890, she was elected president of the newly formed NAWSA, until 1892. From: Melinda Tims, op. cit., p.188.

³⁷⁷ Lucretia Mott: (1793-1880), she founded and became president of the Philadelphia Female Anti-slavery society. She joined Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the fight for women’s equality. She lectured on abolition of slavery, equal rights, temperance, and world peace. She was named president of the American Equal Rights Association in 1866, a group devoted to African American and women’s suffrage. From: Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 48.

³⁷⁸ Women’s liberation Movement: grew out of Abolitionism. It began with the Seneca Falls Convention on July, 19th, 1848. It continued with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, granting American women the right to vote, also called the first wave of feminism; it was carried on with the second wave of feminism of the sixties. It was one the powerful forces shaping the nation in the 1970’s. Feminists challenged society’s ideas about work, family, love, and sexuality. Women staged hundreds of rallies across the country to publicize their demands for equality. From: Sheila Keenan, op. cit, p. 158.

³⁷⁹ Susan .B. Anthony (1820-1906): was from a Quaker family in New England. She had been a member of a temperance league which fought for the use of alcohol. She was not allowed to speak against alcohol in public, because she was a woman. She soon became known as “Napoleon for the Women’s Rights Movement”. From: Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 188.

³⁸⁰ Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 30.

In 1921, the Equal Rights Amendment³⁸¹ (ERA) was proposed by Alice Paul³⁸². This amendment aimed at improving working conditions for women. For example, women were not allowed to perform certain jobs, to work by night, and had the lowest paid jobs. The ERA was introduced into Congress in December 1923, as women needed new laws against social and economic discrimination.

After American women had gained the right to vote in 1920, first wave feminism was followed by hard economic conditions during the Great Depression; however, with the advent of the Second World War, the situation had changed. Indeed, it gave more importance to working women and a new interest in the ERA, as a great number of women entered the labor force.

By the end of the Second World War, the US witnessed the baby-boom during which large numbers of women workers returned to their homes, and had more babies; however, most of them were not satisfied with this situation. Simone de Beauvoir's³⁸³ famous text, "The Second Sex" was translated into English in the 1950's, and was widely read in the US. Simone wanted women to understand and determine their biological nature and roles; she also wanted them to participate fully in a male's world without having the status of the "other". She wrote:

What peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she- a free and autonomous being like all human creatures- nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other.^[384]

³⁸¹ Equal Rights Amendment: Amendment to the US Constitution which gave women equal rights to men. It began in Congress in 1923 and was finally passed in 1972. In 1982, only 35 out of 38 states had ratified the amendment. From: [Oxford Guide to British and American Culture](#), 2005, p. 145.

³⁸² Alice Paul: (1885-1977), she split from NAWSA in 1913, and formed the National Woman's Party in 1917. Her efforts were important to the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, which gave women the right to vote. She also wrote the first Equal Rights Amendment, and called it the Lucretia Mott Amendment; she got it introduced in Congress in 1923. From: Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 83.

³⁸³ Simone de Beauvoir: (1908-1986) A French writer and social philosopher, who was among the leaders of the modern existentialist movement and a champion of women's rights. Her long commitment to ameliorate the status of women occasioned her highly popular, though controversial book, "The Second Sex" (1949) which takes the view that women are relegated to an inferior position by male-dominated society, and not by any biological or psychological determinant. From: [Encyclopedia Americana](#), V3, 2006, p. 419.

³⁸⁴ David Chalmers, [And The Crooked Places Made Straight](#), 1996, p. 160.

In 1963, the American author Betty Friedan³⁸⁵ published her best seller “The Feminine Mystique”, in which she urged women to seek new roles and responsibilities by leaving their jobs as wives and mothers and having professional careers of their own; however, the book was dedicated to white, well- educated women, not to Black women, who had more serious problems than the ones evoked by Friedan. This book had given American women a new sense of freedom, which would allow them to acquire a greater concern for economic and social equality, and a deeper protection against discrimination.

In 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW)³⁸⁶ was born, with Betty Friedan as its first president. This organization claimed that women should be active participants in politics, business, and its primary goal was to achieve legislative, educational, and economic equality for women. Women joined NOW because they were underemployed and underpaid. Coming from different civil rights and liberal organizations, they organized large marches, demonstrations, and meetings to achieve their goals. In her book “Rebirth of Feminism”, Judith Hole stated:

The National Organisation for Women was born with a clear statement of purpose; to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, assuming all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.^[387]

Now had organized the first national feminist march in New York City’s Fifth Avenue on August 26, 1970, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of suffrage³⁸⁸; the most important demands of this march were equal opportunities in employment and education, and free abortion which was finally accepted as a national issue.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ Betty Friedan: Born in 1921, she was a journalist and studied to become a psychologist. After getting married, she became a housewife; the success of her book changed Friedan’s life personally and politically. She gave up being a housewife and divorced. In 1966, she, Pauli Murray, and several other feminists founded the National Organization for Women (NOW). From: Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 138.

³⁸⁶ NOW: National Organization for Women, a large organization that works for women’s rights. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, 2005, p. 332.

³⁸⁷ Lois P. Rudnick, Judith E Smith, op. cit., p. 177.

³⁸⁸ Howard Sitkoff, op. cit., p. 104.

³⁸⁹ Lois P. Rudnick, Judith E Smith, op. cit., p. 180.

In 1967, NOW passed a Bill of Rights for women; its aim was to afford them with equal job training opportunities, equal rights to education, and child care facilities. With a membership of over 500,000, in 2005, NOW became the largest feminist organization in the US.³⁹⁰

Throughout the feminist movement, women had worked for the legalization of abortion and prostitution, and the elimination of violence against women and children. Consciousness raising groups were formed to address issues such as women's health, child care, violence, and pornography; new institutions were created like child care centers, shelters for battered women, and women's health clinics. Consciousness raising focused on the fact that feminists were dealing with the most intimate aspects of personal life.³⁹¹

The feminist movement aimed at equality in social, educational, and political fields. Feminists' roles were to examine the different elements which divided them, such as race, and social class.

In the 1980's, the American feminist movement became more controversial, as ethnic minorities were divided into subgroups. We can say that the second wave of feminism gave birth to what we called as "feminisms", because feminists from different racial and ethnic groups formed distinct feminist movements. There were Black women, Jewish women, and Asian feminists; other sub-groups were formed as for the elderly, the obese people, the physically handicapped, each one dealing with specific feminist issues.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ George Sullivan, op. cit., p. 69.

³⁹¹ Lois P. Rudnick, Judith E. Smith, op. cit., p. 180.

³⁹² Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 194.

3.2 THE BIRTH OF THE BLACK FEMINIST MOVEMENT

The Black Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's witnessed the birth of second wave feminism, a movement in which Black women were determined to reaffirm their position by starting a new, radical, feminist movement. This movement granted them true equality and brought great changes in views concerning Black women in American society.

Feminism emerged during a time at which other social movements characterized American society, among them: the conflict over the Vietnam War, and the struggle for racial equality. Through this challenge, Americans were seeking to redefine the true meaning of democracy and the most principal aspects of social and political life.³⁹³ The feminist movement of the 1960's, also called mainstream feminism³⁹⁴, dealt with the struggle of women to gain the same economic, political, and social rights as men. It was led by women of all races who wanted to improve their social lives by asking for welfare rights.

The Women's Liberation Movement, born out of the Civil Rights Movement, focused on the fact that discrimination was immoral, and that the protest became legitimate for women to protect their rights. This movement was started by women students who had been active in the Anti-War and Civil Rights movement.³⁹⁵ It aimed at defending women's rights, which included full economic and political equality, and participation in society. It is assumed that the Women's liberation movement was initially concerned with white, middle-class women, who tried to find solutions to problems such as poverty and racism; in the 1960's, this movement drew both Black and white women to carry on their action.

³⁹³ Lois P. Rudnick, Judith E. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

³⁹⁴ George Sullivan, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 71.

The Black Liberation Movement included several different movements for Black Liberation (The Civil Rights Movement, Black Nationalism³⁹⁶, the Black Panthers³⁹⁷, and others). The struggle for Black Liberation meant fighting against racism. Black women wanted the same economic benefits as white women, because they were the most victimized by employment and income discrimination against women.

Living with the double burden of being both Black and women, Black feminists were active in those movements (Civil Rights, Black Nationalism, and Black Panthers). In spite of all the problems they faced, Black feminists had largely contributed to the success of feminist activism, by motivating other feminisms which concerned other racial minorities. As a result, the liberation of Black women meant freedom for all people.

As we can see, there was an analogy between the status of Blacks and that of women. Therefore, we can say that the Black Feminist Movement grew out of the Black Liberation movement and the Women's movement. It was formed on the basis that Black women felt they were racially oppressed in the Women's Liberation movement, and sexually oppressed in the Black Liberation movement.³⁹⁸

The second wave of feminism, born in the late sixties was a political movement, aimed at combating all forms of oppression from which women of color suffered. It is well known that any feminist movement dealt with political ideas that made clear the position of different groups of women in society. In this way, Black feminism emerged with the second wave of feminist activism.

³⁹⁶ Black Nationalism: The idea that Black people should not integrate into white society but should be a separate and self-sufficient society. From: Sheila Hardy and P. Stephen Hardy, op. cit., p. 268.

³⁹⁷ Black Panthers: An organization of African Americans who supported legal action and even violence to gain better conditions for Black people. It was formed in 1966. From: Oxford guide to British and American Culture, p. 44.

³⁹⁸ Available at: http://.wikipedia.Org/wiki/Black_Feminism. 26/09/2010.

Black feminism is based on the fact that sexism, class oppression, and racism are bound together. By the mid 1970's, Black feminism had largely influenced the whole feminist movement, since it required the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression.³⁹⁹ During that era, Black women achieved many successes in the political field. Their accomplishments occurred in every field, from sports, to politics, science, and show business. Doctor Mae Jemison, a physician from Houston Texas, was chosen as the first Black woman astronaut in 1987.⁴⁰⁰

Feminism continued with another wave, called third wave feminism. It arose in the early 1990's, as a result to the failure of second wave feminism. It focused primarily on developing the different realizations of women in America.

3.3 BLACK WOMEN WITHIN THE BLACK FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Black women had experienced two centuries of struggle to be liberated from oppression in a society dominated by racism and sexism. They had a long feminist tradition dating back to the nineteenth century. They became the leaders of the anti-slavery movement, the Black Liberation movement of the sixties, and finally of the contemporary feminist movement.

Since the period of slavery, Black women had no other choice than to work hard in order to feed their families. They performed the most difficult and lowest paid jobs. They always reconciled their work at home with the one outside the home. Racism was the major obstacle to their emancipation. Black women, unlike white women, did not feel oppressed by their families, but by hard economic and social problems like poverty and racism which they had to confront in their daily lives.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ Available at: [http:// en. Wikipedia. Org/wiki/ Black Feminism](http://en.Wikipedia.Org/wiki/Black_Feminism). 26/09/2010.

⁴⁰⁰ Alfred. A. Moss, Jr., op. cit., p. 613.

⁴⁰¹ Claudette Fillard, Colette Collomb-Boureau, Les Mouvements Féministes Américains, 2003, p. 142.

Black women were victims of racism in the white women's movement, and sexism in the Black Liberation movement. As a result, they combined an anti-racist and anti-sexist attitude, with the unique purpose to eliminate the political and economic systems of imperialism and capitalism.⁴⁰²

At first, Black women did not participate fully in the feminist movement. As they were born in slavery, they felt compassion for all oppressed peoples; moreover, they wanted to help Black men for the liberation of Black people: men, and women.⁴⁰³

Black feminists did not consider white feminists as their enemies; however, they were frustrated by the fact that white women were indifferent to problems of Black women. White women discriminated against them by neglecting poor and working class women's issues, the fact which made working with white women a difficult task; moreover, Black women discovered that white women were mainly concerned with making profit of the American capitalist system.⁴⁰⁴ As a result, Black women felt inferior in this system which made them economically exploited, and physically assaulted.

Living in a racist and sexist society, Black women found difficulties to organize their fight against many kinds of oppressions, at home, at work, and within their communities. They had not only been marginalized in the labor force, but also suffered from racial and sexual oppression during their hard working lives. Black women's sufferings in a racist and sexist society encouraged them to create a feminist movement in which they sought to fight against race and gender inequality, and to give a voice to Black women in politics. They were aware of the hardships faced by Black women and became strong activists in the Black feminist movement.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² Bell Hooks, op. cit., p. 191.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 185.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 188.

⁴⁰⁵ Claudette Fillard, op. cit., p. 143.

Black feminism, also called African American feminism, “Womanism”⁴⁰⁶, or Black American feminism, was led by American women who were asking for social, economic, and political equality. It was formed on the basis that Black women felt they were racially oppressed in the women’s movement and sexually oppressed in the Black Liberation movement.

Black women began their struggle at the same time as white feminists, but they were not cited in the white feminist movement because they were in small numbers. Black feminists were unable to have leadership roles within this movement because it was under the control of white women. They formed “Black feminist” groups, created their own feminism, and new Black feminist organizations. They devoted their time asking for women’s rights in the domains of education, health care, child care, security in ghettos, and many other issues⁴⁰⁷. They wanted to construct an American society founded on human rather than material values. Their main actions consisted in achieving equality for women in politics, education, the workforce, and on issues of sexuality and reproduction⁴⁰⁸; they knew they had a great revolutionary task to perform.

It was not an easy task for Black women to form their own feminist movement because they often met with racism: they were most of the time excluded from meetings and their writings strongly criticized because they represented only the Black experience, not the white women’s experience. In spite of this, Black women developed feminist writings, defending their cause on issues such as racism, sexism, and classism⁴⁰⁹. They developed a critical, feminist consciousness which led them to a greater social and political participation.

⁴⁰⁶ Womanism: derived from the Black Southern term “womanish” usually applied to little girls who act older than their years; womanism is a feminist view that addresses the Black woman’s unique experience of double oppression as both Black and female. From: Ronda Racha Penrice, African American History for Dummies, 2007, p. 286.

⁴⁰⁷ Claudette Fillard, op. cit., p. 143.

⁴⁰⁸ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 192.

⁴⁰⁹ Classism: prejudice or discrimination based on class. From: Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary.

Black women writers like Alice Walker⁴¹⁰, Toni Morrison⁴¹¹, and Maya Angelou⁴¹², dealt with questions of sexism, domestic violence, and other forms of women's oppression. Their writings received a great deal of consideration, and therefore revealed a great history of Black people, especially of Black women. Through fiction and political essays, these women gave voice to the preoccupations and experiences of women, creating African American fiction.

Toni Morrison was born in Ohio in 1931, and was one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. In 1993, she received the Nobel Prize for literature, the fact which made her the first Black female Nobel winner. Her work explores the complexity of Black culture, racism, and sexism.

Alice Walker, born in 1944 in Georgia, was a former civil rights worker, and feminist activist. She proposed a new word for Black women's experiences, called "Womanism", to distinguish African American feminism from white feminism.

Maya Angelou, an American author and poet, wrote her autobiography called "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" in 1969, telling about her first seventeen years, focusing on the isolation and loneliness during her childhood, as well as racism and sexism.

⁴¹⁰ Alice Walker: born in 1944; a former civil rights worker, Walker was among the first writers to use fiction to explore the complexities of that movement. First active in the predominantly white feminist movement, Alice Walker pushed the literary boundaries of Black female characters. From: Ronda Racha Penrice, op. cit., p. 286.

⁴¹¹ Toni Morrison: born in 1931, she taught at the college level for several years before becoming a book editor; she edited *The Black Book* in 1974, an overview of African American history; her novel *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. The winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize for literature, Morrison has always looked within herself, her family, and her community to gather material for her powerful novels and essays about racism, sexism, and elitism in the US. From: Ronda Racha Penrice, op. cit., p. 287.

⁴¹² Maya Angelou: born in April, 4, 1928. She was active in the civil rights movement, and served as Northern coordinator of Dr Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Her autobiography, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings", is about those early years in St Louis, Missouri, during the Great Depression. The book deals with the hardships, and racism Maya faced, and with her painful childhood. She received an Emmy Award nomination for her acting in the TV series "Roots", in 1977. By 1993, Angelou's list of published works included several collections of poetry and autobiographies. From: Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 161.

Black women activists fought for women's rights without neglecting the rights of Black men whom they did not consider as enemies. A famous Black woman called Angela Davis⁴¹³ was born in Birmingham, Alabama. Two of her friends were killed in a church bombing in September 1963, committed by white supremacists who wanted Black people to leave Birmingham. Angela Davis herself moved to New York when she was fifteen, to escape from this violent city. In 1967, she went to California where she earned a Ph.D. in philosophy.

Angela Davis was deeply concerned about the plight of Black people, and soon became active in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); however, she suffered from sexist attitudes on the part of several male leaders, and also realized that SNCC and other Black power organizations did not solve problems faced by Black people such as poverty or racism.

To sum up, we have to say that the seventies was a decade in which African American women activists created a Black feminist movement defying both male dominated Black Nationalism and white dominated Women's Rights Organizations⁴¹⁴; Black feminism was a direct response to male chauvinism within the Civil Rights Movement, Black power, and student movements. Tired of Black male sexism, and white women racism, Black women built their own movement, the Black feminist movement, which aimed at combating all forms of oppression from which they suffered. The seventies offered more opportunities for Black women, especially after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the massive registration campaign engaged by organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). African American women had finally gained more and more political victories. They would also create their own organizations to support their cause.

⁴¹³ Angela Davis: born in 1944, she grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, in a middle class African American community. She was an American political activist, scholar, and author. In the sixties, she emerged as a prominent activist in the civil rights movement, and the Black Panther Party. She did research in feminism, and African American studies. In the sixties, she opposed the Vietnam War, racism, and sexism. In 2001, she spoke against the War on Terror. From: Sheila Keenan, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁴¹⁴ Robin D. G Kelley, *op. cit.*, p. 551.

3.4 THE CREATION OF BLACK FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONS

Black feminism was seen as a political movement emerging out of a Black women's feeling of dissatisfaction with both the Civil Rights Movement and the white feminist movement of the 1960's and 1970's. Indeed, Black women had been ignored in both movements. The Black feminist movement was formed by women active in Civil Rights organizations like SNCC, the Black Panthers, and other groups. Its goal was the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression.⁴¹⁵

Black women faced severe sexism within Civil Rights groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. A Black activist, under the name of Fannie Lou Hamer was denied the right to vote because she hadn't paid taxes for two years. Other Black women were determined to resist the daily forms of discrimination they faced on buses, in schools, and in jobs. They fought by organizing strikes, boycotting schools, and demonstrating against police brutality.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Black women activists had created organizations like the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), founded in 1896, and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), formed in 1935.⁴¹⁶ It is well known that during the 1960's, and 1970's, Black women's preoccupations turned to race, gender, and class issues; therefore, several organizations emerged to solve these problems.⁴¹⁷ These organizations had to clarify the position of Black women who wanted to be treated equally to white women. They focused on the fact that feminism was not only a white women's issue but concerned also Black women.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black-feminism>. 26/09/2010.

⁴¹⁶ Ronda Racha Penrice, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.191.

⁴¹⁸ Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black-feminism>. 26/09/2010.

Their membership included Black women from all levels: well educated, middle class women, and poorly educated women, who dealt with the most urgent issues. Johnnie Tillmon⁴¹⁹ addressed poor Black women's issues and helped found the "Aid to Needy Children" (ANC) in 1963. Later, she led the "National Welfare Rights Organization" (NWRO), founded in 1966. She demanded equal pay for women, child care and voter registration.⁴²⁰

The most important organization of the seventies was the National Organization for Women (NOW). It was founded in 1966 by Betty Friedan who served as its first president until 1970.⁴²¹ She recruited white and Black women, especially young and poor women, and ethnic minorities who did not receive enough consideration for their preoccupations. NOW was one of the most respectable organizations; it dealt with minority and working class concerns. Its main demands were the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the right of women to abortion, and the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act. Many famous Black women were active members in this organization, among them, Fannie Lou Hamer⁴²², Pauli Murray⁴²³, and Shirley Chisholm.⁴²⁴ In 1970, Aileen Hernandez, a Black woman replaced Betty Friedan as President of NOW.⁴²⁵

⁴¹⁹ Johnnie Tillmon: (1926-1995), she was a welfare rights leader, and a community activist. A leading advocate for poor women, she began her organizing activities well before she became executive director of the NWRO in 1972. She insisted that the National Welfare Rights Organization was a poor women's organization, for women of all colors. From: Susan Ware, Notable American Women, 2004, p. 636.

⁴²⁰ Ronda Racha Penrice, op. cit., p. 191.

⁴²¹ Melinda Tims, op. cit., p. 192.

⁴²² Fannie Lou Hamer: (1917-1977), she was an active member in the SCLC and SNCC. Her commitment to Civil Rights caused her to lose her home and job, and a severe beating while jailed for Civil Rights activities, left her permanently disabled. She founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and worked primarily for the disenfranchisement of Southern Black Voters. From: Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 140.

⁴²³ Pauli Murray: (1910-1985) she was an American civil rights advocate, women's rights activist, and feminist, lawyer, writer, poet, teacher, and priest. She played an important role in the struggle for equality, and fighting for racial discrimination. She worked with both the NAACP, and CORE. She campaigned for the inclusion of sex discrimination in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Thanks to her efforts, it became law that year. In 1966, Murray was a founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW). She is one of the most important figures in the history of twentieth century America. From: Susan Ware, op. cit, p. 459.

⁴²⁴ Shirley Chisholm: born in 1924, she was the first African American woman elected to Congress. She was active in the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), and the League of Women Voters. She was deeply angered by the injustices faced by women, children, and African Americans. She served in the House of Representatives for seven terms. While in office, she created the National Political Congress of Black women. She retired from Congress in 1983, to pursue a teaching career. From: Charles Gulatta, op. cit., p. 118.

⁴²⁵ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 306.

In 1973, the most important organization founded by Black women was the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), with the specific goal of including Black women of all ages, and classes.⁴²⁶ It asked for political, social, and economic equality for Black women, and focused on the prejudices that women of color faced like racism, sexism, classism, and lesbianism. The inaugural conference was held in New York City, and Black women from different backgrounds participated in this organization. The founding members were Michelle Wallace⁴²⁷, Doris Wright⁴²⁸, and others. They made speeches that aimed at combating racist and sexist discrimination against Black women. After being an active organization, The NBFO ended its activity in 1977.⁴²⁹

Another organization, named “The Combahee River Collective” emerged in Boston, in 1974. The name of this organization was proposed by the Black American feminist Barbara Smith, referring to the action led by Harriet Tubman, the Black woman who had led nearly 750 slaves to freedom, near the Combahee River in South Carolina in 1863⁴³⁰. The members of this organization were from different political movements, including the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti war movement, the labor movement, and others.

⁴²⁶ Robin D.G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

⁴²⁷ Michelle Wallace: born on January 4, 1952. A feminist and author, she wrote “Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman” in 1979, a book in which she criticized Black Nationalism, and sexism. This book had a highly influential force in both African American and feminist circles.
Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michele_Wallace.10/04/2012.

⁴²⁸ Doris Wright: born in Lake Village, Arkansas, she obtained a Bachelor degree of science in psychology and sociology from the University of Arkansas.
Available at: www.littlerock.org/BoardofDirectors/MemberBios.28/04/2012.

⁴²⁹ Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black-feminism>.26/09/2010.

⁴³⁰ Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black-feminism>.26/09/2010.

During the seventies, African American women organized meetings to discuss the different issues concerning Black feminists, such as violence, rape, abortion, and also sought to define Black feminism as different from white feminism. They founded shelters for battered women, and cooperated with women activists to find out the different elements which divided them, race, social class, and sexual orientation. Michelle Wallace, a Black feminist was also a member of the “Combahee River Collective”. In one of her books, she said that:

We exist as women who are Black, who are feminists each stranded for the moment, working independently because there is not yet an environment in this society remotely congenial to our struggle because, being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the World. ^[431]

It is assumed that another Black feminist organization was the “Black Lesbian Caucus”. It was the first organization for lesbians, and women of color in New York. In 1971, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was formed to address issues affecting primarily African Americans⁴³², especially job training, health care, welfare and social services. It started with nine members, and attained 43 members in 2005.⁴³³ The National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC), established in 1971 was also designed to empower women’s political influence on a national level. In 1990, its membership reached 75,000 members.⁴³⁴ Today, these organizations continue their activity to attain economic, educational, and legislative equality for women.

⁴³¹ Available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/black-feminism.26/09/2010>.

⁴³² Robin. D. G. Kelley , Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 553.

⁴³³ Ronda Racha Penrice, op. cit., p. 193.

⁴³⁴ George Sullivan, op. cit., p. 70.

3.5 BLACK WOMEN IN THE POST CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

It is assumed that during the Civil Rights Era, Black American leaders aimed at creating a nation in which American people “would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character”;⁴³⁵ however, in Post Civil Rights America, segregation and discrimination prevailed. A new era of racial conflict was followed by new movements asking for social justice, between the mid 1970’s and the mid 1990’s.⁴³⁶

New measures were applied by the American government, in order to ban racism in education, housing, and employment. Known as “Affirmative Action”⁴³⁷ policies, they helped to find work more easily, to gain a higher income, and to hold more important jobs in the public and governmental sectors.⁴³⁸

It is also well known that these policies led to the emergence of the African American middle class. Before the sixties, Black women were hired only in unskilled labor such as domestic servants, but since the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, they had made great progress in the economic field and governmental action.⁴³⁹ During the seventies, Black women gained wealth, had more educational opportunities, and were hired in middle class occupations. For example, they became managers of department stores to which they were forbidden to enter before, and held important jobs as mayors in cities where they could not vote.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁵ James Ciment, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴³⁷ Affirmative Action: is a policy that allows race and gender to be considered among other factors in decisions on hiring, promotion, public contracting, and public school admissions. The program had its roots in President John F. Kennedy's 1961 executive order requiring federal contractors not to discriminate in hiring practices. From: Harvard Sitkoff, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴³⁸ James Ciment, *op.cit.*, p. 221.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

In the Post-Civil rights Era, Black women were discriminated against in housing, health care, and in jobs.⁴⁴¹ Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,⁴⁴² and the Voting Rights Act of 1965,⁴⁴³ Black women continued to suffer from poverty, inferior income to whites, and no health insurance.⁴⁴⁴

It is assumed that riots occurred in the mid 1960's, during which African American women protested against segregation and discrimination in schools and cities.⁴⁴⁵ These cities were called ghettos, and saw the emergence of many African American artists and activists.⁴⁴⁶ During the seventies, Black middle class families left ghettos, and went to suburbs. However, they encountered racism, and school integration was their primary obstacle during these years.⁴⁴⁷

It is well known that in the same period, multinational factories had moved to other countries, where there were cheap labor and taxes; as a result, Black unemployment increased, leaving African American women jobless and poor. Indeed Black women and children were the most hit by this economic downturn.⁴⁴⁸ Black families remained poorer than white families; moreover, they were the worst affected by illnesses and death. Being the least privileged in white American society, Black women had a difficult task in the Post Civil Rights Era, as they felt their needs were still ignored by feminist organizations.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴¹ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 358.

⁴⁴² Civil Rights Act of 1964: it was signed into law on July, 2, by President Lyndon B. Johnson, and entitled all persons to equal access to restaurants, bars, theatres, hotels, gasoline stations, and similar establishments serving the general public. The legislation also barred discrimination in the hiring, promotion, and wages of employees of medium size and large firms. From: Thomas E Patterson, We the People, 2008, p. 175.

⁴⁴³ Voting Rights Act of 1965: it was introduced by President Lyndon B. Johnson in March 1965, passed by Congress, and signed into law by the President on August 6; the Voting Rights Act guaranteed the voting rights of all U.S. citizens "without distinctions of race, color, or previous condition of servitude". The law was aimed at striking down a web of statutes and practices in Southern states that had prevented the vast majority of African Americans from voting there, especially laws requiring prospective voters to read and interpret sections of the State Constitution and to provide written answers to a test that could be as long as 20 pages. From: Harvard Sitkoff, op. cit., p. 263.

⁴⁴⁴ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 202.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 311.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 313.

⁴⁴⁷ Robin D. G Kelley and Earl Lewis, op. cit., p. 544.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 560.

⁴⁴⁹ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 349.

The Post Civil Rights Era was characterized by political movements in which women of various classes, and ethnic backgrounds participated. These women were involved in Black power, anti poverty, and anti war campaigns.⁴⁵⁰ It is well known that during that period, the United States was involved in the Vietnam War, in which a great number of African Americans participated; however, they were persuaded that they were sent to fight for freedom, whereas they were denied basic human rights.⁴⁵¹

When Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968, many African Americans feared for their future; indeed, this murder convinced them that America was against their freedom, and that their dream of equality would remain unfulfilled.⁴⁵² Black people remained poor, undereducated, and unemployed, despite the huge efforts accomplished by Martin Luther King to achieve equality, and justice.

It is assumed that even after her husband's death, Coretta Scott King⁴⁵³ remained courageous and continued to support the Black community. She declared:

Black women emerged as a new breed of Union Leaders. They were following the steps of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Rosa Parks, Daisy Bates, and Fannie Lou Hamer.^[454]

Known as the First Lady of the Civil Rights Movement, Coretta Scott King had combated for World peace. In 1986, she was arrested after participating in a protest against Apartheid at the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C. She founded the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change, and served as its director for twenty seven years.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁰ Mary Beth Norton, and Ruth M. Alexander, op. cit., p. 438.

⁴⁵¹ Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 305.

⁴⁵² Ibid., p. 322.

⁴⁵³ Coretta Scott King: born in 1927, she was named "the keeper of the flame" because she carried on the civil rights efforts of her husband, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. After his assassination, she kept her husband's speaking dates and wrote a book about her life with him. From: Sheila Keenan, op. cit., p. 144.

⁴⁵⁴ Paula Giddings, op. cit., p. 331.

⁴⁵⁵ Sheila Hardy, P. Stephen Hardy, op. cit., p. 138.

In the Post Civil Rights Era, Black women became interested in their own past; they published the history of their sufferings, and oppression they endured in a nation dominated by whites. As the Women's Movement was primarily concerned with white women, and the Civil Rights Movement with Black men, Black women's major concern was to reveal to people all over the World, their contribution mainly to the Civil Rights Movement and the Feminist one.⁴⁵⁶ It was in that period that famous Black women as Ida Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell became well known to the American public.⁴⁵⁷

Black women were motivated to have a successful career. It is said that a famous Black woman called Oprah Winfrey became the wealthiest Black businesswoman in the world. She began her career in television in 1986, and became the first Black woman billionaire in 2003.⁴⁵⁸ She had offered millions of dollars to charitable organizations, in America and Africa.⁴⁵⁹ It is known that she founded a school in South Africa, under the name of "Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy" for girls which opened in January 2007.⁴⁶⁰

Before the passage of the Civil Rights Act, and Voting Rights Act, only white politicians dominated the American government. However, in the Post Civil Rights Era, a great representation in Congress followed. It is assumed that in 2007, 42 African American men and women were represented in Congress.⁴⁶¹ Shirley Chisholm (1924-2005) was the first Black woman to be elected in the American Congress.⁴⁶² She actively supported equal rights, and Affirmative Action policies.⁴⁶³ She served as an active member of the National Organization for Women (NOW). She was elected in the House of Representatives for seven terms during which she fought for women's rights and other minority rights.

⁴⁵⁶ Stephen J. Whitfield, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁴⁵⁸ James Ciment, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

⁴⁵⁹ Nell Irvin Painter, *op. cit.*, p. 383.

⁴⁶⁰ James Ciment, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁴⁶² Sheila Hardy, P. Stephen Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

⁴⁶³ Robin. D.G. Kelley, Earl Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 556.

In a conference on women's employment, Shirley Chisholm advised women to rebel; she declared:

Women in this country must become revolutionaries. We must refuse to accept the old, the traditional roles and stereotypes... We must replace the old, negative thoughts about our femininity with positive thoughts and positive action affirming it, and more. But we must also remember that we will be breaking with tradition, and so we must prepare ourselves educationally, economically, and psychologically in order that we will be able to accept and bear with the sanctions that society will immediately impose upon us.^[464]

Another famous Black woman in politics was Barbara Jordan (1936-1996). She earned a law degree in 1959, and in 1960, participated in John Kennedy's presidential campaign.⁴⁶⁵ She wanted to improve African American's lives concerning social issues as housing, employment, and voter registration. In 1966, Barbara Jordan became the first Black woman senator, and in 1972, she was elected to the House of Representatives for three terms.⁴⁶⁶ She ended her career as a teacher at the University of Texas.

The most important Black woman leader of the twenty-first century was Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice. She grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, during the most difficult years of the Civil Rights Era. Having lost one of her playmates in the bombing of a church in 1963, she became deeply affected by segregation against Black people.⁴⁶⁷ These events had convinced her to pursue her efforts to protect African Americans' rights for freedom. Condoleeza Rice had served at the State Department in the Carter Administration; during the eighties, she directed the Soviet and East European Affairs in the National Security Council. In 2001, President George W. Bush (son) had appointed her as the National Security Director. In 2005, she became Secretary of State, succeeding to Colin Powell.⁴⁶⁸ Condoleeza Rice played a key role in American foreign policy during the Bush Administration. She had executed the Iraq War, and the War on Terror.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 557.

⁴⁶⁵ Sheila Hardy, P. Stephen Hardy, op. cit, p. 173.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 174.

⁴⁶⁷ James Ciment, op. cit., p. 230.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 230.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 231.

Following the Civil Rights and Women's Rights Movements, African American women held important positions in economic, social, and political fields. They entered into the mainstream of American life, especially after the Civil Rights Act, and Voting Rights Act had banned laws which discriminated against Black people.⁴⁷⁰

The sixties had introduced the first changes on American laws and politics; American people became conscious of racial, religious, and political differences throughout their communities;⁴⁷¹ moreover, the rise of the Black middle class was one of the greatest achievements of the Post Civil Rights Era. It is assumed that the poverty level among African Americans had fallen from 31 to 21 percent, between 1980 and 2000;⁴⁷² however, in the seventies, only 45 percent of Black families had achieved middle class status.⁴⁷³

Throughout the country, Black women struggled for their rights: their primary goal was to end class and gender discrimination by asking for equal employment opportunities, and have access to political action;⁴⁷⁴ however, this did not mean that they achieved complete equality with whites. By 2008, their income remained inferior to that of white people, and they were the worst hit by the economic depression that affected the American nation.⁴⁷⁵

For Black women, holding public office constituted a dream which was unbelievable a few years earlier. It is assumed that in 1964, one hundred Blacks were elected in the USA, whereas, in 2000, seven thousand Blacks were elected, most of them in the House of Representatives. Three Black people were represented in the Senate, among them, Colin Powell, and Condoleeza Rice.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁰ William H. Chafe, op. cit., p. 420.

⁴⁷¹ M. J. Heale, op. cit., p. 158.

⁴⁷² James Ciment, op. cit., p. 221.

⁴⁷³ William H. Chafe, op. cit., p. 424.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 414.

⁴⁷⁵ David Mauk and John Oakland, American Civilization, An Introduction, 2009, p. 98.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 100.

In 2008, African Americans' dream has become a reality: a Black President has won the election. President Barack Obama was not a product of the Civil Rights Movement, rather of the success of the Black middle class in America.⁴⁷⁷ The election of Michelle Obama as America's First lady has proved to people all over the World that Black women have finally succeeded in the long and historical battle, the struggle for civil and political rights.

At the Presidential election of 2008, Black women had given Barack Obama the majority of the female vote, making him the first Black American President in the history of the United States.⁴⁷⁸ Moreover, his election has brought three Black women to the White House: Michelle Obama, and her two daughters, Malia, and Sasha.⁴⁷⁹

3.6 COMPARISON BETWEEN AMERICAN AND AFRICAN FEMINISMS

All over the World, Black women had participated in a life of struggle for liberation and emancipation. Beginning from the 1920's, Black American and African women were involved in feminist movements; Black women in both continents were victims of economic, social, and political inequalities.⁴⁸⁰ Their struggle would center on the satisfaction of their basic rights, such as the right to vote, or to have equal pay for equal jobs to men.

It is said that African women's movements were founded in the late nineteenth century, when nationalism became a predominant force in the Arab World. Nationalist struggles had unified men and women, who actively participated in these movements for liberating their countries from colonial rule.⁴⁸¹ Indeed, nationalism was perceived by women as a way to be active in public life.

⁴⁷⁷ James Ciment, op.cit., p. 229.

⁴⁷⁸ Gwen Ifill, *The Breakthrough, Politics And Race in The Age of Obama*, 2009, p. 77.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

⁴⁸⁰ Available at: <http://www.Columbia.edu/cu/sister/Differences/html> 26/09/2010.

⁴⁸¹ Margaret L. Meriwether and Judith E. Tucker, *Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*, 1999, p. 107.

Qasim Amine, an Egyptian judge, also known as the father of Arab feminism, had written a book entitled “The Liberation of Women”, in 1899, in which he said:

The status of women is inseparably tied to the status of a nation. When the status of a nation is low, reflecting an uncivilized condition for that nation, the status of women is also low, and when the status of a nation is elevated, reflecting progress and civilization of that nation, the status of women in that country is also elevated.^[482]

As we already know, contemporary Black American feminism emerged with the second wave of the American Women’s Movement, which began in the late sixties. Feeling discriminated in both economic and political fields, Black American women had sought to distinguish their feminist identity, by creating their own feminism.

It is also said that women’s oppression originated from the colonial system which tyrannized most African societies.⁴⁸³ Black women in the United States had supported African women’s liberation struggles which happened during the sixties.⁴⁸⁴ Indeed, American women had achieved a tenacious position that made them more aware of peace, and freedom in the World; moreover, they had acclaimed the independence movements in many African states, as Algeria, Nigeria, or the Gold Coast.⁴⁸⁵

It is well known that Algeria was the first Arab state to be under European colonial rule in 1830.⁴⁸⁶ At first, Algerian women’s action was not for political power; instead, they were seeking social, economic, and political changes, and their primary concern was to keep their traditions, religion, and culture.

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 100.

⁴⁸³ Available at: <http://www.Columbia.edu/cu/sister/Differences/html/26/09/2010>.

⁴⁸⁴ John Hope Franklin, Alfred A Moss, JR. op. cit., p. 619.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 620.

⁴⁸⁶ Margaret L. Meriwether and Judith E Tucker, op. cit., p. 29.

Feminism in Africa was not yet organized in the 1960's. In fact, African feminists were so preoccupied by the effects of European colonial rule and the social, economic, and cultural changes they produced, that they did not call themselves feminists. Instead, they wanted to empower their national culture, and to protect their families against the westernization of their language, education, and religion.⁴⁸⁷ African feminists had developed a feminist consciousness by defending nationalism, nationhood, and struggling for national liberation. They strengthened their positions by opposing the countries that colonized them. Moreover, they gave priority to their nations over other feminist issues.⁴⁸⁸

If we take the example of Algeria, the nationalist struggle lasted for eight long years during which Algerian women risked their lives in fighting for their country's liberation, not for their own emancipation as women.⁴⁸⁹ In Algeria, women were living under a patriarchal system, which used religion to oppose women's emancipation. Moreover, patriarchy was rooted among Arab families since a long time before the colonial period.⁴⁹⁰ Algerian women considered that independence from French rule would bring them freedom, but they were aware that the political situation of their country was more urgent than feminist reforms.⁴⁹¹ During the Liberation War, Algerian women played an active role by providing help, food, medicine, and care for fighters. They transported weapons, cared for the wounded, and acted as information agents and spies. They also hid men in their homes, and went to battlefields alongside with them. Djamila Bouhired, one of the most famous activists, had declared in an interview:

The young women of Algeria don't have time to discuss the problems of sex right now. We are still in a struggle to make our new country work, to rebuild the destroyed family, to preserve our identity as a nation.^[492]

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴⁸⁹ Mounira Cherrad, *States and Women's Rights*, 2001, p. 185.

⁴⁹⁰ Available at: <http://cgiampietri.wordpress.com/2007/12/26/women-feminisms-and-the-neopatriarch-08/01/2012>.

⁴⁹¹ Mounira Cherrad, op. cit., p. 185.

⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 188.

It is said that the Algerian family code adopted in the mid fifties had established a family in which women were dominated by men.⁴⁹³ In 1982, Algerian women had organized demonstrations, and asked for equality between men and women concerning social issues, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance rights. They succeeded to collect more than one thousand signatures in which they asked the government to add new amendments to the family code, which finally became law on June, 9, 1984.⁴⁹⁴

In the late 1980's, Anti-regime Islamic extremism appeared, culminating with the 5th October 1988 riots which occurred in most Algerian cities.⁴⁹⁵ Beginning from the 1990's, Algerian women asked for new rights to attain their goals. They had fought colonial rule, then terrorism with the same courage and determination as men; they organized marches to denounce terrorist leaders who committed crimes against innocent people, and protested discriminating laws. Their status had improved with the efforts of the international community to apply the principles of democracy, by forcing local governments to recognize the equality between men and women in social and political lives.⁴⁹⁶

For African women, feminism is defined as a struggle against all forms of injustice. As they belong to the Third World, they are much worried about hunger, thirst, or war. They want to be helped by First World women to solve these problems; moreover, their highest priorities remain peace and development.⁴⁹⁷ It is said that American feminism had had a positive impact on African feminism; however, African feminists must carry on their own struggle, by leading their own battles, and analyzing their own objectives. Finally, we have to say that Black women all over the World must be united to ask for more rights, in order to end both capitalist and imperialist systems.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹³ Margaret L. Meriwether and Judith E. Tucker, op. cit., p. 92.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴⁹⁵ Mounira Cherrad, op.cit., p. 185.

⁴⁹⁶ Available at: <http://cgjampietri.wordpress.com/2007/12/26/women.feminisms-and-the-neopatriarch>, 08/01/2012.

⁴⁹⁷ Available at: http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/v2i1/alhibr_21.htm, 08/01/2012.

⁴⁹⁸ Available at: http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/v2i1/alhibr_21.htm, 08/01/2012.

In October 2011, three African women who fought injustice, dictatorship, and inequality, in Liberia and Yemen, have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of their struggle for women's rights.

Ellen John Sirleaf, 72, was the first female Liberian President, elected democratically in 2005. She had made efforts to achieve peace and promote economic and social developments, in a country devastated by civil wars; also, she struggled to strengthen the position of women.

Leymah Gbowee, 39, is a Liberian women's rights activist. She is the head of the "Women Peace and Security Network", an organization which attempts to bring an end to the long war in Liberia, and to encourage women to participate in elections. Throughout her struggle, she campaigns for women's rights, protesting inequality, oppression, and rape. She considers the Nobel Peace Prize as a proof of the struggle led by women to defend their rights, not only in Liberia and Yemen, but also in any country where women are oppressed. In the Nobel Audience city hall she declared:

We used our pains, broken bodies and scarred emotions to confront the injustices and terror of our nation. We must continue to unite in sisterhood to turn our tears into triumph; there is no time to rest until our World achieves wholeness and balance, where all men and women are considered equal and free.^[499]

Tawakkul Karman, 32, is the head of the human rights group "Women Journalists without Chains". She has been a leading figure of the protest against Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, for his authoritarian regime. The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to Tawakkul Karman in recognition to the Arab spring movement that has ousted dictators in North Africa, and the Middle East. Karman is the youngest Arab laureate, and the first Arab woman to win the Prize. In her speech in Oslo, she gave importance to the struggle of Arab women in a society dominated by men's supremacy.

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⁴⁹⁹ Quoted from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2073078/Nobel-Peace-Prize-Ellen-Johnson-18/01/2012>.

Conclusion

The history of feminism recounted a narrative of white feminism in the United States and Europe; however, it excluded the struggles of women in other continents such as Africa, as well as women of color in Western societies.⁵⁰⁰

First wave feminism was carried out by white American women abolitionists, who were fighting for the right to vote. It also involved famous Black women, such as Sojourner Truth, Ida B Wells, and Mary Church Terrell, whose primary goals were the fight against racism, and sexism.

Second wave feminism emerged in the sixties, and was one of the most important movements in the US, because it revived the spirit of feminism among the African American community.⁵⁰¹ Black women's struggle in this period had revealed that they had surmounted all barriers to achieve womanhood and citizenship. Their political participation was due to their feminist personal experiences, which oriented them toward social, economic, and political changes within their societies.⁵⁰²

Third wave feminism was the result of the new global order, the fall of communism, and religious fundamentalism. It called to accept and create new alliances between Black and other feminisms. It was inspired by a new generation of radical women voices during the 1980's, and 1990's, mainly women of color, and Third World women.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Margaret L. Meriwether and Judith E. Tucker, op. cit., p. 90.

⁵⁰¹ M.J. Heale, op. cit, p. 148.

⁵⁰² Margaret L. Meriwether and Judith E. Tucker, op. cit., p 95.

⁵⁰³ Available at: [http://www.sagepub.com/upm.data/6236 chapter1 23/01/2012](http://www.sagepub.com/upm.data/6236%20chapter1%2023/01/2012).

As a conclusion, we have to say that Black women's struggle in the Civil Rights Movement had left a great impact on American society. Moreover, they had transformed American history, by fighting for equality and resisting against discrimination.

By the mid 1980's, Black American women were finally integrated into World politics; they had linked their personal life to their political one. They had formed their own Feminist Movement to address the needs of Black women who were ignored in both the Black Liberation movement, and the white women's movement. Finally, they supported Black women all over the World, especially Third World women.⁵⁰⁴

Unlike feminism in the United States, African feminism served to protect the nation from colonial rule. African women acted in a way that did not challenge their patriarchal states.⁵⁰⁵ Their goals were mainly social, economic, and cultural emancipation, rather than the need for political power. As a matter of fact, the personal is not necessarily the political.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ Available at: [http:// www mit.edu.8001/activities/thistle/v9/9.01/6.blackf.html](http://www.mit.edu.8001/activities/thistle/v9/9.01/6.blackf.html) 28/05/2010.

⁵⁰⁵ Margaret L. Meriwether and Judith E. Tucker, op. cit., p. 109.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., p 94.

General Conclusion

The history of African American women brought a new meaning to American freedom, justice, and independence. These women had worked hard to change the face of America; they fought for freedom from slavery, oppression, racism, and sexism. They had lived on a land of constant revolution⁵⁰⁷, and had always participated, and highly contributed at making America a land of freedom, justice, and equality.

Their struggle was unique because they represented two groups of marginalized people: Women and African Americans. They had combated in slavery, during the Civil War, in the First and Second World Wars, and during the Great Depression; however, the most important role they performed was during the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties, a period in which they sought to define a new identity within American society, in order to achieve equality and justice.

Black women had experienced poverty, segregation, violence, and racism. They used to live in an atmosphere of racial discrimination in both social and economic fields; moreover, they were completely barred from political participation. Therefore, they defined their own goals to achieve their full integration in the mainstream of American life.

Throughout their struggle, they have sought better education, integration in economy, political office, and leadership roles in American society. Famous Black women such as Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Septima Clarke, or Ella Baker, became the heroines of the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties.⁵⁰⁸ They dedicated their lives to struggle in order to end an era of discrimination, and inequality.

⁵⁰⁷ Mabel. M. Smythe, The Black American Reference Book, 1976, p. 360.

⁵⁰⁸ Lois P. Rudnick, Judith E. Smith, and Rachel Lee Rubin, op. cit., p. 178.

The story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott was attributed to the strong determination of an ordinary Black woman to end segregation on buses. Indeed, Rosa Parks' historical refusal to yield her seat to a white man had provoked a Black protest, which was known as the Civil Rights Movement. That incident had given Black women the opportunity to undertake a big mission, and to define their own future.

Black women's activism during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s proved that they were committed to achieve equality and justice, and to show their strength in order to defy and reject racist laws. They were proud to be Black and females; they extended the meaning of womanhood, and founded a new movement, Black Feminism. They succeeded to form their own organizations, and to defend their civil and political rights.

Black women participated in both the struggle for racial equality and the Women's Liberation Movement. Between the mid 1920's and the mid 1960's, they did not encourage feminism, because they were aware that freedom for Black people was the most important goal they should attain; then, when that freedom was gained, they would work for women's rights.⁵⁰⁹

Throughout their struggle toward Women's Liberation and Black Liberation, they wanted to eliminate all sex barriers to their integration in social, educational, economic, and political life.⁵¹⁰ As a result, they were successful to ally the objectives of the Black Liberation Movement, with those of the emancipation of both Black and white women in American society;⁵¹¹ moreover, thanks to their long experience in civil rights, Black women had asserted their leadership roles in the Black Feminist Movement.

⁵⁰⁹ Bell Hooks, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

From the seventies to the present, Black women gained more power than they had once imagined. They had largely contributed to social, economic and political changes in the American Nation.⁵¹² These daughters of Africa, and descendents of slaves, had risked their lives to bring about equality for all. They helped launch the Civil Rights Movement, created their own Feminist Movement, and definitely changed their history, and that of their country.

Having been born in slavery, and suffering deeply from racism, Black women felt compassion for the sufferings of all oppressed peoples. They found the courage to denounce racist policies that affected them, and their fight was mainly against imperialism and capitalism. They are now demanding human rights, not only for African Americans, but for people all over the World.

Despite the victories of the Civil Rights Movement, racial equality is still present in the United States.⁵¹³ The struggle to end poverty and discrimination continues today, and the racist and capitalist system is difficult to eradicate; however, the United States gives more importance to women's rights all over the World, in order to promote democracy, and at the same time fight extremism and terrorism.

As an example, America became aware of oppressed Afghan women, especially since the events of September, 11, 2001.⁵¹⁴ Therefore, it made gender equality an urgent issue to American foreign policy. Allowing women of all races to participate in politics is a sine qua non condition to achieve freedom and democracy; at the same time, it is a way for women all over the World to gain their civil and political rights within more just, more modern, and more developed societies.

⁵¹² Nell Irvin Painter, op. cit., p. 391.

⁵¹³ David Mauk and John Oakland, op. cit., p. 98.

⁵¹⁴ Foreign Affairs, May-June, 2004, p. 80.

Appendices

Appendix One

The Declaration of Independence July 4th, 1776

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the Earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organize its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that government long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpation, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these colonies; and such is now the necessity which constraints them to alter their former systems of government.

The history of the present King of Great Britain is history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over those states. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his governors to pass laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his assent should be obtained, and, when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless these people would relinquish the right of representation in the legislature, a right inestimable to them, and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved representative houses repeatedly, for opposing, with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the legislative powers, incapable of annihilation, have returned to the people at large for their exercise; the state remaining, in the meantime, exposed to all the dangers of invasions from without and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these states, for that purpose obstructing the laws of naturalization of foreigners, refusing to pass others to encourage their migration hither, and raising the conditions of new appropriations of lands.

He has obstructed the administration of justice, by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers.

He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies without the consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the military independent of, and superior to, the civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws, giving his assent to their acts of pretended legislation:

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us;

For protecting them, by a mock trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states;

For cutting off our trade with all parts of the world;

For imposing taxes on us without our consent;

For depriving us, in many cases, of the benefits of trial by jury;

For transporting us beyond seas, to be tried for pretended offences;

For abolishing the free system of English laws in a neighbouring province, establishing therein an arbitrary government, and enlarging its boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these colonies;

For taking away our charters, abolishing our most valuable laws, and altering fundamentally the forms of our governments;

For suspending our legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated government here, by declaring us out of his protection and waging war against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burned our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny already begun with the circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow citizens, taken captive on the high seas, to bear arms against their country, to become the executioners of their friends and brethren, or to fall themselves by their hands.

He has excited domestic insurrection among us; and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions.

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress, in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

Nor have we been wanting in our attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them, from time to time, of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity; and we have conjured them, by the ties of our common kindred, to disavow these usurpations, which would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They, too, have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity which denounces our separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends.

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved; and that, as free and independent states, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour.

John Hancock and fifty-five others.

Source: Thomas E. Patterson, We the People, A Concise Introduction to American Politics, Seventh Edition, New York, McGraw Hill Companies Inc, 2008, pp. 642-643.

Appendix Two

The Bill of Rights (The first ten Amendments)

The ten original Amendments to the Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights, were passed by Congress on September 25, 1789, and ratified on December 15, 1791.

AMENDMENT I (1791): Basic freedoms; separation of church and state

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

AMENDMENT II (1791): The right to bear arms

A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

AMENDMENT III (1791): Quartering of soldiers

No soldier shall, in time of peace, be quartered in any house without the consent of the owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

AMENDMENT IV (1791): Search and seizure

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly described, the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

AMENDMENT V (1791): Rights in court cases

No Person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the militia, when in actual service in time of war or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation.

AMENDMENT VI (1791): Rights of the accused

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favour, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.

AMENDMENT VII (1791): The right to a trial by jury

In suits of common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury shall be otherwise reexamined in any court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law.

AMENDMENT VIII (1791): Bail; cruel and unusual punishment

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishment inflicted.

AMENDMENT IX (1791): Rights retained by the people

The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

AMENDMENT X (1791): Reserved powers

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the state respectively, or to the people.

LATER AMENDMENTS

AMENDMENT XI (1798): Law suits against states

The judicial power of the United States shall not be constructed to extend to any suit in law or equity, commenced or prosecuted against one of the United States by a citizen or another state, or by citizens or subjects of any foreign state.

AMENDMENT XII (1804): Electoral votes

The electors shall meet in their respective States, and vote by ballot for President and Vice-President, one of whom, at least, shall not be an inhabitant of the same state with themselves; they shall name in their ballots the person voted for as President, and in distinct ballots the person voted for as Vice-President, and they shall make distinct lists of all persons voted for as President, and of all persons voted for as Vice-President, and of the number of votes for each, which lists they shall sign and certify, and transmit sealed to the seat of government of the United States, directed to the President of the Senate; - the President of the senate shall, in the presence of the senate and house of Representatives, open all the certificates and the votes shall then be counted; - the person having the greatest number of votes for President shall be the President if such number be a majority of the whole number of electors appointed, and if no person have a majority, then from the persons having the highest numbers not exceeding three on the list of those voted for as President, the House of Representatives shall choose immediately, by ballot, the President. But in choosing the President, the votes shall be taken by States, the representation from each State having one vote; a quorum for this purpose shall consist of a member or members from two-thirds of the States, and a majority of all the States shall be necessary to a choice. And if the House of Representatives shall not choose a President whenever the right of choice shall develop upon them, before the fourth day of March next following, then the Vice-President shall act as President, as in the case of death or other constitutional disability of the President.

The person having the greatest number of votes as Vice-President shall be the Vice-President, if such number be a majority of the whole number of electors appointed; and if no person have a majority, then from the two highest numbers on the list the senate shall choose the vice-President; a quorum for the purpose shall consist of two-thirds of the whole number of Senators, and a majority of the whole number shall be necessary to a choice. But no person constitutionally ineligible to the office of President shall be eligible to that of Vice-President of the United States.

AMENDMENT XIII (1865): Abolition of slavery

Section 1 Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2 Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

AMENDMENT XIV (1868): Citizenship for former slaves; due process and equal protection clauses

Section 1 All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Section 2 Representatives shall be appointed among the several States according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each State, excluding Indians not taxed. But when the right to vote at any election for the choice of Electors for President and vice-President of the United States, Representatives in Congress, the executive and judicial officers of a state, or the members of the legislature thereof, is denied to any of the male inhabitants of such State, being twenty-one years of age and citizens of the United states, or in any way abridged, except for participation in rebellion, or other crime, the basis of representation therein shall be reduced in the proportion which the number of such male citizens shall bear to the whole number of male citizens twenty-one years of age in such State.

Section 3 No person shall be a Senator or Representative in congress, or elector of President and Vice-President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath, as a

member of congress, or as an officer of the United states, as a member of any State legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any State, to support the Constitution of the United states, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. Congress may, by a vote of two-thirds of each house, remove such disability.

Section 4 The validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, including debts incurred for payment of pensions and bounties for services in suppressing insurrection or rebellion, shall not be questioned. But neither the United States nor any State shall assume or pay any debt or obligation incurred in aid of insurrection or rebellion against the United States, or any claim for the loss of emancipation of any slave; but all such debts, obligations, and claims shall be held illegal and void.

Section 5 The Congress shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislature, the provision of this article.

AMENDMENT XV (1870): Voting rights for freed male slaves

Section 1 The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude.

Section 2 The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislature.

AMENDMENT XVI (1913): Federal income tax

The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes on incomes, from whatever source derived, without apportionment among the several States, and without regard to any census or enumeration.

AMENDMENT XVII (1913): The direct election of Senators

Section 1 The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State, elected by the people thereof, for six years; and each Senator shall have one vote. The electors in each State shall have the qualifications requisite for electors of (voters for) the most numerous branch of the State legislatures.

Section 2 When vacancies happen in the representation of any State in the Senate, the executive authority of such State shall issue writs of election to fill such vacancies: Provided, that the legislature of any State may empower the executive thereof to make temporary appointments until the people fill vacancies by election as the legislature may direct.

Section 3 This amendment shall not be so construed as to affect the election or term of any Senator chosen before it becomes valid as part of the Constitution.

AMENDMENT XVIII (1919, repealed 1933): Prohibition

Section 1 After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the united States, and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof, for beverage purposes, is hereby prohibited.

Section 2 The Congress and the several States shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Section 3 This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of the several States, as provided by the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission thereof to the States by the Congress.

AMENDMENT XIX (1920): Voting rights for women

Section 1 The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Section 2 The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

AMENDMENT XX (1933): The President's term of office

Section 1 The terms of the President and the Vice-President shall end at noon on the 20th day of January, and the terms of Senators and representatives at noon on the 3rd day of January, of the year in which such terms would have ended if this article had not been ratified; and the terms of their successors shall then begin.

(The start of sessions of Congress)

Section 2 The Congress shall assemble at least once in every year, and such meeting shall begin at noon on the 3rd day of January, unless they shall by law appoint a different day.

(Presidential succession)

Section 3 If, at time fixed for the beginning of the term of the president, the President-elect shall have died, the Vice-President-elect shall become president. If a President shall not have been chosen before the time fixed for the beginning of his term, or if the President-elect shall have failed to qualify, then the Vice-President-elect shall act as President until a president shall have qualified; and the congress may by law provide for the case wherein neither a President-elect nor a Vice-President-elect shall have qualified, declaring who shall then act as President, or the manner in which one who is to act shall be selected, and such persons shall act accordingly until a President or vice-President shall have qualified.

Section 4 The Congress may by law provide for the case of the death of any of the persons from whom the House of Representatives may choose a President whenever the right of choice shall have developed upon them, and for the case of

the death of any of the persons from whom the Senate may choose a Vice-President whenever the right of choice shall have developed upon them.

Section 5 Sections 1 and 2 shall take effect on the 15th day of October following the ratification of this article.

Section 6 This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the constitution by the legislatures of three-quarters of the several States within seven years from the date of its submission.

AMENDMENT XXI (1933): Repeal of prohibition

Section 1 The eighteenth article of amendment to the Constitution of the United States is hereby repealed.

Section 2 The transportation or importation into any State, Territory, or Possession of the United States for delivery or use therein of intoxicating liquors, in violation of the laws thereof, is hereby prohibited.

Section 3 This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by conventions in the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of submission thereof to the States by the Congress.

AMENDMENT XXII (1951): Term limits for the President, 2 terms or 10 years

Section 1 No person shall be elected to the office of President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of President more than once. But this article shall not apply to any person holding the office of President when this article was proposed by the Congress, and shall not prevent any person who may be holding the office of President, or acting as President, during the term within which this article becomes operative from holding the office of President or acting as President during the remainder of such term.

Section 2 This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislatures of three-quarters of the several States within seven years from the date of its submission to the States by the Congress.

AMENDMENT XXIII (1961): Electoral College votes for the District of Columbia

Section 1 The District constituting the seat of Government of the United States shall appoint in such manner as the Congress may direct:

A number of electors of President and Vice-President equal to the whole number of Senators and Representatives in Congress to which the District would be entitled if it were a State, but in no event more than the least populous State; they shall be in addition to those appointed by the States, but they shall be considered for the purposes of the election of President and Vice-President, to be electors appointed by a State; and they shall meet in the District and perform such duties as provided by the twelfth article of amendment.

Section 2 The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

AMENDMENT XXIV (1964): Prohibition of poll taxes

Section 1 The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice-President, for electors for President or Vice-President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.

Section 2 The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

AMENDMENT XXV (1967): Presidential succession

Section 1 In the case of the removal of the President from office or of his death or resignation, the Vice-President shall become President.

Section 2 Whenever there is a vacancy in the office of the Vice-President, the President shall nominate a Vice-President who shall take office upon confirmation by a majority vote of both Houses of Congress.

Section 3 Whenever the President transmits to the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives his written declaration that he is unable to discharge the powers and duties of this office, and until he transmits to them a written declaration to the contrary, such powers and duties shall be discharged by the Vice-President as Acting President.

Section 4 Whenever the Vice-President and a majority of either the principal officers of the executive departments or of such other body as Congress may by law provide, transmit to the President pro tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives their written declaration that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the vice-President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President.

Thereafter, when the President transmits to the President pro tempore of the Senate and the speaker of the House of representatives his written declaration that no inability exists, he shall resume the powers and duties of his office unless the vice-President and the majority of either the principal officers of the executive department(s) or of such other body as Congress may by law provide, transmit within four days to the President pro tempore of the senate and the Speaker of the house of Representatives their written declaration that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office. Thereupon Congress shall decide the issue, assembling within forty-eight hours for that purpose if not in session. If the Congress, within twenty-one days after receipt of the latter written declaration, or, if Congress is not in session, within twenty-one days after Congress is required to assemble, determines by two-thirds votes of both Houses that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the Vice-President shall continue to discharge the same as Acting President; otherwise, the President shall resume the powers and duties of his office.

AMENDMENT XXVI (1971): Voting rights for young people

Section 1 The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.

Section 2 The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

AMENDMENT XXVII (1992): Timing of congressional pay raises

No law varying the compensation for the service of Senators and Representatives shall take effect until an election of Representatives shall have intervened.

Source: David Mauk and John Oakland, American Civilization An Introduction, Fifth Edition, New York, USA, Routledge, 2009, pp. 384-385-386-387-388-389-390-391-392.

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Glossary

Glossary

Abolitionism : The campaign, strengthened by religious passion, for the immediate end of slavery. Among the most famous abolitionists were William Lloyd Garrison and Theodore Dwight Weld. Themselves always in the minority, abolitionists combined with more compromising opponents of slavery to form a wide antislavery movement in the North by the eve of the Civil War. From: Virginia Bernhard, Firsthand America, 1994, p. 508.

Activist: a person who takes direct action to support or oppose an issue or belief. From: Sheila Hardy, Extraordinary People of the Civil Rights Movement, 2007, p. 268.

Baby boom: The prosperity and optimism that characterized the post-World War II sparked an intense interest in family and “normalcy”, which in turn created a most unusual generation of Americans, the “baby boomers.” The baby boom consisted of the generation of children fathered by veterans returning to civilian life at the end of World War II. The US population rose by an incredible 20 million people from 1940 to 1950. From: Harvard Sitkoff, Postwar America, 2000, p. 28.

Black Nationalism: A philosophy that exalted Black cultural expression, pride in blackness, and often separation from white society. It has been an important current within African-American intellectual history since the 19th century, when some free Blacks advocated emigration to Africa. Frustrated by violence, discrimination and the slow progress in gaining rights at the start of the 20th century, some African Americans had lost hope of ever achieving equality in the United States. Led by Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey, Black nationalists advocated the creation of a new African-American nation, a Black homeland in Africa. In 1914, Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) to encourage African American economic independence and to organize his “Back to Africa” cause. His movement declined after he was jailed for mail fraud in 1925 in connection with his fund-raising activities. His beliefs have influenced other African American leaders throughout the century. Since 1945 few African Americans have supported a return to Africa, but many have espoused other aspects of Black nationalism inspired by Garvey, including group solidarity, racial separatism, and ethnic pride. The most visible agent of Black nationalism has been the Nation of Islam and its adherents, including the outspoken and controversial Malcolm X, who converted to Islam in prison and was assassinated in 1965. Malcolm called on Blacks to separate themselves from “white devils” and defend themselves “by any means necessary”. Malcolm’s ideas spread beyond the Black Muslims and influenced the “Black Power” movement. From: Ibid., p. 38.

Black Power: In the mid-1960s, “Black Power” became the slogan of militant Blacks who rejected the nonviolence of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the moderate goals of the early civil rights movement. Stokely Carmichael, the fire-brand elected to head the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1966, popularized the Black power slogan that summer during the civil rights protest march to Jackson, Mississippi. Black Power grew out of frustrations caused by the limited progress of the civil rights movement, desperation at the poverty most Blacks suffered, urban race riots beginning in 1964, and the powerful ideas of Malcolm X, a Black Muslim who rejected integration and advocated self-defense. Those who adopted the Black Power slogan ranged from the Black Panthers, who sought to gain Black power “through the barrel of a gun,” to those who took pride in their African roots and racial heritage. The Black Power movement heightened the self-esteem of many African Americans and spurred mainstream civil rights leaders to focus attention on the economic plight of the Black urban underclass. From: *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

Capitalism: An economic system in which the means of production and exchange are privately owned and market exchanges establish prices. It is also referred to as “Free enterprise system.” From: Virginia Bernhard, *op. cit.*, p.509.

Civil liberties: Those rights of the individual citizen, as enumerated in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution, that limit the powers of the government. The First amendment to the Constitution, for example, prohibits congress from making any law that would restrict the free exercise of religious liberty. From: *Ibid.*

Civil rights: the legal rights of personal liberty that belong to all citizens in American society, as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. From: Sheila Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.268.

Civil Rights Act: The Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, was a major turning point in the quest of African Americans for equal treatment under the law. Its numerous titles, or sections, struck down a network of laws that had historically kept Black people, especially in the South, from voting, using public accommodations, and receiving equal treatment under the law. Title I of the Act restricted the use of literacy tests and poll taxes (a tax on adults of voting age that had prevented most Blacks from voting). Titles II and III outlawed certain types of segregation and discrimination in hotels, restaurants, and other public accommodations. Title IV furthered the cause of school desegregation. Titles VII and VIII outlawed discrimination by employers with more than 100 workers and established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to investigate violations and enforce the law. Other titles established procedures for the federal government to enforce civil rights laws and updated court procedures. From: Harvard Sitkoff, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

Civil Rights Movement: A movement in the 1950's and 1960's that, through the use of civil disobedience, obtained civil rights; the right of equal access to lunch counters, hotels, education, and legislation by the federal government. Among many leaders, Martin Luther King, Jr., is the most prominent. From: William. O. Kellogg, The Easy Way, 2003, p.156.

Consciousness-raising groups: In the late 1960's and early 1970's, small groups of women held regularly scheduled meetings where they would share intimate details of their lives with each other. These women, who were mainly fairly young, middle to upper middle class, well educated, and white, found that when they discussed their lives and their feelings common patterns emerged. Most of them shared experiences of oppression that they realized came from being female in a male-dominated society, and from that realization came the idea that "the personal is political"; in other words, that experiences that seem to be deeply personal often have roots in the surrounding culture and thus do not have to be repeated if the relationships and assumptions from which they develop could be changed. Consciousness-raising groups grew out of the civil rights and antiwar movements, and had an important effect on the newly re-emerging feminist movement. From the groups came many new insights into how relationships between men and women and between women and other women could be improved. From: Harvard Sitkoff, op. cit., p 75.

CORE: The Congress of Racial Equality, founded in 1942 by Bernice fisher, James Farmer, and others to organize and lead boycotts, sit-ins, marches, and other forms of nonviolent protest. In the early 1960s, it concentrated on voter registration in the South. Later, by the mid-1960s, it focused on achieving political power for Blacks and also was active in the anti-war movement. From: Sheila Hardy, op. cit., p. 269.

Discrimination: refers to any kind of unfair treatment based on race, gender, or ethnicity.

Disenfranchise: To remove the right of one to vote. Franchise is used in political science and history to refer to the right to vote. From: William. O. Kellogg, op. cit., p. 156.

Emancipation: Act or process of setting or making one free; freeing, especially applied to slaves. From: Ibid., p. 148.

Freedom Rides: A series of protests against segregation on interstate travel, staged by black and white activists traveling by bus through the southern United States. From: Sheila Hardy, op. cit., p. 269.

Freedom Schools: schools established in the south during the civil rights movement to teach African American children confidence, political organization skills, and voter literacy. From: Ibid.

Great Society: The label given to Lyndon B. Johnson's domestic program. Johnson, having grown up politically during Franklin D. Roosevelt's years in office, sought during his own presidency a program to fulfill the promise of the New Deal and complete the work left undone by John F. Kennedy's New Frontier. From: Virginia Bernhard, op. cit., p. 510.

Imperialism: The policy of one nation's conquering other portions of the world and exercising political dominion over them. The term can also be applied to economic or cultural domination of one society by another. From: Ibid., p. 511.

Jim Crow Laws: Discriminatory practices developed in the 1880's in the Southern United States to restrict the personal liberties and rights of African Americans. From: Sheila Hardy, op. cit., p. 270.

Ku Klux Klan: An ultra-racist organization first formed during Reconstruction following the civil War and later revived in the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan had its third incarnation in the 1950s and 1960s. Rising up in response to the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which ordered desegregation of all public schools, the new Klan sought to halt the civil rights movement by intimidating its leaders with threats, murders, bombings, and other terrorist acts. Klan violence, however, helped mobilize public support for the passage of the civil rights legislation. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson promised to use the law to control this "hooded society of bigots," a reference to the white sheets with hoods that Klan members wore. From: Harvard Sitkoff, op. cit., pp. 160-161.

MIA: The Montgomery Improvement Association, founded in 1955 to organize the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, which led to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that outlawed segregated seating on public buses. From: Sheila Hardy, op. cit., p. 270.

Middle class status: The social class between the working class and the upper class. It consists of people who are generally regarded as having an average status, education, income, in a society. From: Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, 2005, p. 300.

NAACP: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; it is the oldest civil rights organization in the United States, that played a central role in the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s. The NAACP was founded in 1919 by a group of Black civil rights leaders, including the scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, and prominent white progressives. The organization promoted civil rights by investigating lynchings and other violence against Blacks, lobbying lawmakers, publicizing efforts to improve civil rights, and, most important, by challenging racist laws in the courts. After decades of a few hard-won legal and political battles, the NAACP's legal strategy paid off in 1954 when the Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of public schools in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, decision. Under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall and Roy Wilkins, the organization continued to fight legal battles and successfully lobbied for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. From: Harvard Sitkoff, op. cit., p. 195.

Reconstruction: The period following the Civil War during which the Confederate states of the South were under the control of the federal government and the system of slavery was abolished. From: *Ibid.*, p.271.

Registration: The practice of placing citizen's names on an official list of voters before they are eligible to exercise their right to vote. From: Thomas E. Patterson, *We the People*, 2008, p. 659.

SCLC: the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization of ministers and other church leaders committed to working for civil rights, which was founded in 1957 and led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The organization grew out of the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of 1955-56, which had forced the city to integrate the local transportation system. Under King's leadership, the group brought its tactics of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience to cities across the South and later in the 1960's to northern cities as well. King served as president of this organization until his assassination in 1968 and was succeeded first by Abernathy, then by the Reverend Joseph E. Lowery. From: Harvard Sitkoff, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

Secession: As a specific term in American history, the act of the eleven states of the Confederacy in removing themselves from the Union; also the doctrine justifying that decision. The theory of secession held that the Union was made up of sovereign states each of which retained the right to go its separate way. From: Virginia Bernhard, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

Segregation: the legal separation of the races in public institutions and in society. In 1896 the Supreme Court, rendering its decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, ruled that segregated "separate but equal" public facilities did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1954 the court reversed itself through its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, holding that separate facilities were "inherently unequal". From: *Ibid.*

Selma march: In March 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr., and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) sought to publicize the need for a federal Voting Rights Act by launching a voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama. Although half of the population in the county was black, only 1 percent of the potential Black voters were registered to vote. When protesters lined up for a peaceful march on the city, the county sheriff, Jim Clark, sent policemen on horseback to attack them with tear gas, clubs, and whips. Film footage of the attack appeared on the evening news and won support for the federal Voting Rights Act, which was signed into law in August 1965. From: Harvard Sitkoff, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

Seneca Falls Convention: Seneca Falls, a small town in western New York State, and often looked as the birthplace of the American feminist movement. In July of 1848, several hundred early feminists met there to discuss their problems in what is known as the Seneca Falls Convention. The meeting was organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. From: Melinda Tims, *Perspectives on the Making of America*, 2002, pp. 187-188.

Sit-ins (1960-61): On February 1, 1960, four freshmen from a local black college sat down at the lunch counter of Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina. Denied service, they sat at the counter for the rest of the day and promised to return and occupy the seats until they were served. By the end of the week, enough Black students had joined the demonstration to fill the lunchroom completely. Six months later, city officials agreed to integrate public restaurants. The Greensboro sit-in inspired similar protests elsewhere in North Carolina and neighboring states. Eventually, about 70,000 students participated in sit-ins across the South. The movement not only won access to public accommodations for Blacks but also revitalized the civil rights movement; it was students who took part in the sit-in who also formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in April 1960. From: Harvard Sitkoff, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

SNCC: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, established in 1960 under the direction of Ella Baker, to organize students in nonviolent direct protest against segregation and racism. From: Sheila Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

Suffrage: The right to vote. During Reconstruction the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, granting the vote to African American males. Women remained without a federal guarantee of the vote until 1920 when, after a century of organized political pressure, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. From: Virginia Bernhard, *op. cit.*, p. 514.

Temperance: The campaign against the non-medical use of alcohol. It was one of the largest reform movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From: *Ibid.*

Third World: A term used to designate non-Western countries that have yet to industrialize. The United States and its industrialized trading partners, and the Soviet Union and its satellites, make up the first two worlds. From: *Ibid.*

Voting Rights Act: Introduced by President Lyndon B. Johnson in March 1965, passed by Congress, and signed into law by the President in early August, the Voting rights Act guaranteed the voting rights of all U.S. citizens "without distinctions of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The law was aimed at striking down a web of statutes and practices in southern states that had prevented the vast majority of African Americans from voting there, especially laws requiring prospective voters to read and interpret sections of the state constitution and to provide written answers to a test that could be as long as 20 pages. The act restricted literacy testing, forbade intimidation of voters, authorized the attorney general to dispatch federal registrars and observers to countries that tried to resist the act, and empowered the Justice Department to clear in advance changes in state electoral rules that might unfairly burden African American voters. Along with the 24th Amendment to the Constitution, which had been ratified the previous year and prohibited the poll tax in federal elections, and a Supreme Court decision that prohibited poll taxes in all elections, this landmark legislation gave the vote back to Southern Blacks. By 1969, approximately three-fifths of adult African Americans in the South had registered to vote. The most sweeping gains came in Mississippi,

where Black registration leaped from 7 percent in 1964 to 60 percent in 1968, and in Alabama, where African American voter enrollment jumped from 23 percent to 53 percent. From: Harvard Sitkoff, op. cit., pp. 263-264.

Welfare state: The set of governmental programs that provides minimal care for the poor, the elderly, the disabled, and the unemployed. All industrialized societies have adopted welfare measures. In the United States the origins of the welfare state lie in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. From: Virginia Bernhard, op. cit., p. 514.

White supremacist: a person who believes that the white race is superior to all others and who treats people of other races with hostility. From: Sheila Hardy, op. cit., p. 271.

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Abstract

The United States was founded by people with clear ideals. People from all over the World came to take profit from this land of freedom; however, the importation of Black slaves from Africa in colonial times was followed by the harshest forms of discrimination, which were opposite to the ideals proclaimed by the founding fathers. The American society was supposed to be based on life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, all of which benefited for whites only.

Black women were brought to the American colonies against their will; enslaved and harshly exploited by white people, they had spent an existence dominated by race and gender oppression that lasted for more than four centuries. Being long denied their basic civil rights, these women struggled to advance their race. African American women fought for the inclusion in the women's suffrage, and their activism would lead to the Civil Rights Movement, that revealed an important role played by Black women. Beginning from the fifties, they sought to achieve voting rights, equality in public places, and political power.

This dissertation aims first at examining the changing status and roles of Black women during the major events that changed American society in the twentieth century. Next, it will investigate the development of their social, economic and political lives during the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties. It will also reveal their actions to found a Black Feminist Movement. This work has also the purpose of demonstrating that even if Black women have remained a long time second class citizens, it was their activism in the Civil Rights Movement, and their resistance to persistent discrimination, which finally gave them the opportunity to be considered as full American citizens.

Key Words:

Black Women; Denied; Civil Rights; Struggled; Women's Suffrage; Civil Rights Movement; Voting Rights; Equality; Political Power; Black Feminist Movement.