

SOCIO-POLITICAL FIGHT FOR EQUALITY AND EQUITY FOR WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: IDA B. WELLS AND ROSA PARK, CHARISMATIC LEADERS OR VAIN WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS?

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Abstract

This article designs to highlight why American women in general and black American women in particular have been marginalized and deprived from some of the American inalienable rights among which life, liberty and equity and how the later ones succeeded in putting back the clock. Feminism, Marxism and New Historicism help respectively apprehend the equality of both sexes in all aspects of public or private life, decipher conflicts between the haves and the have-nots in a given society and lens written history as an accurate view of what really occurred in the past with subsequent impacts in the present time. This typical socio-political character determines peoples with their own realities in building their proper history as the case of black women Americans was in light of their life experience about civil rights and social equity under the leadership of Ida B. Wells and Rosa Parks in the United States of America.

Key Words : Americans, men, women, rights, equality, equity.

Résumé

Cet article se propose d’expliquer comment les femmes américaines en général et les femmes noires américaines en particulier ont été marginalisées et privées de certains droits inaliénables au nombre desquels la vie, la liberté et l’équité ; et comment ces dernières ont réussi à renverser la tendance. Le féminisme, le marxisme et le nouvel historicisme servent respectueusement de piliers scientifiques pour apprécier l’égalité des deux sexes dans tous les aspects de la vie publique et privée, d’appréhender les conflits entre privilégiés et prolétaires au sein d’une même communauté et de passer en loupe l’histoire écrite en tant qu’une vue avérée du passé et les conséquences y afférentes dans le temps présent. Ce caractère typique socio-politique détermine les peuples dans leurs propres réalités à construire leur histoire, à l’instar des femmes noires américaines dans leur expérience de vie vis-à-vis des droits civiques et d’équité sociale sous l’égide de Ida B. Wells et Rosa Parks aux Etats Unis d’Amérique.

Mots Clés : Américain(e)s, hommes, femmes, droits, égalité, équité.

Introduction

The issue of freedom in the United States of America has always been a revolving one with specific ups and downs whether related to founding fathers’ non-will to extend that liberty to both

men and women or maybe ill-winded by racism with its cortège of everlasting cases of discrimination. Daniel, Royot (1974,p.24) refers to the Declaration of Independence , laying emphasis on liberty and pursuit of happiness as seen in the most quoted extract from it as follows: “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among which are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” Furthermore, he strengthens the case with the US sacred Constitution which announces as its purpose, ‘to secure liberty’s blessings’.

Yet, in process of time, a social frail was remarked regarding black women who suffered unbearable discriminations in a certain number of fields within the 19th and the 20th centuries. Socio-political upheavals reached a pick, creating trouble about respecting the same rights for some, depriving others from that precious soul of the American nation and proving the unsound deeds with inappropriate arguments. What is law, what is not and what could justify the right medium of both remain a doubtful debate, all the same belonging to the American justice which declared unable to put coins and voices together. Among many others, Ida B. Wells and Rosa Parks, two black American women, untamable activists and tenuous freedom fighters succeeded in holding the right end of the stick.

Meant to make rehabilitate civil rights to women both white and black, they made use of that same right to claim for right to persuade and force Courts and Government to recognize, support and diligently apply the inalienable rights to both sexes regardless to any other social consideration. By the means of marches, street-protests, boycotts, sit-ins , individual and community-based actions, they devoted their fight against civil rights and social equity which implies fair access to education, employment and social services in general. The one after the other, they took over the torch since freedom has never been effective with Americans without claims and contradictions but they made the option of non-violence: a peaceful strategy or characteristic of theirs.

1. Background, problem statement and objectives of the study.

1.1. Background and Problem Statement.

It has commonly been admitted by communities all over the world that civil rights are duly considered as human rights. Thus, this factual consideration implies that both men and women should enjoy to the fullest these rights in any society regardless to race, gender or any other probable society-based alibi. Yet, White Americans grasped all rights including civil rights as the rights of men due to a certain number of one-eyed texts mainly brought by Pilgrim Fathers and colonists in general. The later ones testified and asserted the inferiority of women such as innatism which was in fact a set of theories, non-contested till the aftermath of the American Revolution. It definitely consisted in asserting that a woman was by nature inferior of body, of spirit, of temperament and then was devoted to absolute submission. Medieval, biblical and scientific arguments mentioned as follow represent backbones of such viewpoints or ill-visions towards women:

Les maladies de la femme résultaient d'une génération prolongée du système nerveux, engendrée notamment par l'excitation politique ou les plaisirs illicites. Il lui fallait donc éviter les activités stressantes en dehors du foyer, et les études prolongées étaient proscrites en vertu d'un principe selon lequel le volume de son cerveau était inversement proportionnel à celui de son utérus. Selon les médecins, la fragilité de son système nerveux la prédisposait aux désordres psychiques et aux maladies mentales. Elle avait besoin du calme que seule la douceur du foyer pouvait lui procurer (Claudette, F. et Colette Collombe-Boureau. 2003, p.10).

La femme était née de l'homme et pour l'homme. Une interprétation littérale d'Ancien comme du Nouveau Testament, démontrait que la femme devait se soumettre, qu'elle était une créature de l'après-coup, cadeau de Dieu à l'homme sans qui et en dehors de qui elle n'aurait aucun sens. (Claudette, F. et Colette Collombe - Boureau. 2003, pp.10-11)

Great Chain of Being Theory est une théorie selon laquelle, un même principe de vie unissait Dieu aux plus petites substances animées, selon un ordre prescrit. Il était plusieurs ordres d'anges entre Dieu et les êtres humains dont la forme la plus accomplie était l'homme Caucasien. Au bas de l'échelle, on trouvait le Nègre, puis le Hottentot. La femme, elle, occupait une place intermédiaire entre l'homme et le singe. Comme la plus haute espèce de singe était l'orang-outan, la femme se trouvait donc placée entre le Hottentot et l'orang-outan. (Claudette, F. et Colette Collombe-Boureau. 2003, pp.11-12).

Empiric or historical realities lend support to men to consider women as the weaker sex and act accordingly, depriving women from their socio-political rights even with the American Constitution which remains dumb about equality and equity between both sexes. Even though events, viewpoints and recorded actions from men widely prove a relegated place to women in general and specifically in the United States of America, there is still available ways and means to illustrate other facets of that same situation. Thought to be quite inferior in every domain of achievement and not able to fulfill great things, Evelyn Reed (1970, p.2) rings another bell about women's socio-political status even far away in the past:

First women were not always the oppressed or 'second' sex. Anthropology, or the study of prehistory tells us the contrary. Throughout primitive society, which was the epoch of tribal collectivism, women were the equals of men and recognized by man as such. (Reed Evelyn, 1970: p.2)

Yet, from primitive societies to the ones of class-divided societies conceptions change another way run, fighting out the primitive frame restrictions to apprehend the social construct about the image of women in a socio-cultural and even political environments. Defeating that negative portrayal of women, referring to the conflicting duality between nature and society, Evelyn Reed (1970, p.5) diligently affirms:

It is not nature, but class society which lowered women and elevated men. Men won their social supremacy in struggle and conquest over the woman. But this sexual struggle was part and parcel of a great social struggle – the overturn of primitive society and the institution of class-society. Women's inferiority is the product of a social system which has produced and fostered innumerable other inequalities, inferiorities, discriminations and degradations. But this social

history has been concealed behind the myth that women are naturally inferior to man. (Reed Evelyn, 1970, p.5)

Boundary markers as American women civil rights activists and social equity fighters, both Ida B. Wells and Rosa Park went the same way about that noble struggle as pioneers for not black American socio-political emancipation only but for the whole American women society regardless to race and gender. Respectively journalist and seamstress, their choices were not simply a matter of chronology or the one of intellectual level but mostly a gem knowingly based on their common thoughts, actions and goals. How did these Black women contribute in fighting for civil rights and social equity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Which roles did they play in this struggle as hardworking proponents or surface job activists for the benefit of their community? Did their fight succeeded in eliminating or lessening inequalities between Blacks and Whites and brought social equity which requires fair treatments at social, economic and political levels? There are such questions this research paper is entitled to answer with a special reference to Ida B. Wells and Rosa Park, two Black women Americans highly determined toward women's full citizenship.

1.2. Objectives and scope of the study.

In limelight, the main objective in line with this research work principally aims at demonstrating how Black women successfully fought for civil rights and social equity in the United States of America. It intends to blatantly show how their achievements illustrate the visible acts and actions they displayed despite their being considered as weaker sex, doomed to social subservience. Under this general perspective are placed some specific objectives which firstly focus on highlighting roles Black women played to enhance socio-political women's status in the overall development of the American community. Secondly, help apprehend if gains of that fight of theirs participated in eradicating or diminishing inequalities among Blacks and Whites and consequently on women. Thirdly, whether the struggle for social equity led to fair social treatment, fair access to economic performance and full participation in the American political life. Fourthly, draw lessons from the past and the present of the United States of America in order to help build a more equitable American society men and women could enjoy equal rights, fair treatment and opportunities on social, economic and political domains regardless to gender.

This research work has not taken into account all African-American civil rights leaders and social equity fighters since this study lenses this struggle through the lives of Ida B. Wells and Rosa Park. Thus, the present article can't cover all the aspects related to this fight in the whole life of Americans in that land: the making of everyone in terms of experiences of any sort from the wide cluster of cultures that built the American society. Sources of information vary because multiple and multiform nevertheless, the ones available and within hands serve as guides and landmarks for insightful investigation.

2. Theoretical framework, methodology and Literature review.

2.1. Research Methodology and theories.

In line with the nature of this article, historical methodology is identified as being the most appropriate since the fight for civil rights and social equity represent in many regards, part and parcel of the historical making of the United States of America. Consequently, techniques of research are essentially based on historical documentation with both physical and virtual libraries. Written materials and linguistic instruments (French and English) have been quite helpful in apprehending full understanding and interpretation of events, circumstances and contexts.

Insightful reading, interpretation and analysis of the different trends related to historical documents led to lean on three literary theories which are: Feminism, Marxism and New Historicism. The first being a social theory which supports the equality of both sexes in all aspects of public or private life, the second that proffers a society built upon a series of ongoing conflicts between the haves and the have-nots, the third one stands as an alternative theory to old historicism according to which history, written as such is an accurate view of what really occurred.

2.2. Literature Review.

Series of literary productions furnish sufficient ingredients in apprehending insightful appreciations with regards to that fight genuinely conducted by the two target actors namely Ida B. Wells and Rosa Park. In varied ways and means reflected in testimonies vividly documented by renowned authors help grasp the gist about that socio-political greatness. In the book, *Freedom's Daughters The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830-1970*, the author Lynne Olson displays a comprehensive history of the vital roles women both Black and White played in the Civil Rights Movements. Next was the case of Claudette Fillard and Colette Collom-Boureau who wrote the impressive book *Les Mouvements Féministes Américains* in which history of American feminists is plainly explained, approaching difficulties and disappointments encountered by a huge number of those activists in the long walk to conquer their socio-political place within the American society. Still in the same drive but more specifically touching lives those women witness from slavery to freedom via that double discrimination of sexism and racism Paula Giddings hits the case in her book entitled *When and Where I Enter The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. By the means of diaries, speeches, letters and other trustful sources, the author stresses the case with evidence and high conviction.

Constructing a special life of their own in a very vicious environment made of a variety of hardships, Victor Perlo develops in his book *Economics of Racism : The Roots of Inequality in the United States of America*, a clear-cut observation of the American economic system deep rooted in inequality of all sorts due to racism. To elucidate that deplorable situation of women under another perspective, Martha Kendall informs in her book *Failure is Impossible! The History of American Women's Rights* about the impressive changes those women succeeded in bringing in fields of education, property rights, workplace, politics, etc..., proving how much time they are quite optimistic

with inflexible hope to win the case. Enduring sorrow along with time but achieving greatness at the end of that tough journey of theirs, Gerda Lerner emphasizes in her book *Black Women in White America* gently depicts or portrays the greatness about those women seeking to acquire an appropriate education. Despite their being considered as mere objects, the hard times in their crusades against lynching and unfavorable social realities against their empowerment. A bunch of fresh and blood realities about American women's history and gender studies is provided in the book *Women's America, Refocusing the Past* written by Linda K. Kerber and Sherron De Hart. Made of a selection of essays, it profusely sheds light on the lives of women across racial, ethnic, regional, and class lines from the traditional America to the modern America for nearly four centuries. Gains for fighting racism after slavery abolition, civil right movements with some white women activists, sexism and other socio-political plagues, show how courageous and determined they proved to reach the end of the stick, socially and politically.

In a nutshell, collected materials within the purpose of this research paper open wide doors to fields of battle regarding American women emancipation. Leaders in their rank couldn't put aside neither Ida B. Wells nor Rosa Park if one incline to evaluate their determination and sense of commitment in the fight for civil rights and social equity in the United States America.

3. Ida B. Wells: between dreams and fight for fulfilment.

3.1. Activist and freedom-fighter in her motivation-action process.

Within the perspective of meeting dreams which are specifically related to the American socio-political challenges in general but the case of women in particular regarding both black and white, Ida B. Wells aims high with significant steps toward targets. With full determination and know-how in every fight for the common purpose for women sake, she made her voice heard and constantly acted in fields of segregation laws, anti-lynching campaigning, and advancement of colored people and broadly in feminist rights movement. Highly meant to end racial segregation, she began her racial fight very early before the activist Rosa Park showed similar resistance on a bus.

On a specific issue related to her refusal to move from her seat in the ladies' car to the front of the train into a smoking car, followed by her engaging a lawyer to sue the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway company, Ida B. Wells won the case with a financial settlement. According to L. K. Kerber (2000, p.23), she then became an early civil right activist because her defiant act happened before Plessy V. Ferguson in 1896 with the US supreme Court which established the fallacious doctrine of 'separate but equal'. Exponentially thrilled with her victory and inflexible eager to share her story which could serve as example to gear up many other Black American women, she wrote an article in *The Living Way*, a black church weekly where the following is gently mentioned: "If Blacks stood up for their rights, those rights granted in Reconstruction legislation would be preserved", L. K. Kerber (2000, p.23). The content of the article rejuvenates Black-American women's mind about their legitimate rights, worthiness about their struggle to full citizenship as was the case of Ida B. Wells

against lynching. Untamable actor women civil rights, she became with no doubt the most influential leader in the anti-lynching campaigning in America from 1892 to 1910.

Under her double title of both teacher and journalist in that threatening time, she accordingly acted by denouncing lynching while making it her lifelong battle. In such a vein, she wrote a series of three pamphlets of which version is entitled *Mon Combat Pour La Justice* in which she expressively exposed accounts of lynching, accompanied by related causes in order to put the whole American society wise about the lynching- based truths. Cases of atrocity were multiple and multiform, been mentioned in the volume with Ida B. Wells at the forefront to counteract negative actions and galvanize other women to hold the end of the stick. The case of Memphis grocery attack or atrocity pushed Ida B. Wells to denounce the unsound act with an editorial in the journal *The Free Speech*, where she urged Blacks to leave Memphis in the following lines: “There is...only one thing left we can do; save money and leave a town which neither protect our lives or our property, nor give us a fair trial in the courts “, M. Bay (2009, p.89). Consequently, many people took note of that piece of advice, seized the opportunity and left the town for the purpose of freedom and socio-political equity or equality before the law. Yet , those who remained in those unrestful environments including Ida B. Wells as leader organized boycotts of white owned businesses in response to lynchings , wrote scathing editorials, gave public talks and mobilized blacks to put an end to that shameful practice.

In a more comprehensive way, lynching at the curve definitely marked the beginning of Ida. B. Well’s anti-lynching campaign. Always sticking to her motivation, she stated investigating the fraudulent charges put forward as reasons to lynch Blacks in those deplorable circumstances. She came out with the common acknowledgement that many Blacks were hung, burned, shot to death for trivial things in number of which could be mentioned: not paying taxes, disrespecting Whites, testifying in Court, stealing hogs and public drunkenness. Her investigations were crowned with the conclusion that “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 “, P. Giddings (1984, p.41). In one word, lynching was another form of slavery quite well oriented towards Blacks. It was used as means of punishment in order to control Blacks, showing them that they are not free and preventing them from rights they have been granted. It was what Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sharron De Hart (2000, p.12) were demonstrating to the knowing of everyone when they put:

Lynching was not an act of foolishness, an unintended act of violence, but a willful method, even organized, to chastise and control Blacks, to institute in all of them terror. No question for the freedmen to ever imagine themselves to obtain the respect owed to citizens, to hope to vote or to be elected, to come to compete with traders, craftsmen or White entrepreneurs...They nourished the psychosis of the sexual overpower of the Black man, and of his irrepressible desire for the White woman; they saw in each Black man, a powerful rapist. Whipping, castrating, hanging, burning, they protected, they said, their women in danger. (Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sharron De Hart, 2000: p.12)

Activist and freedom fighter, Ida B. Wells endeavored in many fields with diverse ways and means to fulfill her dreams. Her commitment for betterment about socio-political issues went beyond societal limits. Her feminist fight instructs more than one could imagine when in face of hardships, she genuinely and courageously takes responsibilities and goes on leads of fulfillment.

3.2 Ida B. Wells: Feminist movements and fight for social equity.

Both endeavors from Ida B. Wells got registered in the same drive of significant efforts towards women liberation and total freedom. The feminist right movement which appeared in the USA followed a notice announcing the first mass feminist meeting whereby American women began fighting for woman's rights since the 19th century with Seneca Falls Convention which held in 1848 as a typical example against coldhearted citizens reluctant to take tangible initiatives in line with objectives to be fulfilled for the well-being of the whole American society and for women in particular. The main ideas behind the movement include self-conscious struggle, Black women empowerment against oppression, self-construction and independence to achieve great things. These precise ideas were exactly expressed by the sociologist P. Hill Collins (2000, p.10) in her book titled *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* when she addressed the case as follows:

I initially wrote *Black Feminist Thought* in order to help empower African-American women. I knew that when an individual Black woman's consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday life undergoes change, she can become empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom, even if it exists initially primarily in her own mind. If she is lucky enough to meet others who are undergoing similar journeys, she and they can change the world around them. (P. Hill Collins 2000: p.10)

Being fully aware of that useful fight of theirs, having as consequence a political empowerment represented for Ida B. Wells an essential consciousness coupled with know-how to help fulfill planned objectives and enjoy legitimate rights. Because Black women experienced not only racism, classism, sexism but many other forms of oppression, Ida B. Wells fostered specific social requirements which were in her eyes quite appropriate to keep up with any challenge. It was in fact what P. Hill Collins (2000, p.x) called 'conditions of social justice' which match well in thoughts, ideas and actions with those of the Black women of the 19th century such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Mary Ann, Maria W. Stewart, Lucy Stone, Mary Church Tell etc., For, their calls for Black women's unity and full rights enjoyment marked the origins of Black Feminism in the United States of America. In a positive way because ideas and actions went on in unison, Black feminism favored both women and men to realize a broader and more humanistic vision of community which dutifully encouraged each person to develop his or her individual and unique human potential.

Feminist movements envisaged a community based on the promotion of notions related to fairness, equality and justice for all human beings, not just for African American women. Black feminism surrounds a comprehensive anti-sexist, antiracist and anti-elitist perspective on social change. In spite of differences of age, sexual orientations, ethnicity and regional origins within the

country, Black women share that deplorable experience of belonging to a society that denigrates or relegates them to the lowest possible social status. In view to reaching their targets, clubs and organizations were set up to play active and positive roles, focusing their activities on the spirit of cooperative works with mutual relief associations or benevolent societies in which members worked to help people in their own communities.

Ida B. Wells' militancy in the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), her fight for women suffrage and the passage of the 19th amendment of 1920 and her breaking a segregation policy during a suffrage on March 13th, 1913 few days before president Woodrow Wilson took office, significantly contribute to the kind of equity she forcibly fought for. Among many of those cases that reflect opposition to women suffrage against which Ida B. Wells was the one of Baptist clergy that proved so conservative that it defines the divine law which makes no distinction between sexes. P. Giddings (1984, p.120) expressively highlights this position against the advancement of women as follows:

to prove through Bible authority that the only place for women in the Church is that of a singer or a prayer and that in teaching or preaching, she is acting contrary to divine authority and that the exercise of the right of suffrage would be a deplorable climax to these transgressions. (P. Giddings 1984: p.120)

There was in fact no exception about places where women were not thrashed out as less than human beings in the eyes of everyone who, speechless had no choice than pursing libs and fold arms for the sake of justice to prevail, if any. Ida B. Wells' fight for fair trial in court for black prisoners, saves from lynching and challenges related to riots in favor of victims represent in many regards her sense of equity for which she nourished hope and success in her everyday determination. In fields of wage and employment, socio-political places and better working conditions Ida B. Wells proved to the general public, her tenacity, sacrifice and leadership. Others did the same under some other perspectives with other ways and means.

4. Rosa Parks: A Distinguished Instigator of the Civil Rights Movement and a Confirmed Advocate of Social Equity.

4.1. Rosa Parks: Mother of the American Civil Rights Movement.

Acting not in the same period of time but still in the same veins of fighting against injustice in general and women socio-political deficiencies in the American civil society, Rosa Parks took serious initiatives at forefront to instill with indelible marks her actions in such fields. Known as an international icon of resistance to racial segregation, she was indeed the woman who definitely turned the wheel of freedom movements which in one way or the other changed the American society. In individual, in group or in community, she proved constant will and recorded factual actions always in line with her determination. Hardworking and dynamic, she revealed her own case as patient but tough activist. As an evidence of social justice fighter, Rosa P (1954, p.6) affirms:

I worked on numerous cases with the NAACP, but we didn't get the publicity. There were cases of flogging, peonage murder and rape. We didn't seem to have too many successes. It was more a matter of trying to challenge the powers that be, and to let it be known that we did not wish to continue being second class citizens. (Park Rosa 1954: p.6)

With her defiance of Jim Crow laws as symbol of courage, non-violence and faith, her first for equality and equity flexed in front of nothing of the kinds of promoting injustice. Stuck to her memory since her childhood, freedom in all its senses and fields of fight find their roots in her fountain of motivation that was her mother hymn about freedom. A significant part of it is softly displayed by C. Wilson (2006, p.8) in a melodious rhythm in these lines:

“Oh, freedom,
Oh, freedom over me,
Before I'd be a slave,
I'd be burned in my grave
And go home to my Lord.

Source of inflexible determination, standpoint of sparkling thoughts and ideas and forging stove of tangible actions is for Rosa Park, that poem which nourishes her in her inner soul where inspirations flourish to help her take initiatives. In light of her courage appear other legendary qualities of her personality such as quiet strength, non-violence and faith. Such potentialities remain in many regards, exceptional gears for Rosa Parks whether in bus boycott, actions in association improvement, civil rights in general, direct-action protests, sit-ins and marches.

A brink of social act could burn Rosa Parks to the deepest of her mind and she accordingly take steps to protest with vigor, adequate strategies but surely in an atmosphere of good tempers crowned by non-violence attitudes. An illustration is the case of the sit-ins in Lunch Counters which inaugurated a direct-action mass protest movement that defied the racial and political boundaries of America. The starting point of that demonstration was marked just by a nonpareil social circumstance as projected by A. Ainamon (1998, p.3) in his lecture entitled 'Civil Rights Movements':

On February 1, 1960, in Greensboro, North Carolina, four freshmen at Greensboro Agricultural and Technical College (ATC) sat at the 'white' lunch counter in Woolworth and asked to be served. The waitress refused but the young men waited and left at the end of the day. (Augustin Ainamon 1998: p.3)

Racial and political boundaries were successfully challenged by mass protest movements crowned by consequent gains because the fight for national interests from Blacks in general and Blacks women in particular could jeopardize politicians' plans mainly in times of elections. Activists like Rosa Park knowingly made that option to hit hard when there was any possible opportunity to aim high with claims and adjust required ways and means to reach targets ahead. It was exactly the case with President John F. Kennedy who diligently issued an appropriate measure when sit-ins spread throughout the South and white hoodlums caused some cases of violence. Gary, P. (1989, p.6) describes the situation in these terms: “As the wave of protests began bringing drudging results,

presidential candidate John F. Kennedy put aside advice not to inflame White southern voters and gave public support to the sit-ins". In a kind of clustered relationships, both freedom fighters and authorities at different levels of the socio-political chain identify strategies best to meet challenges. Positive fallouts which derived from Rosa Park fight in association or in lobbying groups enriched her struggle for social equity.

4.2. Rosa Parks and the Fight for Civil Equity.

The well-organized and accelerated Civil Rights Movements of the 1960's urged the American government and political authorities to take great measures in favor of Blacks. Women like Rosa Parks and others topped the bill over that ever-lasting struggle with valuable gains for the best interests of both Black and White women. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 remain living examples of success following Rosa Parks' pinpointed inspiration and right to claim for acquired rights in the United States of America.

The first one outlawed discrimination in public facilities and employment, authorized the attorney general to initiate suits to enforce school integration and allowed for the withholding of federal funds to non-complying schools. Amazingly, that law vastly expanded the scope of federal protection of the rights of women to other minorities who experienced discrimination. This happened right at the moment when the legislation was directed specifically at removing barriers to equal success and opportunity which affected African-Americans. The second, even though well-intended to grant voting right to women, it rather solved at the very beginning the problems of discrimination and segregation before President Lyndon Johnson took serious decisions after his victory at the presidential election of 1964. He urgently introduced a comprehensive voting rights bill to the Congress on March 15 of the same year with a speech which contains a plainly explicit part of which where he said: "Their cause must be our cause too... Because it's not just Negroes, but it's really all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice... we shall overcome", A. Ainamon (1998, p. 12). It could be safe to affirm that circumstances determine consciousness in the rank of Americans despite the ups and downs which animate life among political authorities and civil rights fighters whether Blacks or Whites. The case of black women struggling for civil rights and social equity sheds more light on that duality which highly instructs researchers about the American history of civil rights acquisition. Before social equity being fought for and gains from that long walk being obtained for the benefits of black women C. Fillards (2003, p.23) depicts the socio-economic conditions of black women in the two seemingly complementary statements that follow:

Not only were Black women forced to work in inferior positions and perform the least desirable tasks, but they were paid from 10 to 60 percent less than ill-paid White women. The insult was double in that Black workers in the manufacturing sector were often more highly qualified than Whites.

Because they were thought to be able to withstand more heat, they got the most heat-intense jobs in the candy and glass factories. In the bakeries it was Black women who cleaned, greased and

lifted the heavy pans. In tobacco, the lowest-paid and most numbing work. (Carls Fillards 2003: p.23)

The fight for equity in wage and employment, the passage of the Equal Pay Act in 1963 stemmed from the unbearable notice about black women's working conditions. Under harsh pressure from activists like Rosa Park whether in individual initiative or in corporation, political authorities thought to put in place the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), a federal agency created on July 2, 1965. Because politicians didn't find it urging to take into account women's advocacies, the commission systematically ignored their grievances to engage itself in cases of racial discrimination. Busy facing other foreign difficulties like the war of Vietnam, they granted like consideration to that home matter which place women down to the last stage of the American socio-political ladder. The later one handed down to them servitude and discrimination, poverty for the majority with domestic responsibilities beyond their own means as mothers lacking fatherly assistance.

To lessen for a while those difficulties and opt soft landing to black women in such hardships, some bills under the appellation of Economic Equity Act (EEA) were taken by the Congress in 1980's. Backed up by the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) and other groups with the purpose to aid most destitute such as Black women, the poor and workwomen with low wages. The bills were projected to cover the alimonies, retirements, insurances, share financial responsibilities of parents in case of divorce and the highest allowances for babysitters. Nevertheless, the project was not voted in bloc but the obligatory payment of alimony and the maintaining of their rights in case of parental leave were adopted. For, feminist of the Congress made vote a bill which would authorize fathers and mothers for their children's education or in case of need, to take a parental leave without wage. Yet, in reality, such legislation was specially addressed to constituted families and hardly affected the poorest women in particular Black women.

Conclusion

Prominent American public figures whether political authorities or not, fought for rights in diverse ways and with different means depending on subjects or targets to be reached because living together became a must and circumstances inspire and determine consciousness. Men and women regardless of race and original backgrounds witnessed fortune and misfortune on their hard routes to freedom in spite of handicaps dispatched here and there by White Americans, both men and women to prevent the later ones from reaching their target: their civil rights. The case of Black American women in socio-political field fought their life long individually, in community or in association to acquire and enjoy to the fullest civil rights and social equity for the whole American society.

Ida B. Wells and Rosa Parks, two women freedom fighters and advocates for better women social conditions, made their voices heard and acted despite their limited means in face of discrimination of diverse sorts and recorded challenges to meet for the best interests of women, blacks and whites. Marginal group of the labor force, economically deprived members of the whole American society, women as heads of families, they successfully fought for their liberation and their

insertion in the American community. Using their indelible rights to fight for rights, instrument granted by the constitution, they made it possible, having same opportunities with whites in the same sectors of development within the American society. Incarnating inferiority due to their sex, facing double challenge like racial discrimination and sexism, they did participate in revisiting civil rights and social equity in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries without violence but rather genuine use of constitutional ways and means for legitimate claims.

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