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SAME BUT DIFFERENT: THE CONTROVERSY OVER WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION IN AMERICAN HISTORICAL AND NON HISTORICAL WRITINGS, FROM 19th CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

Kouamé SAYNI

Etudes Américaines, Département d'Anglais, UAO Côte d'Ivoire
Email: Saykoua1@gmail.com

ABSTRACT



The women's rights movement, which was born from the struggle for the abolition of slavery in 19th century, has been dynamic if one takes into account its power of mobilization and sensitization to the cause of fundamental social and civil rights. But it has also been subject to a lot of contradictions in implementing equalitarian principles. The most significant of these is racism, which has led the women's organization to division. It is this division, at least the cause of it that has led to this work, a critical survey conducted with the help of historiographical tools, which has allowed the reading of writings as diverse as historical books –*History of Women Suffrage* (1881) by Stanton et al.—, critical essays – “Elizabeth Cady Stanton, ‘The Solitude of Self’” (2013) by Lisa Shawn Hogan —, books of theory –*Segregated Sisterhood* (1998) by Nancie Caraway—, and life story –*Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850) by abolitionist and women's rights militant Sojourner Truth. These writings of varied genres have helped us to go over as many controversies as the difference in tactics, the problem of white conservatism, and the century-old racism in white suffrage militants.

Key Words: Women's rights, conservatism, racism, abolition, suffrage, controversy, feminism, etc.

Résumé

Le mouvement des droits des femmes, né de la lutte abolitionniste du 19^e siècle, a été un mouvement dynamique si l'on tient compte de son pouvoir de mobilisation et de sensibilisation à la cause des droits sociaux et civiques fondamentaux. Mais fort est de reconnaître que ce mouvement a été aussi sujet à beaucoup de contradictions notamment dans la mise en œuvre des principes égalitaires. La plus significative/évocatrice de ces contradictions est le racisme qui a conduit l'organisation des femmes à la division. C'est cette division, du moins les facteurs qui l'ont causée, qui ont suscité ce travail qui est une analyse historiographique qui a permis de parcourir différentes formes d'écritures allant de l'histoire (*History of Women Suffrage* (1881)) à l'essai critique (“Elizabeth Cady Stanton, ‘The Solitude of Self’” (2013)) ou encore au livre de théorie féministe (*Segregated Sisterhood* (1998)) et au récit auto/biographique (*Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850)). Ces formes d'écritures issues de genres différents, ont permis de réfléchir sur ces controverses motivées par des facteurs aussi variés que les incompréhensions dans l'approche tactique, la question du conservatisme des Blancs et surtout le racisme.

Mots clés : Droits de la femme, conservatisme, racisme, abolition, suffrage, controverse, féminisme, etc.

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"When Ernestine Rose, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony began that agitation by which colleges were opened to women and the numerous reforms inaugurated for the amelioration of their condition along all lines, their sisters who groaned in bondage had little reason to hope that these blessings would ever brighten their crushed and blighted lives, for during those days of oppression and despair, colored women were not only refused admittance to institutions of learning, but the law of the States in which the majority lived made it a crime to teach them to read."¹

The idea that can be drawn from the above statement by black woman activist Mary Church Terrell, is the fear that the historic movement, which brought the American women to engage in the political scene in the mid-19th century, might leave aside their fellow black militants. Initially engaged in the Garrisonian movement for the abolition of slavery, women indeed, decided to unite in an organization in 1848 – the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) – under the leadership of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, to fulfill their own aspirations. Unfortunately, what was the common cause for them, that is, the fight for full and equal citizenship between men and women became the source of controversy between Blacks and Whites, leading the association into division. At the semi-centennial of their suffrage association in late 19th century, it is this controversy and the threat of division that Mary Terrell implicitly echoed in her statement.

How can we account for this separation in the women's movement? And how is it articulated in the American literary and historical records? Here

are the questions that have motivated this work which is, in fact, an analysis that stands between literature and civilization. The question of the fight for women's rights in America is, undoubtedly, a question for historians and the people in the world of literary production. Maybe it is an issue of history more than one of imaginative literature, because of its involvement into the lives of people and events related to the past. And specifically because of this historical implication, one cannot work on it without calling for historiography. As a field focused on the scientific study of history, historiography derives from the modern historian's effort to provide a scientific record and interpretation of human experience. This scientific activity of historians is generally based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination.

Without pretending to engage in a historical writing, the objective of this work is to use some of the basic techniques in historiography in order to investigate this women's organization, which brought so much change in the social status of the women in America in late 19th and early 20th century. More specifically, the work will examine the way the militant activities of that organization have been reported in contemporary American writings, the changing interpretation of the conditions of its development from its early times to its great moments of committed militancy, to the rise of divergent views between its early militants, tearing, thus, the movement focus into divided interests. The records of interest in this work include as various sources as books of history, seminal speeches by pioneer leaders in the woman's movement like Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott. Personal accounts like slave narratives will be used as they provide rich and authentic records of the experiences of ex-slaves in original forms of auto-biographical writings.

¹—"The Progress of Colored Women" was an address delivered by Mary Church Terrell before the National American Women's Suffrage Association at the Columbia Theater, Washington, D.C., February 18, 1898, on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. The speech was initially published by Smith Brothers, Washington, D.C., 1898 For further reading, see:
[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/murrayib:b:@field\(NUMBER+@band\(lcrbmrp+t0a13\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/murrayib:b:@field(NUMBER+@band(lcrbmrp+t0a13))) Date of consultation 01/12/2016

I **The National American Women Suffrage Association: Context and Interpretation of a Militant Organization**

The process that brought women to experience equal and full right in American society took the name of Feminism. The word Feminism derives from 'feminine', a concept referring to the woman, and is meant to define the organized effort to give women the same economic, social, and political rights as men². Before its political and ideological implications, feminism inspired a certain number of people mostly, women who had historically been active in the organizations for the abolition of slavery in America. The most prominent of these organizations was the American Anti-Slavery Society led by William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879). By mid-19th century, the American opinion was crystallized on slavery, and the anti-slavery adepts were relentless in their opposition to human bondage. In their committed militancy, their organization was determined to claim for the independence of all people living on the continent with no restriction regardless gender and color. In the course of these activities, which took a civic and political character, the anti-slavery association became a source of inspiration for women in uniting and creating their own association.

Feminist in orientation and resolutely engaged to obtain rights for women, focusing on the basic creed written in the American Constitution, that association started informal activity upon conventions. The first of those assemblies was held at the Wesleyan Chapel in Senaca Falls, New York, on July 19 and 20, 1848. Known as Women's Rights Conventions, the gatherings were, in fact, called to address the condition of women whose basic rights were denied in American society. One outstanding event triggered the mobilizations. In 1840, eight years before the Senaca Falls meeting, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other American women taking part in the World Anti-Slavery Conference in London, were refused seat because of their gender. In other words, what Feminist critic Judith Butler defines as a "mark" of biological, linguistic, and/or cultural condition of being male or female the issue

of gender is, thus, central to the American women's gathering in an association³.

The written record that can best account for this historic feminist mobilization is certainly the *History of Woman Suffrage*, a multi-volume book published in the first time in 1881 and authored by Elisabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, the leading figures of the organization⁴. It is not the first historic document that was published to address the woman's issue in the United States, but taking into account the pioneer roles of the persons who wrote it, the book has an important symbolic stake. As a book that documents the greatest achievements of the movement, the *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881) served as a repository of its main rhetoric. It is the main reference when it comes to have an authentic historical account of the struggle for women's rights. Written to "rouse new thoughts in the minds prepared to hear them" as Stanton writes in the first volume, the book had grown popular by the end of the 19th century since its message had reached millions of adepts. In spite of that great popularity which is justified both by the rich project it conveyed in terms of the benefits that women were supposed to gain in civic rights and by the good articulated ideas of justice in American social setting, the movement's progress was slow by the turn of the century. For, a part from the main victories achieved within the general struggle for the abolition of slavery, the American society remained largely deaf to the demands for change by the fringe of women who had devoted their strength to progress. We will devote the major part of the second section of this work to the causes of this insufficiency of results in the women's organization; for the time being, it is important to focus on the major actions and the main articulation of the movement philosophy.

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York , Routledge, 2006,p.9

⁴- The book was ultimately produced in six volumes. The first three volumes were edited by these early figures of the Association. See: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Suzan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, ed., *History of Woman Suffrage*, (Vol.1, New York, Fowler and Wells Pub., 1881); reprint Edition: New York, Arno and the New York Times, 1969.

²- Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, First Edition, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2009

a- The philosophy of a struggle for Women's rights

As mentioned above, the mobilization of American abolitionist women to the cause of women's rights was inspired by a philosophy known as feminism. In essence, the feminist worldview is focused on the belief that women should have the same rights, power, and opportunities as men's. As such it works as a normative provision that is meant to provide corrective norms for a fair and just society. To this end, the norms to be corrected are the traditional patriarchal values which have served as basis for the functioning of western civilization on which America has been modeled. That patriarchal outlook guided the institution on the public and domestic spheres in the American society upon the Fourteenth Amendment (approved in 1868), which stated that the US citizens are males, restricting, thus, women to the domestic activities.⁵

Taking inspiration from the struggle for women's rights, feminism took new developments, precisely in its evolutions in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. These later developments clearly showed different approaches to the issue in relation to the variety of writings by women. Generally these writings are concerned with the representation of women in literature, whether it is produced by a male or female writer. Rebecca West's critical works and Virginia Woolf's essays on women authors who suffered from economic and cultural disadvantages in what she termed as "patriarchal" society illustrate this feminist expression in the 20th century. Her book *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is considered a classic document of the feminist critical movement.

Over the 20th century, the literary expression of the feminist ideas has opened the way to the development of a highly-articulated theory interpreted in multi-cultural stand point. Thus, alongside the American mainstream feminist criticism which was born from the general mobilization against traditional male dominant society, there have had different other feminist articulations, notably the African American feminist thought born from cultural revolutionary ideas in

⁵- Eva Zahradníkova, "Women's Suffrage Movement in the United States 1821-1921", Tomas Bata Univ. Faculty of Humanities, Bachelor Thesis, 2010, p.48

the 1950s and 1960s. This ethnic-influenced feminism rose, according to African American feminist critic Nancie Caraway, as response to a need for articulating other paradigms in existing white mainstream feminism which proved to be racist in the course of the quest for the woman self in America⁶. The positive project of this "black feminism", Caraway continues, "validates and articulates the formerly submerged voices of Black women, affirming a rich history of resistance and embeddedness in African American cultural identities"⁷. It is this Afrocentric feminism which ultimately became the source of inspiration for another contention in the struggle for women's rights and to which we shall come back later.

The development of the feminist thought extends to more complicated forms as what is called "Gynocriticism" by Elaine Showalter—in reference to writings by women, including letters and journals, and all aspects of their production and interpretation—but which is not part of our concern in this work⁸.

Whether it concerns the mainstream white feminism or African American feminism, or again Gynocriticism, the struggle for women's rights and the various rhetorical productions it has generated derive from an active interpretation of equalitarian principles which were charted in the Declaration of Sentiments produced upon the convention of 1848. Among these equalitarian principles, there are the right to elective franchise, the right to ownership, property, and wage, the right to education, etc. The American women were mobilized for these rights through organized action in the 19th and 20th centuries.

⁶ - Nancie Caraway, *Segregated Sisterhood : Racism and the Politics of African American Feminism*, Knoxville, The Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1998, p.5

⁷ - Nancies Caraway, idem.

⁸ - For further reading about "Gynocriticism", see: Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, 1977; Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination*, 1975; Ellen Morers, *Literary Women*, 1976. J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, New York, Penguin Books, 1999, pp.315-318

b- Actions and Victories of Women's Organizations

The least that one can say is that the Association known as National American Women Suffrage Association motivating women's effort and fight to experience full civil rights in the American society, had not always existed in the form in which everyone knew it in the 1890s. In fact, the 1890s corresponded to a new perspective in the course of the movement evolution. Retrospectively in the late 1860s, the different women's rights gatherings had resulted in the creation of one main platform for their contentions: the American Equal Rights Association (AERA) which was invested in working for voting rights. But that focus was more oriented to the equal benefit of white and black women alike. Even if any of the leading protagonists objected to that right for colored women, such objection had not yet been publicly notified, at least until the 15th amendment to the US constitution proposed in May 1869. At that time, indeed, the question of the vote granted to only African American men, central to the amendment, became the focal point of a heating debate between female leaders. While some like Stanton and Antony opposed the ratification of the amendment unless it was accompanied by another one that would enfranchise black women, others like Lucy Stone supported it so far as it helped, in her own terms, "anybody to get out of the terrible pit"⁹.

As it can be noticed by this statement, the hard resistance of patriarchal order constrained some of the female leaders like Stone to content themselves to slow progress. But it is clear that that accounts for a disagreement on the tactics in the movement's fight. No matter the justifications that disagreement, in May 1869, that is, two days after debate between the women leaders, Anthony, Stanton and other allies formed the National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA). The creation of that Association resulted in the creation of another one, the American Women Suffrage Association (AWSA), in November 1869 by Lucy

Stone, her husband Henry Blackwell, Julia Ward Howe and their allies.

However, the creation of two organizations caused a dispersion of the focus in women's fight. While Lucy Stone's AWSA stressed on suffrage in quite exclusively state level, Suzan B. Anthony in the NWSA worked on a wide range of issues like equal pay, ownership, and divorce issues at the national level. The AWSA used respectable tactics while the NWSA adopted confrontational methods. Anthony, for example, interrupted the official ceremony at the 100th anniversary of the US Declaration of Independence to present NSW's Declaration of Rights for women. She was arrested in 1872 for voting, which was still illegal for women, and was found guilty in a highly publicized trial. Normally that dissemination of focuses and strategies should be benefic given the potential pressure of women initiatives. The American society became, indeed, open to women in several fields concerning social issues. For example, by 1890, colleges and universities were open to girls, and the notion of "woman's sphere", traditionally used to refer to activities exclusively devoted to women –household activities childrearing, etc. — was progressively abandoned. And more significantly, all legal provisions allowing husbands to control their wives' activities were revised.

Even if these gains brought sentiment of enthusiasm in the opinion about the liberation of women in the social domain, there was not the same type of optimism regarding the political expression. Indeed, there was no significant progress in the demand for suffrage. These successes and backlashes are largely documented in *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881) by Stanton and her co-authors. When Stanton argues that the women's movement had "sat quite long enough on a limb of the Republican tree singing 'suffrage if you please' like so many insignificant humming birds", she means to point out with a mitigated accent of optimism the limited progress of their movement¹⁰. And at the same time it was an occasion to call for the attention of readers and the thousands of militants who had enrolled in the organization to the

⁹ -Kathryn Cullen-DuPont,"American Equal Rights Association" in *The Encyclopedia of Women's History in America*, (2nd Ed.) New York, Fact on File, 2000, pp.215-216

¹⁰- Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Letters, Diary and Reminiscences*, Vol. 2 Nov. 1880, p.254

up-coming challenges of the struggle. She made her stir more explicit as she wrote, "we who have undertaken the task have been moved by the consideration that many of our co-workers have already fallen asleep".¹¹ Stanton's statement sounds like a deception concerning what seemed like a lack of motivation in the movement's militants, because their efforts had not earned them more than the liberation from traditional home occupations. On the contrary, it was an urgent call to "shake things up", to use the words by the critique Lisa Shawn Hogan, for the most important part of the struggle to come: the political aspect¹². And it is precisely in the political field that the great challenges will come on the surface, the challenge of unification between long-lasting divergent forces, and the challenge of the separation under divergent interests.

II. Divergent interests, Fragmented Discourse

It has been mentioned that the process of struggle for women's rights brought about the birth of different organizations two of the most prominent were Stanton's National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA) and Stone's American Women Suffrage Association (AWSA). Born in the late 1860s, those two early organizations evolved as rivals in the arena of the fight for women's emancipation until the 19th century when serious obstacles in securing/winning rights from traditional system brought them to unite into what was known as National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in February 1890. For the purpose of concision, we will spare the reader the details of the unifying efforts or position tractations that were obviously deployed for it. The focus in this part will be how the unified associations managed to pursue the initial goals of winning rights for women and, the impacts of its different actions on the organization in terms of cohesion and future challenges.

a-An Obsession for Suffrage: the Unattainable Goal

Even if the question of suffrage was crucial in the unification of women organizations into the common platform of NAWSA in the last decade of the 19th century, the leaders represented by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Suzan B. Anthony were

determined to seize any occasion to win rights for their fellow country women. As Stanton said in that early time of her presidency of the Association, "When any principle or question is up for discussion, let us seize on it and show its connection, whether nearly or remotely, with woman's disfranchisement" (See note 40 Declaration). In fact, Stanton's desire to "seize" on "any principle" and make it an item of suffrage foreshadows radicalism she will finally not refrain from vowing out in a diary she compiled in the late 1880s. , Expressing her doubt about the commitment of her co-leader Anthony to change, she writes "I tell her that I get more radical as I grow older, while she seems to grow more conservative"¹³.

The fact that Stanton shows radicalism is not surprising. Indeed, since she took the leadership of the organization with Anthony, she went through a lot of obstacles, principally in trying to enhance with the issue of suffrage. According to Lisa Shawn, these obstacles were caused by the fact that in the 1880s, the women's movement "had entered a period that many scholars refer to as the 'doldrums' with suffrage becoming 'respectable and dull'"¹⁴. It simply means that although it remained serious, it benefited from no support in the American opinion which was then largely drawn by an irreducible conservatism. In 1887, that conservatism trend of the US society had led the Senate to reject a Constitutional Amendment on woman suffrage. At a time when only three states —Washington, Wyoming, and Utah— had granted full suffrage to women, there seemed to be no way for optimism about the issue, despite the growing popularity of the movement. It was that lack of progress which brought the movement militants, and Stanton the most prominent of them to change the strategy of the struggle, to "shake things up" as Lisa says. But how to stimulate a new strategy when the members lack in motivation, and especially Anthony who was accused of conservatism?

The reading the *History* (1881) or "The Solitude Self" (1892) proves necessary in order to

¹³- Elizabeth Cady Stanton, opt. Cit. p. 254

¹⁴- Lisa Shawn Hogan, ibid. p. 26. Lisa Shawn borrows the terms "doldrums" and "respectable and dull" from Olivia Coolidge's *Women's Rights: The Suffrage Movement in America, 1848-1920*, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1966, p. 96

¹¹- Stanton et al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol.1 p.7

¹²- Lisa Shawn Hogan, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 'The Solitude of Self'" in *Voice of Democracy*, No 8, 2013, p.25

have a clear idea about the new plan that Stanton elaborated for the future of the movement. Stanton had come to realize that the main reason for progress in legal provisions in terms of suffrage objective was assuredly a great conservatism which pointed, first, to the influence of male values in American society. That conservatism also and more importantly related to what political scientist Sue Davis explained as the “need for a fundamental transformation in culture and society”, a transformation that “went far beyond the campaign for legal and political reform”¹⁵. Bringing “transformation in culture and society” requires an investment in issues concerning everyday life affairs of women like education, moral and spiritual straightening, the occupation of respectable positions in social and cultural institutions like churches, etc. These concerns should normally help women to assume self-sovereignty and personal fulfilment (Lisa Shawn, 2013, p.26). Through this change in strategy, the leader of the movement wishes to nourish her militants with intellectual and psychological tools indispensable for a more efficient political fight. Even if the effect of the moral and spiritual education was not immediate, one guesses that it contributed a lot in the political successes of the future phases of the fight. And what is more significant is that such change illustrated the leaders’ great capacity of adaptability to the necessities of the time, even if like with Anthony, that meant shying away from the initial goals.

b- Race and the Rise of Ethnic Rhetoric in Women’s Rights Ideology

In the early days of the women’s rights movement, precisely in 1866, difference in perception on the issue of the African American’s enfranchisement, had caused the collapse of the very first organization –AERA— which was born from the conventions held many times before. The disagreements had brought about the creation of two rival women organizations –AWSA and NWSA— and regular disputes about the tactics and loyalty to the main objectives in the fight. The most remarkable of these disputes is, for example,

Stanton’s remarks about Anthony’s conservatism mentioned above. What is to be understood by conservatism, and how can one perceive Stone’s support of the amendment that enfranchised African American men only in 1866?

It must be noted that the 1880s were characterized by a certain number of rebuttal actions against women’s rights, notably the Senate’s rejection of women’s suffrage amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1887. That rejection of the proposed amendment brought about a general sentiment of dullness which gave the impression that the most important aspect of women’s fight, the right to vote, was unattainable, at least not at the federal level where the dominant view was that of traditional male values. The fact that the late 19th century American society was largely dominated by patriarchal values was not surprising at all. In fact, almost all the observers of the time were aware of it including Stanton herself, who had denounced it through her speech “The Solitude of Self” (1892).

But the conservatism of mainstream American society could also refer to the racism which lurked among white militants of the women’s organization. That racism is among other oppressions like sexism, what African American female writers of the 1960s and 1970s denounced in literary works of varied genres. Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, Barbara Christian, Hortense Spiller, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, etc. are among the most popular African American writers, literary and cultural critics of the 1960s and 1980s. Their works illustrate the importance of themes related to the condition of the woman in patriarchal American society, and specifically the condition of the black woman whose lot was precisely the double prejudice of racism and sexism.

In several types of fiction and non-fiction books, those women of African descent shape visions and ideas that are integral to the oppositional spirit of black revolutionary outlook of the 1960s and 1970s. Feminist in its inspiration, this oppositional spirit overtly protested against the patriarchal politics of white mainstream society and the racist propaganda of their fellow white women militants. This anti-racist endeavor of African American freedom riders dates, in fact, as far back

¹⁵- Sue Davis, *The Political Thought of Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, New York, N.Y.U. Press, 2008, p.77

as in the 19th century with the rise of women's rights campaigns inherited from 1848 the Seneca Fall convention. In the 20th century, alongside the cultural revolutionary and black aesthetic activities of the 1960s, what seemed to be a literary expression by black women became a real commitment for black women's full political participation in American life.

Among the six women mentioned above, Audre Lorde and Bell Hooks posed as the most virulent. As Nancie Caraway writes talking about their intellectual militancy, Lorde and Hooks not only foreground "the omissions of existing feminism", they also and chiefly "suggest a series of methodological approaches with which to examine Black feminist theory" (N Caraway, 1998, p. 25). Within the stand point of these two radical black intellectuals, feminism should not target dominant male society or patriarchal ideology exclusively. It should also challenge its own initial norms which have been perverted into a form of "white domination within oppression", and into a danger of "overreaching communalities in theories that codify the other in hierarchical terms" (N. Caraway, 1998, p. 25). What is really new with these African American women is that they draw from the aberrations of mainstream white feminism, they "reveal the incoherencies and racism in white feminist theory" as Caraway puts it, and more importantly, they have engaged in charting their own methodological approaches with which they frame a black feminist theory, one that is ingrained in the rich oral tradition of black culture.

Also poignant were the arguments developed by women's rights activists of the 19th century, the most popular of which were the Grimke sisters, Sojourner Truth, and Mary Church Terrell. In several declarations and literary productions, these leading figures denounced sexism and racism prevalent in the women's organization. Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), for example, has been popular with a declaration she made in 1851 during a women's rights rally in Ohio. Taking the floor while most of the white women attendants objected to her right to address the audience for fear of drawing public attention away from their cause, she attacked the incoherencies of her time in a speech that

Frances D. Cage, Chair of the rally later entitled "Ain't I a Woman?". The following passage points out the main ideas of her criticism:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And Ain't I a woman? Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! Ain't I a woman? [...]¹⁶.

Criticizing the patriarchal ideology in American society, that extemporaneous speech is also considered an indirect urge for equality between white women and black women. Such an anti-system discourse, as well as innumerable others by women's rights activists in the 19th century and 20th centuries , and writers of all trends has contributed to shape the basis for the contradiction in the century-old fight against women's marginalization in America.

Conclusion

The emancipation of the woman has mobilized millions of militants in America and abroad from mid-19th century to the vote of the Nineteenth Amendment in August, 1920. By this time, the NAWSA, as the organization which conducted the struggle, had gone through different stages and forms of battles which ultimately affected its own image in terms of organized and unified movement with a coherent and dignified activity. The notion that most simply refers to these stages and forms of battles is controversy, even if all the activities engaged by the suffrage movement were not controversial.

The least that one can say, though, is that the main focus of the battle, which is the right to vote, has been the object of countless disagreements over all this time. The disagreement, or the controversy amounted to simple differences in implementing tactics to "unpleasant feelings engendered during long separation" to use the

¹⁶- The statement is extracted from the introductory pages of *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850) by Sojourner Truth, New York, Dover Publishing Inc. 1997 pp.v-vi

words of Alice Stone Blackwell, the daughter to early leader Lucy Stone¹⁷. But significantly enough, the controversy derived from more pernicious sentiments like racism, prejudice inherited from century-old practice of human bondage.

The present work has focused on the different modes of representation of this controversy in the fight within women's suffrage organization from the Seneca Fall convention in 1848 to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, to nowadays. This discussion has flapped through different sources. These starting from historical books like the now classical multivolume *History of Women suffrage* (1881) co-authored by Elizabeth C. Stanton, Suzan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, to less historical records like the article "Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 'The Solitude of Self'" (January 18, 1892) written by Lisa Shawn Hogan, to some of the critical works like *Segregated Sisterhood* (1998) by Nancie Caraway which provides insights into an African American feminist rhetoric, which is a logical development of the discord.

Even if restrictions related to space did not allow lengthy development on this interesting issue of women's rights and the controversy it engendered, we hope to have provided sufficient materials for a comprehensive approach to it, though. Through this short analysis, we do yearn to stimulate further and critical developments with other researchers.

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