Elizabeth Ross Haynes and African American Women's Activism

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Introduction

The focus of this paper is Elizabeth Ross Haynes, who was a social worker, author, sociologist, and American activist who worked towards improving the conditions of African American women's lives. Born to Mary Cames Ross and Henry Ross, Elizabeth Ross Haynes grew up in the progressive era of the early 20th century when Black Women's needs were largely ignored (Carlton-LaNey, 1997). She engaged in speaking and researching women's labour issues, political growth, women's spirituality, and writing, as well as ensuring that women utilized their skills and talents in improving their quality of life. Due to the lack of sufficient resources for women, Ross opted for institutions in order to gain access to education and employment opportunities. Later, she formed movements such as the National League of Republican coloured Women, which spoke against racism and the neglect of women's needs. In relevance to her misery as a black woman, Elizabeth Ross sought to improve the blacks' welfare by establishing institutions for black women immigrants and for better living conditions and employment.

Analysis

Social Background

The needs of Native blacks, especially women in the United States, were constantly ignored even by the reformers. In this essence, few opportunities, such as employment and training, were available to them. This forced Ross, together with the other women, to opt for the few institutions provided for them in order to gain a quality life and employment opportunities. The black leaders and other critics had designed feminists' perspective, which omitted the experiences and use of talents and abilities by women of colour. Ross Haynes was at the forefront by engaging in activities that led to the development and availability of institutional resources, especially for young African American women who sought better employment opportunities, education, and better living conditions. Her capacity as a sociologist gave her the opportunity to actively engage in culminating movements and positions that directly involved finding better opportunities for women. Throughout her life, she constantly engaged in promoting and establishing new branches of YWCA, which helped female migrants find

jobs and training.

Society deemed women and denied them a chance and opportunity to improve the quality of their lives. Their place was in the kitchen, where they took care of children, and hence, they lacked the chance to do blue-collar jobs. In the early 20th century, many female reformers were raised as a part of a growing trend of changing women's backgrounds and society's perceptions of all women. In this regard, Ross joined the *National Association Of Colored Women,* which commissioned the start of a nationwide prohibition of women's humiliation and suppression and the eventual decline in men's dominance (Storrs, 2003). In improving the quality of women's lives, the Ross suffrage movement involved both social, political and economic progressive era reforms, which were aimed at eradicating political corruption, improving women's lives and living conditions and increasing government intervention in protecting women.

Elizabeth Ross introduced a campaign that was focused on educating and providing services to local women. As opposed to earlier female activism, Ross participated in political and public movements that were aimed at raising awareness for women's education and supplementing the traditional role of women. By turning women from traditional social roles into political and public roles, activism brought a different perception of women in every society. She also believed that giving women a chance to learn and obtain skills would improve the living and working conditions of many women.

Ross Haynes- a pragmatist, advocated for the needs of the Negro women and argued that their needs superseded integrated politics and that the role of women in political life should involve a betterment of other women's needs. The growing concentration of political power enacted by other women activists in the early progressive era lacked the desire to modify harsh aspects of political values, which surpassed women's needs by undermining the abilities of women in radicalizing society. Ross argued for a more responsive measure from the government in order to incorporate the already changing lifestyles and consider the needs of women outside the political space. However, in a male-dominated society, women were viewed as intellectually and politically inferior to men and hence, their social problems were not taken seriously.

From a social perspective, Ross successfully influenced the improvement of political reforms by maintaining the main goal of the progressive movements, which was to eliminate social, political and economic problems mostly caused by immigration, corruption and urbanization. Her efforts to reform the black quality of life were fruitful and led to the improvement of the living and working conditions of the black women workers. Ross used her education and intellectual abilities to further and improve the cause of black women workers. Ross was also among the leading black women to become a new deal democrat and was actively involved in Harlem politics. Her belief was in education, and she had a favourable attitude towards women in urban industrial society and the ability to improve the environment and life conditions. Additionally, she sought the need and obligation to intervene in social and economic affairs and propagate a favourable environment for all black women.

Contributions To Social Work

Ross's social work impacted black native women as she spoke against ignorance of women's needs and racist tactics used to bar women from working and accessing resources. As a progressivist, she referred to different responses to the social and economic evolutions which were attributed to industrialization and rapid urbanization. As a result of this scenario, African Americans moved to cities in which they experienced various social needs but lacked the capability of meeting these needs. Ross believed that social problems such as class- warfare, poverty and racism d be addressed better through education, more conducive workplace, a safer environment as well as a supportive government (Schneider et al. 1993). During the progressive era, African Americans were the most vulnerable people, and hence, Ross had the need to establish a prominent voice for raising public awareness of the rising and existing social inequalities and problems. In general, Ross played a major role in demanding expansive reforms for social, political and economic change, mostly pertaining to the black population.

Ross served her social activism role by joining institutions and political parties that argued against racism and the oppression of Negron women. For instance, she founded the National League of Republican coloured women and joined the state temporary commission. Politicians largely controlled lives in major cities through different political entities created and supported by the government. As a result, Ross joined several political entities in order to change and protect the needs of the black community with a greater voice enhanced by the political machines. During this era, the plight of African Americans was constantly ignored and hence was faced with racism, segregation and disenfranchisement from political life. As a result, African Americans were subjected to endless social ills and therefore, to counteract the injustices faced by black women, Ross emerged to fight and advocate for equal rights and opportunities for all people.

Elizabeth's contemporaries included other black-era reformers, members of the *National Association Of Colored Women,* and the state temporary commission. For many African Americans, progress was hard to achieve and successively integrate with the Western cultures due to inequalities and being overlooked by the whites. Due to this, notable African American readers such as BookerTWashingtonW.E.BDuboisJimCrowIda B. Wells were actively involved in correcting economic, political and social problems in America (Carlton-LaNey, 1999, p. 320). However, their work and contribution were greatly overlooked by white progressives, and hence, they did not gain the intended amount of influence at its initial stage. The racism aspects were a major topic from several proggrevism and led to the establishment of racial segregation laws and equal rights for black women. Subsequently, this progressivism pushed for political reforms, which included constitutional amendments to remove voting restrictions.

Her major contribution to social work was that she developed institutional resources for young black women whose needs were previously ignored by other reformers. Mainstream economists and historians perceive the progressive era as the period where rational ideologies and policies towards

black women improved. From a progressive perspective, Ross provided the basis for the implementation of institutional resources and policies that were directly targeted at the Negron women. She also carried out goals that were meant to create a fair economic life for women, implement reforms, and increase minimum wages as well as working hours. The Negron population was viewed as destructive to American society, and hence, it was hard to push for the implementation of policies and create and make resources available to black women.

Ross's critics, including the white progressives and black leaders, accused her of supporting separate programs and institutions for Negro women in the segregated YWCA. As an American activist, a primary characteristic of open and direct criticism was a main feature. Mainly, the superior social class brought a universal revulsion against the arguments raised by Ross. The critics argued that contemporary progressivism was not intellectually compelling and not theoretically applicable depending on the trending circumstances of overcrowded cities due to immigration. The critics were against the need to create equal rights and provision of education to all black women in America. This was due to the fear of a female-dominated society. The political arguments were against Ross's perception of imperial ideologies to which black women were subjected.

Summary

Elizabeth Ross grew up at a time when women's needs were neglected and largely ignored and, therefore, acted as a role model through writing, speaking and researching on Negron women's issues to address their needs, which had been neglected by reformers. As a victim of racism, she vowed to improve women's conditions through joining institutions and forming movements which argued against social inequality. In this essence, movements such as the *National League Of Republican Colored Women* were formed to help curb racism. Ross ensured that women accessed employment and training opportunities. This, in turn, aided in the improvement of their quality of life.

Though faced with multiple criticisms, Ross still argues against racism and ignorance of women's needs to overshadow them and ensures that women's needs are looked into despite the negative feminist perspective adopted in American society to deny black women's participation in economic and political processes in America. Ross's critics, including the white progressives and black leaders, accused her of supporting separate programs and institutions for Negro women in the segregated YWCA. As an American activist, a primary characteristic of open and direct criticism was a main feature. The needs of Native blacks, especially women in the United States, were constantly ignored even by the reformers. In this essence, few opportunities, such as employment and training, were available to them.

Her major contribution to social work was that she developed institutional resources for young black women whose needs were previously ignored by other reformers. Additionally, Elizabeth Ross introduced a campaign that was focused on educating and providing services to local women. Ross's contemporaries included other black-era reformers, members of the *National Association Of Colored*

Women, and the state temporary commission. Ross's social work impacted black native women as she spoke against ignorance of women's needs and racist tactics used to bar women from working and accessing resources.

In my context, Elizabeth Ross's contribution was essential and instrumental in creating and advocating for better living conditions for African American women. In this regard, Haynes's involvement in developing institutional resources for young black women established a platform which enabled black women to gain progress in a society full of inequalities and male dominance. Subsequently, her contribution to providing education opportunities and reforms provided support for advocating the idea of progress and general improvement of society based on different perceptions of African American women. Haynes definitely demonstrated the belief that African American women were equal and able to overcome existing and emerging social, political, and economic problems if they were offered the necessary resources and equal opportunities. Lastly, in my context, I believe that Ross provided the necessary measures needed to address the problems experienced by the immigrants based on the concept of progressivism.

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