

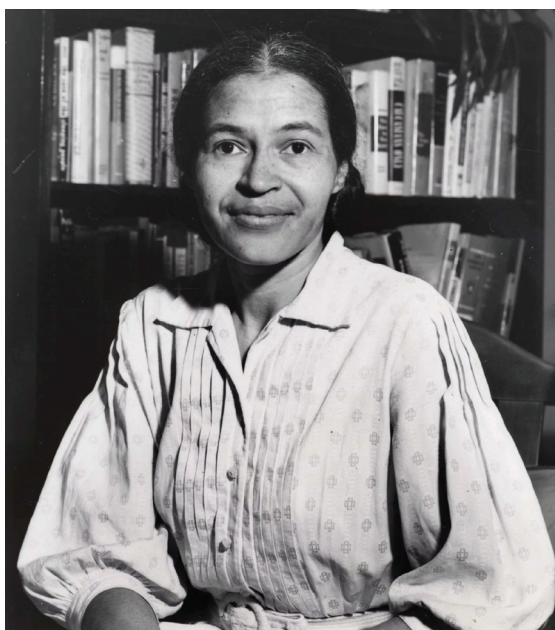
THE SASSINESS OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

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Lately, I have been obsessed about reading the biographies of famous women activists, what they had to do or say to get their message out there, the challenges they faced and the victories they celebrated.

Having grown up in a generation where the revitalization of the women's movement was the 'in-thing', I used to think it was a yesteryear phenomenon, just until now. I was surprised to learn from the National Women's History that it goes way back to the 1840s, marking

Dr. Hilda Mary Tadria – one of the historical women rights activists in Uganda.



ROSA LOUISE MCCAULEY PARKS. SHE WAS AN ACTIVIST IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, WHOM THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS CALLED “THE FIRST LADY OF CIVIL RIGHTS” AND “THE MOTHER OF THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT”

13 July 1848 as watershed.

On that sweltering summer day in upstate New York, a young housewife and mother, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was invited to tea with four women friends. When the course of their conversation turned to the situation of women, Stanton poured out her discontent with the limitations placed on her own situation under America’s new democracy. Stanton’s friends agreed with her, passionately.

I think that this was definitely not the first small group of women who gathered to have such a conversation, but it was the first to plan and carry out a specific, large-scale programme.

And there were also the likes of Rosa Parks, a modest seamstress, who was on her way back home from work when she refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. That single act of defiance on 1 December 1955 is remembered as the start of the civil rights movement and she is respectfully remembered as the mother of the civil rights movement.

Today, even in Africa, we have lots of Stantons and Parks, who are patriotic

, sharing the ideal of creating a world where women can enjoy equal rights with men. They see their mission as helping fellow women who can’t speak for themselves and who can’t keep promises of better and more egalitarian lives. They are living the legacy of women’s rights that eight generations of women before them gave their best to achieve. Alice Paul, that intrepid organiser who first wrote out the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, said, “I always feel the movement is sort of a mosaic. Each of us puts in one little stone, and then you get a great mosaic at the end.”

African women, acting together, adding their small stones to the grand mosaic, have increased their rights against all odds, non-violently, from an initial position of powerlessness. They have a lot to be proud of in this heroic legacy, and a great deal to celebrate. They have clearly been successful in irrevocably changing the circumstances and hopes of fellow women.

In the world of work, large numbers of women have entered the professions, the trades, and businesses of every kind. Ranks of the clergy, the

politicians, the specialists, the military, the newsroom and elsewhere have been opened up for women from their ‘traditional’ role of engaging in house chores.

However, though much has been accomplished, a lot still remains to be done since substantial barriers to the full equality of Africa’s women still stand before their freedom. The remaining injustices can be – and are being – tackled daily in the courts and conference rooms, in homes and organisations, in local communities, at workplaces and on the playing fields of different states in the continent.

And with this going on, we should never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world because, indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has! That was Margaret Mead’s conclusion after a lifetime of observing very diverse cultures around the world. Her insight has been borne out time and again throughout the development of this whole movement.