Anna Julia Cooper Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race

[Name of the Writer]

[Name of the Institution]

A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race

**Introduction**

In front of a largely white audience, a young woman walked up on the stage. She spoke for the struggles of her African American people in spite of her skin being as pale as the audience’s. Anna Julia Cooper lived through slavery, the lynching and legal segregations of Jim Crow, women’s suffrage, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the renewal of the Civil Rights Movement. She was born on August 10, 1858, in Raleigh, North California. It is notable to mention that her mother was enslaved by a white family. She was an American educator and writer, whose writing befitted as a classic African American feminist text (Wallach, 2019). She encouraged African American girls and women for education to get a better place in American society. At the age of six, she had witnessed the end of the Civil war and slavery. However, she continued to suffer from oppression and discrimination in American society. African Americans had to face discrimination in the educational field as well when they were pressurized to avoid higher education. At those grief moments, Anna Julia Cooper emerged as a role model, not only for African Americans but for many coloured people as well (Wallach, 2019). She wrote a number of literary articles to emphasise on the rights of women and African Americans. Her brave actions for the betterment of African Americans earned her the title “The Voice of the South”. Here, the focus is to discuss valuable achievements of Cooper that played a prominent role in the uplifting of African American’ women.

**Discussion**

Anna Julia Cooper was an African American woman of the 19th century. She was well aware of the fact that the struggles for equality and dignity in American society cannot be achieved through the right to vote or the attainment of legal citizenship. Significant changes are required to alter the perception of one nation towards another nation. At the age of ten, she enrolled in St. Augustine’s Institute, a newly developed school for freed slaves (Lemert and Bhan, 2019). It is notable to mention that Cooper proved to be an efficient student and she was honoured to teach mathematics to freed slaves. She advocated her life for the advancement of women’s education after realising the fact that her male classmates were encouraged to get higher education as compared to female students (Wallach, 2019). She had feminist awakening after considering these crucial circumstances, which were keeping female students behind. She realised that African American women were financially sacrificing so that their children could get a better education (Lemert and Bhan, 2019). Her intense struggle to encourage African American women proved to be effective when the literacy rates among African American women began to rise.

It is notable to mention that she always took stand in front of other people who argued that getting equal rights in the American community is more important at that moment. She stood in front of the Protestant Episcopal Church to make him realise that equal rights for women needed to be placed in the racial uplift efforts as well (Moody-Turner & Stewart, 2009). She persuades African American leaders through her writing to cater to the issues affecting African American women along with the right to citizenship and the right to vote. Standing at the centre of male-dominated space for the sake of women’s right demonstrate Cooper’s intense efforts to represent the perspectives and needs of African American women. African American were discriminated and oppressed in American society as whites considered themselves more superior than any other race in the entire world. African Americans sacrificed their wills to incorporate themselves in American society, but it was becoming impossible for them due to discrimination (Wallach, 2019).

Anna Julia Cooper had an unwavering passion to cater to all the obstacles of racism and sexism. In her writing “The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper”, she wrote about the needs and perspectives of African American women. She extensively described the situation of African American women in American society. She presented a clear image of Black women in American society to reveal a complex idea about race, gender, and class in American society (Cooper, 2000). It is notable to mention that she highlighted the common oppression of African American women in “Womanhood: The Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race”. In ‘Womanhood” she emphasised on the moral superiority of Black woman (Lemert and Bhan, 2019). Cooper viewed the issue of sexism and race as inseparably linked with each other. She wanted to place sexism in the centre of racial uplift to highlight its importance. In her entire life, she witnessed cruel and horrified moments against African American women in American society. Even after the end of slavery and the Civil War, Black women had to face the same circumstance. The basic reason behind this was inattentive behaviour of Black leaders towards women’s issue in American society (Moody-Turner & Stewart, 2009). Mary Julia Copper located her activism and feminism firmly within the paradigm of educational development of African Americans (Cooper, 1886). “Womanhood” is referred to as a text of the speech in which Anna Julia Cooper took stand for the African American women. Regardless of string opposition from male-dominated African Americans, she insisted to prioritize the needs and perspectives of African American women in their movement. She established a strong ground in her writing to let others know about the suffering and sacrifice of African American women in American society.

Cooper was a self-assured and forthright woman with complex writing. She persuaded her intellectual and teaching work for most of her life. She did this all by herself with none of the domestic or financial support from her spouse throughout her life. She lived most of her life as a widow as her husband died two years after their marriage. She was the mother of seven foster children (Lemert and Bhan, 2019). It is notable to mention that her life was centred deeply in the virtue of proper public conduct. She devoted her life to make to create a better society for African American women. According to Anna Julia Cooper, “The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or a class – it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of humanity” (Cooper, 1886). The work of Cooper in the early development of African American studies provided with a better pathway to ensure the intellectual advancement of African Americans. Despite the fact that she devoted her entire life to get better educational and financial opportunities for Black women, she encouraged African Americans to set a diverse set of intellectual and social goals. It is important to mention that Cooper displayed her bravery in front of whites by showing courage and confidence. She stood up in front of Americans to demonstrate the current status of African American women as compared to white women (Wallach, 2019). She demanded equality for African Americans in front of the Congress of Representative Women in Chicago. She always ensured that her writing creates awareness among both White and Black Americans regarding injustice and discrimination (Lemert and Bhan, 2019). In “Womanhood”, she revealed the crucial circumstances in which African American women were a force to survive (Cooper, 1886). A critical examination of “Womanhood” disclosed Cooper’s emphasis on women education and equality in the African American society.

To make progress in any community, people should need to take stand for themselves. If people are unable to stand up for themselves, then they cannot expect others to make efforts for them. Same was the case with Cooper as she understood those circumstances. Therefore, she joined the Black women club movement. The basic purpose of that movement was to educate middle-class women of African Americans. She always considered it as her duty to help the oppressed and discriminated nation of Black Africans in American society (Lemert and Bhan, 2019). Her writing and enthusiasm to work for African American women motivated her to become a popular public speaker. She made a speech on multiple occasion to encouraged African Americans women to step up for their rights and equality in American society. She addressed on multiple occasions such as the first Pan African Conference and the National Conference of Coloured Women to highlight some prominent aspects of women equality. Her readings and writings, work in education, lectures, and community activism provided a firm foundation to feminist movement for African American women. She became an exemplar to establish a new community in which each race could enjoy equal rights and respect. The main purpose of her writing and speeches was to create awareness in the entire nation about the sacrifices of African American women in American society (Moody-Turner & Stewart, 2009). She wanted to change the entire perspective of the nation about African Americans. Her collection of essays and speeches changed the perspectives of the majority of Black and White people (Lemert and Bhan, 2019).

The text of Cooper “Womanhood” clearly indicated major concerns of her life such as women’s rights and educational advancement in African Americans. She had a unique perspective and ideology regarding American nations. She wanted to change the perspectives of the entire nation about the uplift of African Americans. It is notable to mention that she wanted to modify the viewpoints of white about African Americans to consider them as one nation, instead of freed slaves (Cooper, 1886). There was an immense need after the Civil War to mitigate the ideology of slavery from American society. Cooper connected herself with the hearts of her African Americans’ brothers and sisters to embrace the notion of solidarity. In her work “Womanhood”, she tried to give voice to her African Americans’ sister in front of a wide range of audience (Moody-Turner & Stewart, 2009). African American leaders were energetic to get their rights in American society, while Cooper wanted them to centralise the idea of women’s equity in their movement (Cooper, 2000). She urged her listeners to accept African American women as a part of society so they can work alongside with men to create a better community. “Womanhood” demonstrates the struggles of Cooper for the betterment of her people. She realised everyone about the importance of African American women to get what they want in American society. She urged her listeners to accept the notion of freedom for Black women (Lemert and Bhan, 2019). Her work indicated the importance of education and intellectual freedom for every nation regardless of gender, class, and race.

The entire life of Cooper was devoted to the fact that the hearts of African Americans were brighter as much as any other nation regardless of their skin colour. It is essential to mention that “Womanhood” was not only about realising audience of the importance of African Americans in American society. It was written with the notion of altering the perspective of people towards Black women in society. In the male-dominated society, she picked up a pencil to demonstrate the ideology that everyone deserved to learn regardless of their class, race, or gender. “Womanhood” was not written to get a headline for her fame in American society. It was written to touch the heart of Black women and men to get back their dignity in society instead of pondering over the ideology of male-domination (Cooper, 2000). The writing and bravery of Cooper enabled her to change the future of African Americans in American society. Her writing and speeches were not only entitled to share her struggles in the male-dominated society, but it was also entitled to move the audience through her words. The heroism and bravery of Cooper are still recognised among African Americans. Black women enabled to stand in front of male-dominated society with the help and efforts of Cooper. Encouragement is an essential factor, which dictates the emotional progress of a person in society. Cooper proved to be that encouragement for African American women in American society.

**Conclusion**

In a nutshell, Anna Julia Cooper was one of the bravest African American women who devoted her life for the betterment of her people. Various publications and essays of Cooper illustrated her intensive efforts to get a better lifestyle for African American in American society. She devoted her entire life to create awareness among both Black and White about the importance of women in society. “Womanhood” is a significant prove of her efforts for the rights of women as she wanted African American leaders to place the agenda of Black women rights in the centre of their actual movement. Her speeches and essays demonstrated the enthusiasm of Cooper to end the ideology of slavery even after the end of the Civil War. Cooper worked hard in the male-dominated society to establish a better future for black women.

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