

Learn about and celebrate Black History: Mary McLeod Bethune



Educator. Civil and Women's Rights Leader. Presidential Advisor.

"We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends."

Born in 1875, a daughter to former slaves, **Mary McLeod Bethune** was one of 17 children and worked with her family on their land growing and picking cotton. In 1894, Mary graduated from Scotia Seminary and attended Dwight Moody's Institute for Home and Foreign Missions and shortly after became a teacher. In the early 1900s, Mary became a single mother to her son and opened a boarding school, the Daytona Beach Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls, which eventually merged with Cookman Institute to form Bethune-Cookman College in 1929.



A dedicated educator, Mary also became an advocate for racial and gender equality. She held voter registration drives for women; was president of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs; became the founding President of the National Council of Negro Women; and in 1936, she became the highest ranking African American woman in government when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt named her Director of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration – a position she held until 1944.

Her accomplishments and lasting impact also include:

- Fighting to end discrimination and lynching.
- Serving as Vice President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons from 1940 until her death in 1955.
- Serving on the advisory board of the Women's Army Corps, ensuring that it was racially integrated.
- Appointed by President Harry S. Truman to the founding conference of the United Nations in 1945, where she was the only woman of color.

To learn more about the incredible life of Mary McLeod Bethune and the lasting impact she made to education, civil rights, and women's rights:

- <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/mary-mcleod-bethune>
- <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/mary-mcleod-bethune>
- <https://www.cookman.edu/history/last-will-testament.html>

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Want to learn about more Black educators and education advocates who have made an impact throughout history?

- **Fanny Jackson Coppin** – Born a slave in 1837, Fanny Jackson Coppin became an educator and advocate. By the age of 14, she was supporting herself and working to receive her education. She graduated from the Rhode Island State Normal School and Oberlin College. From there, she became a teacher and head principal at the Institute for Colored Youth, a Quaker school in Philadelphia. During her time there, she expanded the curriculum, established a Women’s Industrial Exchange, founded a Home for Girls and Young Women, and advocated for her students by connecting them to employers for jobs related to their education. Coppin State University, an historically Black college in Baltimore, is named in her honor. Last year, an elementary school in Philadelphia was renamed in her honor as well. ([Learn more here.](#))
- **Kelly Miller** – Born in 1863, Kelly Miller was a mathematician, educator, and political activist. He attended Howard University where he earned his Bachelor’s in 1886 before becoming the first graduate student at Johns Hopkins University in 1887. Tuition increases prevented him from completing his graduate studies, but he was later hired by Howard University to teach math. While there, he resumed his graduate studies, earning both a master’s and a Law Degree. Kelly was also an advocate of higher education access for African Americans and was one of the founders of the American Negro Academy – an organization that was dedicated to promoting higher education, arts, and science for African Americans as part of the struggle for racial equality. ([Learn more here.](#))
- **Missouri Equity Education Partnership** – Founded by local author and advocate Heather Fleming, the Missouri Equity Education Partnership is a grassroots organization that supports and advocates for anti-bias and antiracist approaches to education. Recently, they began a Banned Book Program in response to school boards banning books from school libraries in our state. They have also created a national March for Education which will have its inaugural marches in cities around the country later this year on April 30th. ([Learn more here.](#))

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