

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE

political activist, civil servant

“If we have the courage and tenacity of our forebears, who stood firmly like a rock against the lash of slavery, we shall find a way to do for our day what they did for theirs.”



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Background Information

Born: July 10, 1875; Died: May 18, 1955

Bethune was born in Mayesville, South Carolina. She grew up in a family of 17 and was the child of formerly enslaved people. Despite growing up in poverty, she became the first and only child in her family to go to school. Bethune attended a missionary school for African American children. She shared what she was learning at school with her family, as they were not fortunate enough to go with her. She later received a scholarship to attend the Scotia Seminary in North Carolina. She then went on to attend the Moody Bible Institute. Upon graduation, began a career as a teacher.

McLeod Bethune's Resistance

Bethune believed that the key to racial advancement was education. Therefore, she founded the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls in Daytona, Florida. While serving as president, the school combined with the Cookman Institute for Men to become the Bethune-Cookman College. The college is an HBCU (Historically Black College or University), an institution for African Americans pursuing a college degree.¹

Bethune founded many organizations dedicated to fighting for racial and gender equality. She became president of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs in 1924, and then went on to become the founding president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) in 1935. ² Bethune also became a special advisor to President Roosevelt on minority affairs that year. In 1936, she worked to help young people find job opportunities through her position as director of the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration. In 1943, she helped represent the NAACP at a conference on the founding of the United Nations. And, in the 1950s, she was appointed by Harry Truman to serve as an official delegate to a presidential inauguration in Liberia.

Achievements

Bethune was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1973. In 1985, the U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp in her honor. In 1994, the former headquarters of the NCNW was bought by the U.S. Park Service and is now known as the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site.

Essential Questions

1. Do you agree with Bethune that education is the key to racial advancement?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. Is attending college a necessary component of success for 21st century learners?

2. Bethune recognized the privilege of being the only child in her family to be able to attend school, and worked to share that education with her family.
 - a. How can you share the privileges in education you have been afforded with those in under severed communities?

3. “If we have the courage and tenacity of our forebears, who stood firmly like a rock against the lash of slavery, we shall find a way to do for our day what they did for theirs.”
 - a. What did she mean by this?
 - b. How could this apply today?

1 Editors, B. (2020, July 06). Mary McLeod Bethune Biography. Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://www.biography.com/activist/mary-mcleod-bethune>

2 Michals, D. (2015). Mary McLeod Bethune. Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/mary-mcleod-bethune>