

## PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

### MARY ELIZA MAHONEY

*nurse, suffragist, activist*

*“Work more and better the coming year than the previous year.”*



#### Background Information

Born: Spring 1845; Died: January 4, 1926

Mahoney's exact birth date is unknown, but she was born to freedmen in the spring of 1845 in Boston, Massachusetts. She attended Phillips School in Boston, which became one of the first integrated schools in the country. She knew at an early age that she wanted to become a nurse, so she began working at the New England Hospital for Women and Children in her teens. Here she worked for 15 years in the roles of janitor, cook, washer woman, and nurse's aide. She was admitted to this hospital's professional graduate school for nursing in 1878. In 1879, Mahoney became the first African American in the US to earn a professional nursing license.<sup>1</sup>

#### Mahoney's Resistance

Mahoney's resistance began with her career choice. She wanted to become a nurse during a time when the healthcare field was predominantly white and male dominated. Unlike southern schools, northern universities accepted students of color, but the process was still extremely difficult. Mahoney defied the odds and was accepted into an intensive, 16-month program. 42 students were admitted into her graduate nursing cohort, but only four completed the program in 1879.

Upon graduation, Mahoney entered the field of private nursing, as she would have faced overwhelming discrimination in public nursing. In 1896, she joined the Nurses Associated Alumnae of the United States and Canada (NAAUSC), where she faced discrimination by the white members that made up the majority of the group. Realizing that a group was needed to advocate for equality for African American nurses, Mahoney co-founded the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) in 1908. In her later years, Mahoney would become national chaplain of the organization.

After her retirement, she became a champion for women's rights, and was one of the first women to register to vote in Boston in 1920.<sup>1</sup>

#### Achievements

In 1936, the Mary Mahoney Award was founded by the NACGN. This award continues to be awarded today by the American Nurses Association to those who promote integration in the field of nursing. In 1993, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York.<sup>1</sup>

## Essential Questions

1. How did Mahoney fight against the discrimination she faced in her professional life?

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2. How were her actions acts of resistance?

a. Who was impacted by her resistance?

3. What is an injustice that you may face in your future career choice?

a. What can you do now in preparation to fight that injustice?

4. ***“Work more and better the coming year than the previous year.”***

a. Given what you know about Mahoney, how does this quote symbolize her resistance?

b. How can this quote be applied to your current role as a student?

<sup>1</sup>Spring, Kelly. “Mary Mahoney.” National Women's History Museum. National Women's History Museum, 2017.