

**GUIDE TO THE
MICROFILM EDITION OF**

**THE PAPERS OF
MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE
1923-1948**

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Amistad Research Center,
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NOTE TO RESEARCHER

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INTRODUCTION

Mary McLeod Bethune rose from poverty to become one of the nation's most distinguished African American leaders and the most prominent black woman of her time. Her life encompassed three different careers: as an educator, she was the central figure in the creation of Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida; as founder and president of the National Council of Negro Women, she was a leading force in developing the black women's organization movement; and in the political realm, she was one of the few blacks to hold influential positions in the federal bureaucracy during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration.

Favoring conciliation over confrontation in her struggle for black equality in an era of segregation, Bethune has been compared to Booker T. Washington. Like him, her leadership style focused on negotiating and cooperating with white leaders to improve the inferior status and economic impoverishment of blacks in American life. By presenting the public image of an affable, non-threatening woman to white audiences, she appealed to their conscience and sense of fair play while clearly expressing her vision of racial equality.

Born in 1875 near Mayesville, South Carolina, Mary McLeod was the fifteenth of 17 children. Her parents were former slaves freed at the time of the Civil War. Though poor by national standards, the McLeod family was a symbol of stability and unity in the local black community. They had worked and saved to buy their own land, building a cabin and growing corn and cotton. Their strong Methodist religious values and work ethics were instilled in Mary at an early age.

Bethune's education began at a free school established near Mayesville by Emma Wilson, a black missionary sent by the Northern Presbyterian Church. After exhausting the educational opportunities at this small school, the young student sought to continue her studies elsewhere. Wilson found a white patron from Denver, Colorado, who financed Bethune's continued education at Scotia Seminary (later Barber-Scotia College), a Presbyterian school for black girls in Concord, North Carolina. Scotia Seminary emphasized religion and industrial (trade school) education. Its racially mixed faculty was Bethune's first intellectual exposure to whites, teaching her that cooperation between the races was possible and that skin color had nothing to do with intelligence.

After graduating from Scotia, Bethune enrolled at the Bible Institute for Home and Foreign Missions (now the Moody Bible Institute) in Chicago, again with a scholarship. She finished her studies in 1895 and thereafter sought missionary service in Africa. But the Presbyterian Mission Board told her it had no openings in Africa for black missionaries.

Instead the 20-year-old Bethune went to teach at the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augusta, Georgia. The school's dynamic black founder and principal, Lucy Laney, instilled in Bethune a different sense of mission--one of bringing educational opportunities to blacks in her own country.

After a year at Haines, she returned to her native South Carolina to teach at the Kindell Institute in Sumter. There she met Albertus Bethune, a former teacher who had become a menswear salesman. After marrying in May of 1898 they moved to Savannah, Georgia, to further his business career. She retired temporarily from teaching, and gave birth to their only child, Albert McLeod Bethune, in 1899. Later that year, with a six-month-old baby, the family moved again, this time to Palatka, Florida, where Mary opened the Palatka Mission School, teaching there for five years. Albertus Bethune did not share his wife's missionary zeal, however, and the couple separated. He died in 1918.

Construction of the Florida East Coast Railway was attracting and employing large numbers of black laborers in northern Florida. On her 1904 arrival in Daytona Beach she found widespread ignorance and poor educational opportunities and decided to do something about it. Reportedly beginning with only \$1.50 in savings, Bethune rented a four-room cottage and opened her school that October with six pupils--five girls and her son. She raised additional money by tirelessly soliciting funds door-to-door. Most school furnishings came from the city dump; used and discarded items like chairs, desks, rugs, and dishes were collected and repaired by the students.

Bethune's powerful personality, unbounded determination, religious faith, and shrewd business skills soon made the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute a phenomenal success. Within two years enrollment had increased to 250 students, mostly girls. Continued growth soon required a larger campus. In 1907 Bethune purchased a field used as a local dump for \$250 and began construction of the first building on the school's new campus, Faith Hall. At first, like most black schools of the time, the institute stressed religion and industrial training, the learning of trade skills for future employment. But as time went on the Daytona Institute began to devote more attention to its high school programs and to encouraging ambitious students to attend college.

Bethune saw her school as the center of the local black community, with its primary goal being the promotion of the overall welfare of this constituency. A variety of programs to achieve this mission included a day and night school, a series of local mission schools run by her students in the turpentine camps surrounding the town, and Sunday afternoon community meetings that brought black and white visitors to campus on equal footing.

In 1911 Bethune established a hospital alongside the school after her students were refused service in Daytona Beach's whites-only hospital. This school-maintained black hospital grew from two to 20 beds until taken over by the city in 1927. Championing the need for greater educational, social, and political opportunities for blacks, she defied the local Ku Klux Klan by leading a successful black voter registration drive in 1920, particularly among women who had just been granted the vote by constitutional amendment. Her guiding motto was "be calm, be steadfast, be courageous."

Strong support by the local black community and influential whites, including James M. Gamble of Procter & Gamble and Thomas H. White of the White Sewing Machine Company, spurred the school's expansion. By 1923 the Daytona Institute had 300 girls enrolled and a 25-member faculty and staff on its eight-building, 20-acre

campus. Though most were elementary students, the high school and teacher-training programs were growing.

Also in 1923 Bethune transformed her school into a college whose primary purpose was the training of future teachers. With the sponsorship of the Board of Education for Negroes of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Daytona Institute was merged with the Cookman Institute, a Jacksonville, Florida, men's college. The new coeducational school doubled its enrollment to 600 and was officially renamed Bethune-Cookman College in 1929. Three years later it received junior college accreditation. The high school department was discontinued in 1936, and the first graduates of its four-year teacher education program received their degrees in 1943.

As college president, Bethune traveled throughout the United States soliciting funds for her school, often using her talent as singer and orator to charm potential donors. At the same time Bethune began her rise to national prominence through her work in organizing the black women's club movement. From 1917 to 1924 she was president of the Florida Federation of Colored Women. In 1920 she founded and served as president of a regional association that became the Southeastern Federation of Colored Women. Four years later she became president of the 10,000-member National Association of Colored Women (NACW), at that time thought to be the highest position a black women could achieve.

Bethune's tenure was marked by her ceaseless attempts to project a positive image of black women. She traveled widely making countless speeches, defending the dignity of black women by refusing to answer to "Mary," "Auntie," or any other common derogatory remarks of the era. A large woman, she developed a flair for dress characterized by capes, velvet dresses, jewelry, and a cane she carried for "swank." At the organizational level, she affiliated the NACW with the white-run National Council of Women, revised its constitution, raised enough money to establish its first permanent headquarters in Washington, D.C., and promoted better communication between members.

Still, Bethune felt the NACW was too locally oriented to present an effective national voice for black women. So in 1935 she created the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) by uniting the major national black women's associations. As NCNW president from its founding until 1949, Bethune focused the organization's activities on fighting segregation and discrimination toward black women, on cultivating better international relations, and on national liberal causes. She established national headquarters in Washington, D.C., chapters in major cities, employed a full-time staff, and published the *African American Women's Journal*.

In addition, Bethune found time to serve as president of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools, vice-president of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and president of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. She also worked with the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, the National Urban League, and the NAACP, which presented her with its Spingarn Medal for distinguished achievement in 1935.

Bethune had met Eleanor Roosevelt through her club work. The president's wife used her influence to have Bethune appointed to the National Advisory Committee of the National Youth Administration (NYA) in 1935, a New Deal agency established to help young people find employment during the Depression. The 35 advisory committee members were civic and professional leaders who formulated nationwide NYA policy.

Bethune also served as director of the NYA's Division of Negro Affairs from its creation in 1935 until it was terminated in 1943. Here, she forcefully advocated a program of equitable representation of blacks in all levels (national, state, and local) of the NYA's administration. Though pragmatically accepting segregation as an unfortunate reality, she nevertheless insisted upon equal, albeit often separate, consideration of blacks in all agency activities and programs. She continually pressed for greater opportunities for black youths to learn skilled trades, and for their later employment in defense industries during World War II.

The college president was becoming a national leader for black interests. In August 1936 she brought together in her home blacks holding various positions in the Roosevelt administration to plan strategy to secure a better life for African Americans under the New Deal. Weekly meetings of this "black cabinet" at Bethune's house supported the emerging drive for civil rights, promoted nondiscrimination in government facilities, sought greater opportunities for blacks in government jobs, and urged black support of the New Deal, President Roosevelt's historic program that effectively ended the Depression.

Drawing upon her growing power and influence, Bethune gained NYA support for two national conferences in 1937 and 1939 that spotlighted the plight of blacks throughout the nation. Personally bringing the conference findings to President Roosevelt, she urged him to advance civil rights. Bethune also used her personal friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt to advance the black cause.

Working outside government, Bethune promoted civil rights reforms by marching and picketing Washington, D.C., businesses that refused to hire blacks. She spoke and demonstrated to gain rights for black sharecroppers, and became a regular speaker for the NAACP and other civil rights organizations. She also supported drives to free the Scottsboro Boys--nine young black men who were accused of raping two white women on a freight train and were tried in Scottsboro, Alabama, in 1931. The men were hastily convicted although the case went on for 20 years, even after one of the plaintiffs recanted her story and medical evidence could not prove that rape was committed.

Ill health forced Bethune to give up the presidency of Bethune-Cookman College in 1942, though she remained president emeritus until her death. When the NYA disbanded in 1943, she left government service, but served as special representative of the U.S. State Department at the 1945 San Francisco Conference that established the United Nations. She also acted as special assistant to the secretary of war for selection of candidates for the Women's Army Corps (WAC) that same year. She resigned as NCNW president in 1949, retiring to her home in Daytona Beach which she later deeded to the Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation in 1953 to promote research, interracial activity, and the sponsorship of wider educational opportunities.

Until her death from a heart attack in 1955, Bethune remained the most influential black woman in the United States, continuing her struggle for equal rights. She received many national and international honors for her work, and in 1952 traveled to Liberia as U.S. representative to the inauguration of that African country's president.

Knowing death was imminent, Bethune wrote "My Last Will and Testament" for *Ebony* magazine, laying out the principles by which she had led her life. To future generations she stressed her legacy of love for others, hope for the future, a thirst for education, respect for the uses of power, faith in God, belief in racial dignity, the challenge of developing confidence in blacks and black institutions, a desire to live harmoniously with all races, and everyone's responsibility to the young.

Bethune's remarkable leadership skills and dynamic oratory brought the problems of African-Americans to national attention. Though usually conciliatory rather than confrontational on the issue of racial equality, Bethune persisted in seeking for all blacks, especially women, educational and economic opportunity. Through her work with national women's clubs and in the federal government, she tirelessly advocated the advancement of the African-Americans. After death, Bethune was buried on the Bethune-Cookman campus. A statue commemorating her leadership was later dedicated in Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C.--the first statue in honor of any woman or any black in a public park in the nation's capital.

Source

"Mary McLeod Bethune." *Contemporary Black Biography*, Volume 4. Gale Research, 1993. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Michigan: Thomson Gale. 2005. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/BioRC>

The Papers of Mary McLeod Bethune, 1923-1948

Box	Folder	Description	Dates
Correspondence			
1	1	Adams, John Henry-Arrington, Minnie	1929-1936
1	2	Baggett, B.B.-Bennett, Ruth L.	1929-1935
1	3	Bethune, Mary McLeod	1927
1	4	Birthday Greeting to Mary McLeod Bethune-Blanton, J.E.	1927-1931
1	5	Boardman, Mrs. W. E.-Burgess, John P.	1929-1936
1	6	Camphor, Mrs. A.P.-Curtis, S.W.	1928-1936
1	7	Danley, S.B. Jr.-Duncan, Dr. C. Frederick	1929-1935
1	8	Egbert and Mayme-Evans, Rev. and Mrs. J.R.	1931-1936
1	9	Feger, Hattie V.-Ford, John E.	1930-1936
1	10	Gardiner, Evelyn C.-Gray, Walter G.	1928-1936
1	11	Hairston, Mrs. W.E.-High, Stanley	1930-1935
1	12	Hill, Dr. P.W.-Hutto, A.E.	1930-1936
1	13	Jackson, A.L.-Josey, T.W.	1930-1935
1	14	Lane, Mrs. James F.-Lynon, Robert	1930-1936
1	15	McAllister, Reuben H.-McLeon, E.C.	1930-1936
2	1	Mallison, Dallas-Monlrig, John W. Jr.	1930-1935
2	2	Mousserone, Henrietta C.-Murray, Richard	1930-1931
2	3	Nelson, William Stuart-Prince, William D.	1929-1936
2	4	Rhodes, J.R.-Ruffin, P.	1930-1936
2	5	Sanders, William W.-Slowe, Lucy D.	1930-1935
2	6	Smith, Angeline-Sumner, Mary B.	1903-1935
2	7	Thomas, Henry Hartley-Vanderhorst, B.C.	1929-1935
2	8	Walcott, Mrs. B.B.-Willman, Dr. and Mrs. C.R.	1930-1936
2	9	Williams, C.S.-Wright, Rev. John Clarence	1930-1935
2	10	Young, P.B.	June 21, 1935

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Box	Folder	Description	Dates
Journals			
2	11	Travel Journal: National Medical Association European Tour	May -August 1927
2	12	Travel Journal, enscribed by A.W. Loundon	May 27, 1927
Speeches/ Addresses			
2	13	“By Mary McLeod Bethune” (article)	January 1, 1931
		“This packet includes...”	August 1930
		“The Customs of Cuba as I Found Them”	n.d.
		“My First Interview” (Diario de la Marina)	September 28, 1930
		"We the undersigned women of the negro race..."	n.d.
		“Notes for the Address before the Women's Club”	n.d.
		“Free Us Now, Not After the War-White”	n.d.
		The Thomas Jefferson Award Responses	1942
		“Selected Sayings by Mary McLeod Bethune”	n.d.
		“A Philosophy of Education for Negro Girls”	n.d.
		“The Negro Women in American Life”	n.d.
2	14	“The High Cost of Keeping the Negro Inferior”	n.d.
		“The National Association of Colored Women”	n.d.
		“Christian Education and the Growth of a Race”	n.d.
		“A Century of Progress of Negro Women” (Address delivered before The Chicago Women’s Federation)	June 30, 1933
		“Suggestive Notes on the Negro Youth's Outlook on Education”	n.d.
		“What Should be the Future of Negro Education?”	n.d.

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Box	Folder	Description	Dates
2	15	“My chairman, may I stand as a voice...”	n.d.
		“The Educational Values of the College-Bred”	May 29, 1934
		“The Power of Faith” (Informal Chapel Talk, Vassar College, New York)	October 21, 1934
		“Interracial Goodwill Throughout the World”	November 14, 1934
		“Breaking the Bars to Brotherhood”	n.d.
		Response to Being Named 21st Spingarn Medalist	June 28, 1933
		“What Will You Do With Your Life?”	n.d.
		"In Search of an Author"	n.d.
		“What Causes Chiefly Impede Progress in Interracial Cooperation and Can We Hope to Make More Rapid Progress During the Next Ten Years?”	n.d.
2	16	President’s Address to the 15th Biennial Convention of the National Association of Colored Women (Oakland, CA)	August 2, 1926
		“Not to be Ministered Unto, But to Minister”	May 15, 1930
		“A Century of Progress of Negro Women”	n.d.
		Address to Graduating Class (Delray County Training School, Delray Beach, Florida)	February 19, 1931
2	17	“Interracial Cooperation in Florida”	n.d.
		“To You I Fling the Torch”	n.d.
		Race Relations	n.d.
		“Present Day Task for Women in the Field of Business”	n.d.
		“The Responsibility of the Church-Related College for the Education of American Youth”	n.d.
		“My chairman, may I express...”	n.d.
		“The Educational Values of the College-Bred”	n.d.

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Box	Folder	Description	Dates
2	18	“Closed Doors”	n.d.
		“Some Trends in Higher Education”	n.d.
2	19	“The Progress of the Negro in the Cultural Arts-Music-Art-Literature”	n.d.
		“Appeal to the Editors and Governors of Southern States”	n.d.
		“Suggestions on: What Christian education means to the youth of the negro race and through them to the welfare of the nation”	n.d.
		"Mary McLeod Bethune" p. 257-259	n.d.
Ephemera and Clippings			
3	1	National Medical Association European Tours Itinerary	1927
3	2	Plans for Testimonial Dinner to Honor 21st Spingarn Medalist	1930-1931
3	3	Menus (from travels abroad)	1927
3	4	Souvenirs (hotel stickers, brochures)	1927-1928
3	5	Photos (from travels abroad)	n.d.
3	6	Photo of Mary McLeod Bethune; Commemorative Postage Stamp; Unidentified Photo	n.d.
3	7	Event Programs and Booklets	1923-1927, n.d.
3	8	Newspaper Clippings re. Mary McLeod Bethune	1926-1937
3	9	Newspaper Clippings re. Bethune-Cookman College	1927-1929
3	10	Ballot (National Council of Women); Bulletins	1925, 1930
3	11	Newspaper Clippings	1929-1962

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Box	Folder	Description	Dates
		Press Releases/ Writings	
3	12	“In the Midst of the Strikes Again”	October 2, 1928
		“Mrs. Bethune Called to Visit West Palm Beach by American Red Cross Head to Further Work Out Plans for Relief and Rehabilitation Among Negroes in Storm Area”	October 8, 1928
		“Work of Rehabilitation Among Negroes in Florida Storm Area Goes Forward”	October 22, 1928
		“Florida to Honor Dr. Bethune as 21st Spingarn Medalist”	February 14, 1935
		“Spingarn Medal to Dr. Bethune for 1935”	1935
		“Short Resume of the Life of Mary McLeod Bethune”	March 1935
		“The Works Program” (National Youth Administration)	July 1, 1936
		“Plans Under Way for Testimonial Dinner Honoring Twenty-First Spingarn Medalist”	n.d.
		“Effect of Intense Hurricane Storm on Florida’s Negro People”	n.d.
3	13	“As a Woman Thinketh” (Play); “Mary Bethune” (Poem)	n.d.
3	14	Travelogues (Trip to California, etc.)	July 25, 1926
3	15	Travel Reports Written by Dr. D.M. Miller	1927
3	16	“Negro Participation in Worth While Projects”	n.d.
		“I Would Rather See a Sermon than Hear One”	1942
		“Taking Up the Question of Negro Migration”	n.d.
3	17	Statement of Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune	June 23, 1945
3	18	Draft Statement	n.d.