



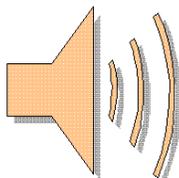
Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune The "Virtual Experience" Exhibit



Portrait of Mrs. Bethune from the 1930s. Photographer or Studio Unknown..

The Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune Virtual Exhibit highlights some of the significant achievements in her life of leadership and service. It spotlights some of her powerful connections made in the universe that are still having a lasting impact today.

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Transcript](#)



To hear a segment of the 1955 Mary McLeod Bethune Brotherhood Luncheon Speech, click the speaker icon. To hear the entire presentation speech given by Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune please go to the section on the website listed under multi-media presentations.

Poem Dedication - Written by: Melissa N. Green

Loved

Because she was born with her eyes wide opened, they said she'll know things before they happen. That was many decades ago, on the 10th day of July in the age of 1875. An intrepid black rose, grew out of the garden of Mayesville, South Carolina. A brilliant masterpiece, with an incandescent purpose, that ignited the soul of anyone who acquainted her.

Her spirit was lucid, flowing like consecrated water in a transparent universe. An intellect enthroned amongst the angels, like the arc of a rainbow, she had a viewpoint that could see past fields and fields of cotton and poverty. Fully aware of the 1896 Supreme Court Decision of Plessy vs. Ferguson, she battled segregation, with a fervor, of serious determination.

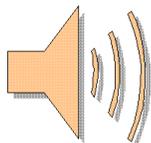
In Florida, she christened hope and planted the seeds of knowledge, in the eager minds of 5 young students. The Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro girls catapulted Bethune's mission to end segregation with education. She said to Rockefeller "can't you see it? Can't you see it? Can't you see my school, right there?" Eventually, with collective work and responsibility, the Bethune-Cookman University began to build the legacy and tradition through Faith Hall and the other corridors of intelligence.

1318 Vermont Avenue NW cultivated the presence of Negro women on Capitol Hill. Faith, Leadership, Culture were the virtues that impressed figures and entities like Roosevelt, Nancy Astor, Thomas White, Henry J. Kaiser, James Gamble, Booker T. Washington, Carter G. Woodson, the Pope and the NAACP. Mary McLeod Bethune was the first president of the National Council of Negro Women. Can you imagine what it must have been like, to sit around the table in the ubiquity of her existence? What might you hear if you were there?

Would you hear the relentless demand for sisters to be accepted with urgency in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps? Would you hear the persistent patriotism for the construction of the S. S. Harriet Tubman? Would you hear them speak about the level of support and togetherness from the Negro League Baseball players? Would you hear them talking about how their picket signs would read in protest to unfair labor practices and voting rights. Mary McLeod Bethune's unprecedented vision to establish a strong political presence for African American women, and uplift mutual equality for all of mankind, had a great and lasting legislative impact. An impact that influenced Roy Wilkins, John Lewis, Dorothy Irene Height, Bayard Rustin, A. Phillip Randolph, Whitney Young & Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

...and the March on Washington

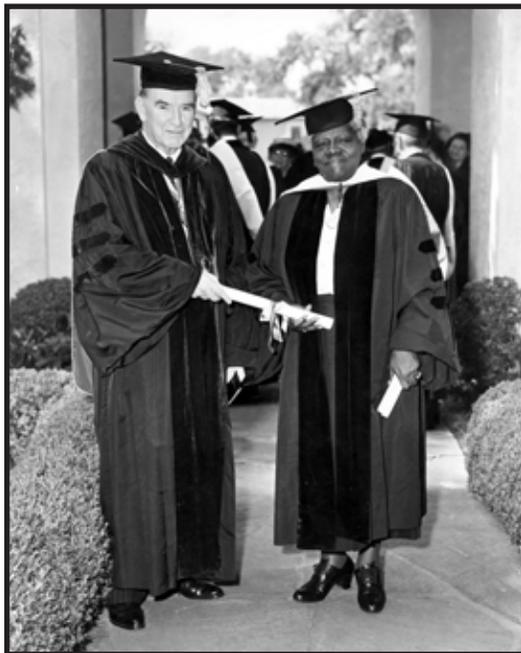
We rise today in her honor... We rise today in her honor... Mary McLeod Bethune, we thank you!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!!!



Poem Audio Version as read by author Melissa Green—
Click the speaker icon.

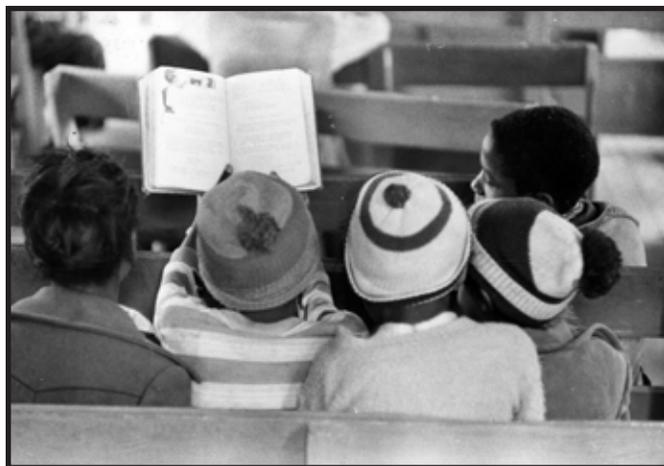
Education

Invest in the human soul. Who knows, it might be a diamond in the rough. —Mary McLeod Bethune



Mary McLeod Bethune receiving an honorary degree from Duke University in North Carolina. Credit: Lyman B. Huntington, Winter Park, Florida.

It was in the year of 1939 that Mrs. Bethune became the director of the Division of Negro Affairs for the National Youth Administration. Education has always been very important to Mrs. Bethune. In her earlier years of education she attended seminary school. After seminary school she attended the Dwight L. Moody's Institute for Home and Foreign Missions in Chicago (The Moody Bible Institute). Miss McLeod's goal for attending the institute was to become a missionary in Africa. This pursuit to be a missionary was a dream deferred because she was informed that she could not be a missionary in Africa due to the color of her skin. She later opened up the The Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls. The school's enrollment began to grow through the years, and was later renamed Bethune-Cookman College (and since 2007 has been Bethune-Cookman University), a co-ed institution.



Children sharing a book in a one room school in a church near Ft. Adams, Mississippi. Credit: Bertrand Miles, New York

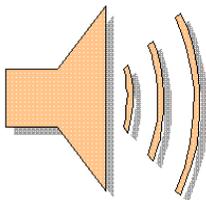
Women

Next to God we are indebted to women, first for life itself, and then for making it worth living. —Mary McLeod Bethune



Mrs. Bethune pinning a corsage on Eleanor Roosevelt. Photographer or Studio unknown.

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Click the speaker icon to Listen to a radio interview by Eleanor Roosevelt as Mrs. Bethune talks about being a dreamer and fulfilling her dreams to see education manifest profoundly.



Mrs. Bethune, wearing the Haitian Medal of Honor and Merit, with Dorothy Ferebee, the second president of the NCNW, in 1949. Photographer or Studio unknown..



Mrs. Bethune and Dorothy Irene Height, who would become the fourth president of the NCNW, in the early 1940s. Photographer or Studio unknown.

Democracy and Americanism

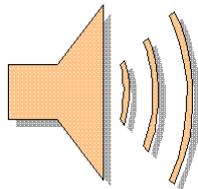
We live in a world which respects power above all things. Power, intelligently directed, can lead to more freedom. Unwisely directed, it can be a dreadful, destructive force. —Mary McLeod Bethune



Portrait of Mary McLeod Bethune. Photographer or Studio unknown.

Once known as one of the world's 50 illustrious women. Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune was admired by many, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

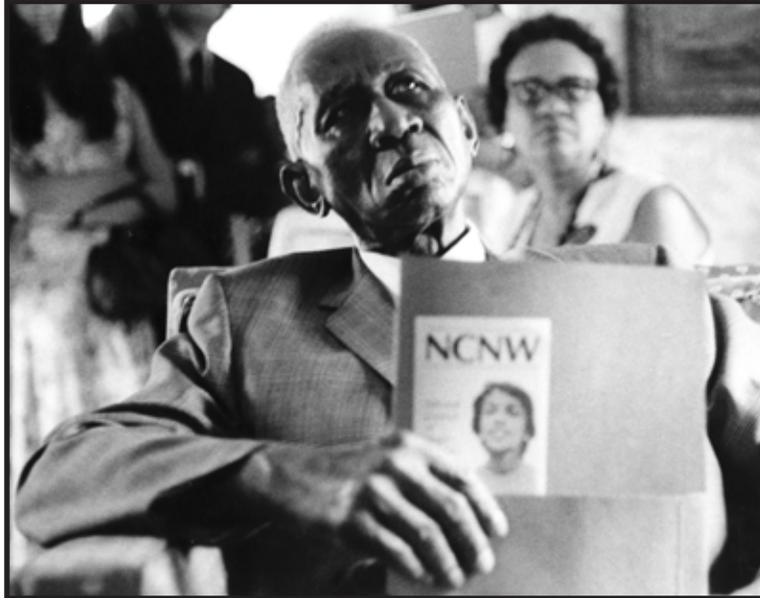
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Click the speaker icon to listen to the Mrs. Bethune's conversation with Mrs. Jean Beckwith regarding Women's Day Week and upholding the National Heritage of Democracy

Civil Rights

Faith is the first factor in a life devoted to service. Without it, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible. —Mary McLeod Bethune



An onlooker listens to a speaker at a reception in honor of Mrs. Bethune on September 24, 1970..Credit: Beuford Smith, New York

Mrs. Bethune was a fierce advocate for civil and human rights. In days past in Washington DC, Mrs. Bethune participated in the NNA's (New Negro Alliance) picket line against People's Drug Store (a large drugstore chain on the east coast). At the time, the chain had several stores in predominantly Black neighborhoods, but did not have as many workers who were Black. To learn more about this story, please read *Mary McLeod Bethune in Washington D.C.: Activism and Education in Logan Circle* (by Dr. Ida E. Jones).



Mrs. Bethune with W. E. B. DuBois (left) and Walter White (right) in San Francisco at the United Nations Conference on International Organization in 1945. Photographer or Studio unknown.

Race Relations

I leave you love, I leave you hope, I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another. I leave you respect for the use of power. I leave you faith. I leave you racial dignity —Mary McLeod Bethune



Women recruits during World War II. Credit: U. S. Navy Photo.

Internationalism

The whole world opened to me when I learned to read. --Mary McLeod Bethune



BUREAU OF PUBLIC RELATIONS, WARDEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

87 (Press Branch)

FIRST NEGRO NURSES LAND IN ENGLAND---Twenty-four of the first contingent of Negro nurses assigned to the European Theater of Operations. Front row, left to right: Second Lieutenants Alice Simpson, Atlanta, Georgia, Vernice Eizer, Portsmouth, Virginia, and Catherine L. Harris, Philadelphia, Pa.; Captain Mary L. Petty, Chicago, Ill., (Commanding), First Lieutenant Ida E. Smith, Oklahoma City, Okla., Second Lieutenants Dorcas Taylor, Omaha, Nebr., and Estelle Smith, Cincinnati, Ohio. Second row, left to right: Second Lieutenants Arlayne Hall, Los Angeles, Cal., Ruby Collins, Gastonia, N.C., Dorothy Guy, Newark, N.J., Doretha Madley, Cordele, Ga., Catherine Fandle, Galveston, Tex., and Lucille Seales, St. Louis, Missouri. Third row, left to right: Second Lieutenants Alice Summers, Greenville, S.C., Cassie Daniels, Valdosta, Ga., Julie James, Richmond, Va., Doris S. Heath, Cleburn, Tex., Gwendolyn Sykes, Goldsboro, N.C. and Melba Franklin, Sugartown, S.C. Fourth row, left to right: Second Lieutenants Sarah Johnson, Greensboro, N.C., Elizabeth L. Williams, Memphis, Tenn., Anna Collins, Portsmouth, Va., Margaret Lipscomb, Opelika, Ala. and Marion Ridgely, Washington, D.C. (U.S. Signal Corps Photo from Bureau of Public Relations). 8-21-44.

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World War II Activities

I'm very grateful to you. My daughters, those of you who are scattered over America and other parts of the world, I've been the dreamer, but oh how wonderfully you have interpreted my dreams. You are interpreters. —Mary McLeod Bethune

One of the missions of the NCNW was an incredible campaign uniquely named *We Serve America*. During World War II, Bethune's NCNW led several fund raising campaigns to show their patriotism and the power of Black presence in the war. In order to raise money the women of NCNW sold *We Serve America* buttons and sponsored events with the local Negro Baseball team the Homestead Grays. It was the money from these campaigns and donations that helped to raise two million dollars for the building of the ship *S. S. Harriet Tubman*. Still today, the heroic *S. S. Harriet Tubman* was the first ship named after a woman. To learn more about Mrs. Bethune's World War II activities, please see the lesson plan: "Its up and its good" Negro League Baseball.



African American recruits to the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps wearing gas masks during an inspection at Ft. Des Moines, Iowa on December 26, 1942. Credit: WAAC Official Photo.



Mrs. Bethune on reviewing stand with Col. R. J. Burt at MacDill Field, Florida, in 1942. Credit: Amsterdam News Library.



Group portrait of Company 6, 3rd Regiment of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) at the First WAC Training Center, Fort Des Moines, Iowa, on January 29, 1945. Credit: National Archives and Records Administration.



Representatives of Negro women in the Armed Forces standing with Mary McLeod Bethune at the 13th Annual Meeting of the National Council of Negro Women, in Washington, DC, on October 12, 1948. Left to right: Lt. Edith Devoe (USN), 1st Lt. Lucia Rapley (Army Nurses Corps), Mrs. Bethune, Yeoman 2nd Class Edna Young (USN); Major Harriet West (WAC). Photographer or Studio unknown.



Mrs. Bethune throws out the first pitch at a Negro League baseball game in 1945. Credit: Photo by Riley.

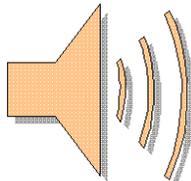
Organizations

If you are going somewhere, look like you're going. —Mary McLeod Bethune



Josephine Baker was a world-famous entertainer and served as an intelligence agent for the Allies during World War II in France. She was a strong supporter of Civil Rights and a supporter of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). In this photo she shakes hands with Vivian Carter Mason, third president of the NCNW, at the Council House in Washington, DC, in July 1951. Left to right: Harold Jackson, Josephine Baker, Jeanetta Welch Brown, and Vivian Carter Mason. Credit: Fred Harris.

[Click here for
Transcript](#)



Click the speaker icon to listen to renowned historian and author Dr. Ida E. Jones speak in reference to Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune's work in organizations and Logan Circle (Washington D.C.)

Transcript of Excerpt from Mary McLeod Bethune Speech, 1955

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NABWH_001_S15_SS5_F07_S1

Twentieth Anniversary Brother Luncheon honoring Mrs. Bethune.

Recording Date: 1955

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: May I thank you my friends. Madame Chairman, platform guests, ladies and gentlemen, my beloved daughters. This is a very moving moment for me. This is not the time for me to speak. This is the time for me to sit in great humility with my head bowed. My soul looking upward with a gratitude to a God who has made it possible for one like me to stand before an audience like this who come to pay homage to simple and ordinary human being who came from the depth of ignorance and poverty to a platform of service; service to mankind. It's moving.

There's a spiritual undergirding I feel now that would say to me be quiet, and let the tears of gratitude flow because you have been humble enough to permit a great God to take a life, reshape it and mold it and send it out. To give out sunshine and love and peace and brotherhood among all men regardless of their creed, their class, their color.

Transcript for Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary McLeod Bethune Interview

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NABWH_001_S15_S55_F98_S1 [Cropped]
Eleanor Roosevelt Interview with Mary McLeod Bethune
WSAI, Cincinnati
Recording Date: February 11, 1949

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: Our guest today has been described as one of the fifty greatest women in American history. She is Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, and her success story is one of the most thrilling I have ever heard. For it is a story of success against what seemed almost insurmountable difficulties.

Mrs. Bethune was born in the South, the daughter of slave parents. Her older brothers and sisters also were slaves, freed at last by Emancipation Proclamation. Somehow, the little girl, Mary, always had a great deal of energy and a thirst for knowledge. And when she had attained an education, she wanted to share it with others for as she once said, "The drums of Africa beat in my soul and they will never be still until every Negro boy and girl in America has a chance to learn and to grow."

Mary Bethune opened her first school in Daytona Beach, Florida, with a total capital of one dollar and fifty cents. They used charred--charred splinter--splinters of burned logs for pencils, and mashed elderberries for ink. Today, that school is the Bethune-Cookman Junior College and its founder is a noted educator, lecturer, and executive.

In 1937, she founded the National Council of Negro Women, and it is about that we wish to question her today. Tell us about the Council, won't you, Mrs. Bethune?

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. I am most grateful to you and your daughter, Anna, for having me as your guest on this program. More particularly I thank you for permitting me to be with you today for I am here representing the National Council of Negro Women and, as you know, on tomorrow, Lincoln's Birthday, we are launching our first nationwide interracial membership enlistment. For the first time, we are inviting women who believe in the fundamental spirit of democracy to join us in our fight for human and civil rights.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: You tell me that you wish to increase the Council's membership this year by a hundred thousand, and that you'd like to reach the million-membership mark. Why are you so anxious to get all these new members at this time?

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: In these times, Mrs. Roosevelt, we feel that in order to achieve the goal of civil and human rights for all, it is necessary for women of all races and creeds to know and understand each other. The National Council of Negro Women serves now as a clearinghouse for the women of our major organizations. But this is not enough. We need the strength of all women who believe as we believe and they need us, for none of us can do much alone.

There are masses of women without organizational affiliation who are waiting for guidance and leadership in order that they, too, may participate in the great struggle for human rights and interracial understanding to which you have already made such a great contribution. These women must be instructed in the proper use of the ballot, using it rightly as a weapon for freedom and economic security.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: Well, that, of course, is most necessary. But I understand you've been told that you ought to take a rest. It doesn't sound as though you are going to. Although the organization is called the National Council of Negro Women, it is really interracial isn't it? Could you say a few words about this, Mrs. Bethune, too?

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: It is remarkable, Mrs. Roosevelt, how during the past fifteen years, the doors of interracial opportunity have opened to us. In every phase of the work of common interest to all women, we are rapidly being affiliated with national and international organizations. And, of course, in the national affairs of our own government we participate very fully, gaining knowledge which enables us to inform and assist all of our women.

In this effort, which begins tomorrow, we have as our Honorary Co-Chairman and Interracial Team, Mrs. Harper Sibley, President of the United Council of Church Women and Miss Marian Anderson our great contralto. We have many distinguished life members; you were, of course, our first one and we are fortunate in having among others Madame Pandit of India,

Honorable Helen Gahagan Douglas, Mrs. Agnes Miles of The Post in Washington. Mrs. Estelle Tannenbaum, one of the great Jewish leaders, Mrs. Francis Biddle, Madame Laura Dreyfus-Barney, and others.

We now seek to create, or the creation of still greater areas of cooperation between the women of all the races of mankind for the preservation of universal peace and justice.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: Thank you, Mary McLeod Bethune. None of us certainly can say that as yet we have perfect democracy, nor even the democracy that Abraham Lincoln and others of our great men envisioned. But I for one am proud that our country could produce a Mrs. Bethune. Your achievements are a tribute to our nation even more a tribute to your own individual spirit and effort.

Transcript for *Cherchez la Femme* Radio Show

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NABWH_001_S15_S55_F99_S1 [Cropped]
"Cherchez la Femme" - 'Look for the Woman'
Jean Beckwith Interview with Mary McLeod Bethune
WOOK - Washington, DC
Recording Date: November 1947

JEAN BECKWITH: As many of you already know, this is a seriously important week to all Americans, and today is a headline day in that week. This is Woman's Day and Rededication Week. The week for the Freedom Train to come to Washington and, also, Thanksgiving week.

So what does that mean? That American women are rededicating themselves today to uphold our national heritage of democracy, and giving thanks for that same heritage in activities both national and international. Now all that is very high sounding, but in just a few minutes, we're going to bring you a very concrete example of a woman and an organization embodying all those ideas. The woman: Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune.

Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, listed by Ida Tarbell as one of America's fifty most illustrious women, and recipient of many honorary degrees, Mrs. Bethune has won the respect of everyone including the President of the United States. Leadership has been continuous for Mrs. Bethune, from the time she was born—fifteenth of her parent's seventeen children, and head of the family—to her present position as Founder and Head of the National Council of Negro Women, Mary McLeod Bethune has brought down to the level of reality, or should we say brought up to the level of reality, the ideals of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Civil liberties, education, health, employment, for the women of her race in an ever increasing measure.

Before we continue with more about Rededication Week and Mrs. Bethune, I am very proud to present Mr. Richard Eaton, owner of W-O-O-K and well-known news commentator, to introduce his friend, Mrs. Bethune.

RICHARD EATON: Thank you Jean. I know [unclear] general [unclear] but however, I do feel very proud at this particular moment to be able to greet, for the first time, on this Woman's Day of this memorable week one of the greatest living Americans. Not only one of the fifty illustrious women, as Ida Tarbell said, but I would say one of the greatest living Americans, perhaps the fifty living Americans today.

She can only be compared to George Washington Carver. And the contributions that she has personally made, the success of better understanding throughout this nation of the problems of each of the races which compose it. And so, Mrs. Bethune, may I greet you and tell you how greatly honored we are to have you with us on this symbolic day.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Thank you Mr. Eaton. I humbly accept this greeting. I am more happy than I can express to you to be here with you at W-O-O-K to be able to bring our listeners a little glimpse of what Negro women are trying to accomplish for their race and all women. We like to think of our organization—the National Council of Negro Women—as being a council to bring all women closer together. To tear down limitations, and to [unclear] the heritage of all Americans.

It has not been easy taking the strides we have for the last twelve and more years. I like to think back to nineteen hundred four and my little four-room school house in Daytona Beach, Florida. With four little girls starting a work there, and which is now a million-dollar Bethune-Cookman College. This was the inspiration that made me realize it could be done.

I have always been a dreamer. Every one of these projects started as a dream. It was necessary to make others see that these dreams can come true if we can get all Negro women behind us. We would like to see a hundred thousand new members of the National Council of Negro Women. A mighty force to bring the cultured, educated viewpoint about a young generation down to earth. To improve the conditions of the slums where a ray of light of knowledge is so badly needed.

JEAN BECKWITH: Well it certainly is, Mrs. Bethune. And I think that right at this point would be a good time to bring in one of our little songs on big subjects, transcribed.

[Music by Male Voices]

That's just human nature
So why should I hate ya'
For being as human as I
We'll get as we give
If we live and let live
And we'll both get along if we try
I'm proud to be me
But I also see
You're just as proud to be you
It's true
You're just as proud to be you

That's just human nature
So why should I hate ya'
For being as human as I
We'll get as we give
If we live and let live
And we'll both get along if we try
I'm proud to be me
But I also see
You're just as proud to be you
It's true
You're just as proud to be you

JEAN BECKWITH: Well thank you very much. That certainly was an appropriate little song just at this point. Mrs. Bethune, I feel that I have caught just a little glimpse of what you're working for and I'm sure our listeners have, too.

My visit to your Council House recently and all the distinguished colored women I meet there was an experience I wish everyone could have. You're, indeed, fortunate to have such a beautiful building at 1318 Vermont Avenue and I'm sure that every, uh, colored woman in the United States and every other woman would like to see it.

But I also know of all the work and sacrifice this has entailed. I understand that it is now debt-free. I am sure that it will be a very sound way to entertain some of the distinguished Americans whom you have visited.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: You're very right Miss Beckwith. We hope to arouse everyone to participate in the campaign to strengthen freedom, in Rededication Week and all year round. The Freedom Train is a fine thing, and we are all behind it. But we must not forget all there is to be done at home.

JEAN BECKWITH: Yes, there is a great deal to be—to be done at home among all the American people. And now Mrs. Bethune, I wonder if you would like to read for us the, uh, little—the words which have become a keynote for this particular day, which is Woman's Day. And this is called, I believe the, Freedom Pledge. Won't you read it Mrs. Bethune?

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Oh I shall be happy to do so. "I am an American. A free American. Free to speak without fear. Free to worship God in my own way. Free to stand for what I think right. Free to oppose what I believe wrong. Free to choose those who govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind."

JEAN BECKWITH: Well it's very difficult, isn't it, to hope for freedom for ourselves and not to hope for freedom for other countries, too. And I believe that that is the reason behind the Freedom Train.

We want to invite all of our listeners to go and see the train while it is in town this week, and make your contributions for people overseas. And, by the way Mrs. Bethune, from some of the press releases a week ago, I should say that there was absolutely no inertia among this National Council of Negro Women. The Twelfth Annual Convention of the National Council here in

Washington met in the [unclear] Departmental auditorium about a week ago from the ninth to the fifteenth, I believe; wasn't it Mrs. Bethune?

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Yes it was. It was a magnificent demonstration of the unity that can be accomplished. There were six hundred delegates from thirty-one states, Liberia, South Africa, and India, attending a full week of meetings to plan ways to bring out our Ten-Point Program.

JEAN BECKWITH: Well that certainly sounds very interesting. But before we continue Mrs. Bethune, I understand that the National Council of Negro Women is composed of many smaller organizations. About how many Mrs. Bethune?

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: We have about, uh--well there are thirty-one metropolitan councils, and there are twenty-four national organizations, and hundreds of life members that have come in to vie with us in carrying the work down to the grass roots of the women in the communities where they live.

JEAN BECKWITH: Oh that is very splendid. And now about that Ten-Point Program, it sounds very interesting. And just what does that cover?

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: We thought very well of the report that came out from the President's Committee on Civil Rights. The endorsement that we brought out covered all of those points. Particularly do we stress restrictions through elections; discriminations and segregation in employment, education, and military regulation; in housing; anti-lynching legislation; and all social [unclear].

JEAN BECKWITH: Well that's a very all-inclusive program. I believe there is something in this Ten-Point Program, from which we have strayed a little bit, about study of the United Nations, which is very much in keeping with the visit of the Freedom Train to Washington, isn't there?

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Well yes, we have, uh--have kept in very close touch with the United Nations. We have one of our representatives who is to appear there two or three times a week, or as often as possible, so that we can get to the ideas of what is being done. And then we pass it on through to our metropolitan councils that keep our national head down to the grass roots of the women in the rural areas so that they might get an idea of what is being done in this particular field.

JEAN BECKWITH: Well it really filters right on down, doesn't it?

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Yes.

JEAN BECKWITH: And there is this--and while we're on this, uh, Freedom Train idea, I understand that in the Ten-Point Program there is also study of the Food Conservation Program.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Oh yes, we, we are greatly interested in that. Through our Telefact, one of our periodicals, we sent out to hundreds of thousands of women a statement asking them to stand by the, uh, request that the President of the United States made. And also by the work--the program that Mr.--the Chairman, you know, of the Food Committee. What is his name?

JEAN BECKWITH: Mr. Luckman.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Mr. Luckman's program.

JEAN BECKWITH: Yes.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: And, uh, we received a letter from Mr. Luckman saying to us that it had reached so many points and they're beginning to get to bring in such results that he was very anxious that every national organization would do the things that we were doing--bringing it down to the smallest woman, in the smallest area that she might know how she could make her little personal contribution.

JEAN BECKWITH: Well that it's the small contributions that really add up, isn't it Mrs. Bethune? And, uh, is there any mention in this Ten-Points of benefits to the Social Security Act? I thought of that in relation with what you said because there are certain—uh, there have been, rather, certain occupations, which we were not previously covered.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Yes, it is proposed to extend coverage to domestic and agricultural workers as well, and some other occupations not previously covered. There was also discussion of public health, conservation, and youth conservation, in the discussions that we brought up during the week.

JEAN BECKWITH: Yes, well it seems to me that if we could conserve youth, and the health, we would solve many of our problems. That is a very courageous program indeed Mrs. Bethune.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: We have to be courageous Miss Beckwith. There is so much to be done. Democracy has a long way to go yet. The problem of democracy is interpretation as much as enactment and that is our major concern at this time.

JEAN BECKWITH: And a very important one, too. Uh, I understand from the different press releases, and also from some very good photographs that I was able to see, that you had such important speakers at your convention as Representative Helen Gahagan Douglas, and Mrs. Jane Hamilton McCauley, so that both political parties were represented.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: Yes, you know, we're very nonpartisan.

JEAN BECKWITH: [Chuckle]

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: And we try to give a chance to the women to think on whatever area they might like to think.

JEAN BECKWITH: Yes.

MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE: We try to get all sides of the picture because freedom is everybody's job. Because the world today, divided by a struggle of ideas on the one hand, devotion to individual liberty on the other, adherence to the all-powerful state. We have had a chance to see how each of these works. They fight for their ideas, and then why isn't it just as important that we fight for ours?

JEAN BECKWITH: That's a very, very, good point Mrs. Bethune. That is the difficulty. We do not fully realize that we must work at keeping those ideas. That it doesn't pay to take them for granted. And judging from what you've told us here today, the members of the National Council of Negro Women certainly aren't taking them for granted. They have really set themselves a task for the coming year—a goal of a hundred thousand new members, and action on their Ten-Point Program. Now we at W-O-O-K wish you every success. Thank you so much for being with us Mrs. Bethune. And now this is Jean Beckwith saying goodbye and remember, *Cherchez la femme*.

Transcript for Dr. Ida E. Jones Interview

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The Legacy of Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune: Past, Present, Future

Interviewer: Melissa Green – Teacher Ranger Teacher

Interviewee: Author/Historian: Dr. Ida E Jones – Assistant Curator of Manuscripts at Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

INTERVIEWER MELISSA GREEN: Hello everyone my name is Melissa Green and I am excited today to have in the studio distinguished author and assistant curator of manuscripts at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center on the Howard University Campus, Dr. Ida E. Jones. Welcome Dr. Jones.

DR. IDA E. JONES: Good afternoon Melissa. Thank you for having me.

MELISSA GREEN: Absolutely! What an honor to have you. Recently, you have crafted an incredible text capturing the indefatigable work of luminary Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune. Can you please give us a brief overview of the book?

DR. IDA E. JONES: Yes! Thank you so much. The book is a fantastic work, as you say, according to those who have read it, and the intentions were to capture Mrs. Bethune as a Washington resident from 1943 to 1949. When she principally resided at 1318 Vermont Avenue. That's a very unique address which is still very much a viable place for Mrs. Bethune's history, and the National Council of Negro Women's history, as it is now a National Park Service site. So the book was to document her life as a resident, but also to give homage to those individuals living out her legacy daily as the National Park Service Rangers and staff maintain and facilitate visitors at the house.

MELISSA GREEN: Excellent! Excellent! I want to also talk about one of the chapters in your book, more specifically chapter two "Becoming a Washington Resident." I want you to please if you could highlight some of the notable achievements and appointments Mrs. Bethune held, and can you also speak in reference to how she showcased Negro Women back during that time with NCNW?

DR. IDA E. JONES: That's a lot of a question--a very loaded question, but a very good question. In part of my effort to look at Mrs. Bethune's life I think my contemporaries, as well as people who have children, and people who have, you know--a little more older, don't really know who she is. She died in 1955, so we don't really know Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune. We see an image with her, kind of, framed in gray hair, and we understand about Bethune-Cookman University, and a little bit about NCNW. But, in doing this research I realize the breadth--I'm just wading into the breadth of who she was.

So, in chapter two, what I sought to put together when I say "Becoming a Washington Resident," was this native South Carolinian who had lived in New York, who had worked in Florida, who had worked in Georgia, who had gone to school in Illinois, looking at her coming to Washington during the 1930s in the New Deal Administration. And because of her relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt, who was then the wife of Senator--no Governor, FDR--when they eventually became president and first lady that relationship continued to blossom. And that's what brought her, basically, to Washington, DC, was the New Deal and the National Youth Administration in 1936. So her work with that is where she, kind of, waded in the pool that was Washington, DC.

When the funding for the NYA ends in 1943 she was still desirous of living in Washington, on the principal part of advocating for women and children, Negro women and children, and education. So, by 1935 she founds NCNW--it's incorporated in 1936 here in Washington, DC. She is working for the federal government. She's the first African American woman to hold a government appointed position in a bureau. And then she now decides to bloom and blossom the NCNW. So, between 1943 and 1949 she's going to reside at the 1318 Vermont Avenue. She's going to create a thing called the honor roll, which she will now acknowledge seventy-one women, domestic, foreign-born, white, Negro, educators, entertainers--I mean a plethora of individuals, for their service to humanity.

And at that same time, she's going to launch the National Black Women's Archives, we call it now, but it would have been the Negro Women's Archives, with the help of Sue Bailey Thurman. And so--and then also at the same time--another strand of that braid would be her efforts at publishing. There was the *Telefact*, which was an internal membership newsletter, then the *African American Women's Journal*, which was a larger publication for the membership and the general population. So she's creating an archives, she's building her school, she's building the organization, she's celebrating other women, she's bringing in foreign

dignitaries--so she was really cooking on so many different pilots on the stove that it was amazing. Because she understood the depth of what she built then would project its height in the future.

MELISSA GREEN: Why do you think she was so determined to do everything that she did in her time frame, and in addition to that, why do you think she also thought it was necessary to take her efforts, her journey, outside of the United States, and connect with other individuals internationally? Why was that so important to her?

DR. IDA E. JONES: Somewhere in the book--as I was trying to flip to the page quietly--talks about when she says, "I know when I speak, I speak on behalf of the other eleven million brown faces domestically, and then those oppressed and seeking freedom globally." So, she understood that as a woman of color that she was also representing her grandmother, her mother, and all those enslaved women. Her contemporaries, who were working as domestics and laundresses, and other kinds of faceless women. And then those of us who are sitting here right now, the generation she wouldn't live to see, but she understood we were coming. And then she also understood globally that there are people in Asia, various parts of North and West Africa, Latin, South America that were also seeking freedom. Who were people of color, East India, the Dalits or the Untouchables. So that persons who were on the periphery, who would never have their name called--it was for those individuals she was going to speak for, and demand that justice be given them, and afforded a chance to become what they should be, as created by God.

MELISSA GREEN: Wow! That's--that's profound. And it also makes me think of her testament: I leave you love, I leave you hope. All of these phenomenal blessings that we can read today, and carry on into the future. She was determined to get that message across even for the generations who weren't not born yet. And I find that profound. I want to also speak in reference to some of her community activism. And, one of my favorite sections in your book is titled "Home Runs, Brother--Brotherly Love, and Bethune Benefit Games." And I'm wondering, Dr. Jones, if you could please speak in reference to how these activities actually propelled Mrs. Bethune as a community person, as a social luminary or an advocate in Logan Circle.

DR. IDA E. JONES: That's a very good question. What I found very interesting about her, seemingly unlike other notables who lived in Washington during her time, or since that time, she really got involved in the local community. She was on U Street when Joe Louis knocked out Max Schmeling, and celebrated with individuals capturing that. A colleague of mine, Will Allen, who has yet to give me the photographs, talks about his grandmother--and they still own the house on Logan Circle--and she would come by for tea. So he remembers, you know, hearing about his grandmother having tea with Mrs. Bethune. And that people would of see her kind of walking around Howard University. Students there would have her there, and see her, and would be able to touch her. Mrs. Loretta Carter Haynes, who I use in the preface, who was a notable Washington, DC, advocate for Emancipation Day, remembers being at Lucretia Mott Elementary School at the age of five--now Mrs. Haynes is well into her eighties--and says "She came to the school and encouraged us." Carter G. Woodson did the same thing--they walked the streets. And people could see them. Carter G. Woodson handed out candy. I'm not sure Mrs. Bethune handed out candy, but she definitely always had something very insightful to say about building one's character and building one's self esteem. So, we have countless stories--at one of the book signings, one lady says her mother met Mrs. Bethune and helped try to open a nursery and a day care in her neighborhood in far Northeast. So she--and then she was a member of Asbury United Methodist Church. And we know that churches in particular are local institutions. So she, being a Methodist, joined a very activist congregation at Asbury. She was involved all the efforts to basically--proto Civil Rights. Anti-discrimination, anti-hospital discrimination. All the Jim Crow Laws, she was helping chip away in the thirties and forties and, before she left in 1949. So, she was very much involved in the community, and it's amazing that someone who was domiciled in Florida, a native of South Carolina, who is also domiciled in Washington DC, looking at running for Congress in New York, going to school in Chicago--I mean, she was pretty much a global citizen. She really was a global citizen because she had friends in Haiti, Liberia, and various parts of East India. So, she was a global citizen, but she sought to change the vertical relationship of Jim Crow, which is a top and bottom relationship, to a more lateral, human, kind--and that John 3:16 "That God so loved the world so whosoever"--so we are all creations of God, so we're all whosoever. Which means we're all equal and given talents that need to shine so that humanity can move forward.

MELISSA GREEN: Right! Absolutely! And she created that global space at the NCNW headquarters, which elevated this community and neighborhood, you know, so significantly. You had mentioned that with Mrs. Bethune there was a spirit of staying encouraged. And I find that to be phenomenal, because a lot of times she would read newspapers or find out an accomplishment someone has done, or had some type of moment that was great in someone's life, and then write them a letter. And then reach out to them. So she just had a way of connecting to someone directly in her community or someone in the far reaches of another country. So she definitely--like, like the world was her home. Yeah, and it was phenomenal. I want to just kind of shift gears, if you will, just kind of focusing on, perhaps, post-Bethune. And, as we look at what activities the NCNW participated in even when Bethune passed on. I was wondering if you could speak in reference to the Wednesdays in Mississippi, and how women

actually galvanized together to still put forth the mission as well as the goals and agenda of women primarily everywhere. So can you speak in reference to that?

DR. IDA E. JONES: That's a very good question. And the interesting thing about this, as a historian, I have to go back--that after Mrs. Bethune passed away, Dorothy Ferebee--actually prior to her passing--was the second president. I want to say for two or three years. And then there was Vivian Carter Mason, who was there for about a year or two. After that, about 1958, Dorothy Height is the president of NCNW for nearly forty years, I want to say. She was there from the fifties to the early 2000s. So, Dorothy Height was the chief apostle of Mrs. Bethune's legacy in my time. And, whenever you had a chance to encounter Dr. Height, she would always say, "Well, Mrs. Bethune would say," or "Mrs. Bethune had said."

So, in regards to the Civil Rights Movement, and the Wednesdays in Mississippi, Dorothy Height was handpicked to join the NCNW in 1939 in New York by Mrs. Bethune. And I think there was a lot of conversations, that she might not have documented in her biography, that happened between the two. And because Dorothy Height was a social worker, who became very engrossed with the mission of NCNW, Civil Rights had to happen on a base level. During the course of her interview, she said women were the ones who were going to change anything, because they are the ones that raise the children, who eventually become the adults who have the mind sets. So if we can help the women, kind of, adjust their mind sets and see each other as women who are trying to raise children in a safe world where there is no war, where there's no threat of open violence, then our children, irrespective of color, can then have better lives. She remembers going to Mississippi, and meeting with the white women in Mississippi, who were totally blind to what Negro women went through. They had no understanding of the depth of poverty, the fear of rape, and the other kinds of ugly things Black women--irrespective of class--were living with on a daily basis. And knowing that maybe some of their husbands or brothers helped stimulate and maintained that culture of fear. The women were going to now have to stand up and say that they were agreeing with other women, or they were going to side with their husbands. So, they had to be also activists to realize they were going to shake off the shackles of the comfortability of being a white woman, and being the, kind of--idolized womanhood. So a lot of contemporaries of Dorothy Height, as well as individuals who were social workers, Christian people, as well as other religious organizations, all came together and realized "What are we living for, and how are we living?" And so, as a result, the idea of getting women to understand and to sit and talk about the differences--but then the similarities, 'cause sexism was also there. So even though white women were idealized, they were also put on pedestals and couldn't do anything. And so, as a result, they were fighting for their own level of civility. So they realized that we can join forces as women, and come together, and raise our children to be open minded and understanding individuals, and then we can see the society that we all want to live in. As manifested by crafting the minds of children. So she talks about that a lot. There was a documentary that was coming out about Wednesdays in Mississippi, it is still being worked on, and I know if you go to the Google, or some web browser you might be able to find the woman who was working on that. 'Cause that's a very rich history which most Civil Rights activists don't talk about. We think of King, the March on Washington, the busing, and other things like that, but there was these women who were making these really daring, really daring opportunities to really connect. Because society wasn't going to change just 'cause you felt you wanted change.

MELISSA GREEN: Right! Excellent! Thank you, Dr. Jones.

Well, I want to say thank you for your time today. And I would like for you, if you could please, give your title of your book, and also let people know where they can purchase copies locally as well as nationally and internationally.

DR. IDA E. JONES: Once again, I want to thank you, Ms. Green, for taking the time to interview me and share this brief insightful work that I learned a lot about wading into the water of Mrs. Bethune. The formal title of the book is *Mary McLeod Bethune in Washington DC: Activism and Education in Logan Circle*. And it is available at the Mary McLeod Bethune home at 1318 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC--which I encourage anyone in the DC-MD-VA area to attend, or any other person traveling through Washington. It is also available on Amazon in printed format as well as eBook. It was published by the History Press, and they're in South Carolina, so if you wanted to go to their website, you can do that also. But the title once again is *Mary McLeod Bethune in Washington DC: Activism and Education in Logan Circle*. It's available at the Bethune Council House in Washington, DC, and please feel free to request at your local bookstores wherever you are. But it's also on Amazon.com as an eBook and a printed book. Thank you so much.

MELISSA GREEN: Excellent! Thank you so much.