

Black History Month

A Florida Focus

A CIVICS IN REAL LIFE SERIES: CIVICS CONNECTION SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight #18: Mary McLeod Bethune

At the [National Statuary Hall](#) in Washington D.C., each state selects and donates two statues to honor those who have made a significant impact on their state's history. In 2022, Florida made [their statue](#) Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, the first African American to represent any state in the Hall. Mary McLeod Bethune was born in 1875 in Mayesville, South Carolina. She was the first person in her family to be born free and the only child to receive an education. After spending some time teaching in Georgia and South Carolina, she moved to Palatka, Florida, and then again to [Daytona Beach](#). In October 1904, Dr. Bethune started the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training Institute for Negro Girls. The school began with just five girls and her son. Having only \$1.50 to her name, she used discarded boxes and crates for furniture and made pencils from charred wood and elderberries. However, within its first year, the school grew to 250 students. The Daytona school eventually merged with the all-boy Cookman Institute of Jacksonville, Florida, and then, in 1931, received accreditation to become [Bethune-Cookman College](#). Dr. Bethune became the first African American woman to serve as a college president, and the school was one of the few places in the South where Blacks could earn more than a high school education. In addition to her passion for education, Mary McLeod Bethune also tackled inequalities in the area of medicine and medical treatment in Florida. In 1911, she founded the Mary McLeod Hospital and Training School for Nurses. It was the only medical school for African American women on the East Coast. Dr. Bethune's contributions expanded well beyond the borders of Florida as she became a national and international leader for civil and women's rights. She served as president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), founder and president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), vice president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ([NAACP](#)), founded the United Negro College Fund, and helped integrate the Red Cross and Women's Army Corp. Dr. Bethune [served as an advisor](#) to presidents Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, and Harry Truman. Her most notable contributions came under the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt when he appointed her Director of the Division of Negro Affairs. Nicknamed the "[Black Cabinet](#)," Dr. Bethune became the first Black woman to head a federal agency. She was also the only Black female to attend the founding conference of the United Nations. She spent her later years writing, investing in several Florida [businesses](#), and working to preserve and archive historical records about the contributions of African American women. In her [Last Will and Testament](#), Dr. Bethune wrote, "*I leave you a thirst for education. Knowledge is the prime need of the hour...If I have a legacy to leave my people, it is my philosophy of living and serving.*"

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

- In what ways did Dr. Bethune contribute to the common good and fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship?
- How did Dr. Bethune make an impact on all three levels of government?



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