

# Mary McLeod Bethune

July 10, 1875 - May 18, 1955

## Self-starting



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

**D**r. Mary McLeod Bethune was an African American educator, political leader and civil rights trailblazer, establishing the *National Council of Negro Women (NCNW)* in 1935. Bethune served as an advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt regarding issues of minority affairs. She was determined to help African American women have opportunities for education. In 1904, Bethune founded the *Daytona Normal and Industrial School for Negro Girls* in Florida. This school, which later became *Bethune-Cookman College*, is considered to be one of her most significant contributions in support of women's education.

Mary McLeod was born on July 10, 1875 in Mayesville, South Carolina, as one of 17 children to former slaves. As a child, she attended school and worked in the cotton fields. She was awarded a scholarship to seminary and attended dreaming of being a missionary. Upon graduation, realizing that opportunities for missionaries were not readily available for African Americans, she became a teacher, instead.

Mary met Albertus Bethune, another teacher, and entered into what would be a tumultuous marriage in 1898, had a son, and moved to Florida. Shortly after founding the *Daytona Normal and Industrial School for Negro Girls*, Albertus left Mary to manage motherhood and the

school, alone. Bethune's soft skills, particularly the **soft skill of self-starting**, was a key element to her success. Determined, she overcame poverty and mustered the will to maintain and grow the school, attracting wealthy donors to the school's board and ultimately allowing it to thrive and merge into *Bethune-Cook College*.

Bethune was also a member of the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)*, where she worked to end segregation as well as discrimination. As a strong advocate for women's rights, she empowered African American women to become leaders in their own communities, understanding the power of a strong woman's voice to unify support within the community.

Her ability to instill self-starting in others allowed her to be effective in building and maintaining the organizations she founded as well as advocating for all minorities, but especially for African American women she sought to empower.

Bethune's legacy continued after her death, becoming the first Black woman to be honored with a national monument. Her last will and testament outlined her philosophy for life including love and the support of others. Her life stands as a symbol of inspiration for future generations.

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