

**The Idealistic Realist: Mary McLeod Bethune,
The National Council of Negro Women and
The National Youth Administration.**

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THE NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

The available literature on Mary McLeod Bethune is very similar. Though it may look at various aspects of her life, it does so on the same plane. It gives an overview. In other words, it skims over her life, focusing only on very narrow - and positive - aspects. She was the president and founder of a black college. She was head of a federal agency during the New Deal. She was head of a million member black women's organization. But what do these "highlightings" tell of Bethune and the world in which she worked?

The point of this paper is to vary a little from the present literature. By taking a closer look at two of Bethune's organizations: the National Council of Negro Women and the National Youth Administration's Division of Negro Affairs, perhaps we can tell a little more of who Bethune really was and how important her work was to her. By "humanizing" Bethune, we may get a better understanding of what it meant to be a minority in racist nation during a trying time.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family and fiancé. My mother, father and grandmother have supported me financially and spiritually throughout this entire process. I will be eternally grateful. My fiancé has also provided me with inner strength in the time of need, not to mention being a great editor and research partner. To all of you, thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

She was a woman of two worlds and of two minds. Prominent in one world, she was often viewed as an intruder in the other. Yet, she influenced both spheres; her name would become synonymous with hard work and dedication. As a result, Mary McLeod Bethune would be powerful in black and white America. An educator and the founder and president of a college, she headed many national black associations and championed the cause of black folk for sixty of her nearly eighty years. Yet, the white establishment knew her by name and considered her a friend and an ally. In navigating the black and white worlds Mary McLeod Bethune used a mixture of idealism and realism. This double mindedness would define her career.

Still, who was this woman that she should achieve such commendable goals? Was she a Rockefeller or a Carnegie whose names were synonymous with vast wealth and who saw such philanthropic endeavors as a means to give back to a society that had obviously given so much? In reality, the “philanthropic society lady” idea was the farthest thing from the truth since Bethune was first and foremost identified as a member of her race.

Her obituary read: “Mary McLeod Bethune July 10, 1875 – May 18, 1955, Negro educator...”¹ The fact that Bethune was an African American makes her accomplishments all the more extraordinary when one takes into account the great hardships that members of her race were forced to endure. Yet, it is this very fact that makes her stand out among early activists. Starting from circumstances which could have stunted the aspirations of the most determined; she rose to a position during her lifetime for which she was recognized as being “...among the fifty greatest women America has produced.”²

Though she was a woman of two worlds - one black, the other white - in her mind, they were inseparable. For her goals to be obtained, it would take the cooperation of

¹ Marjorie Dent Candeels, ed., Current Biography Yearbook 1955 (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1955,1956), 46.

² Maxine Block and E. Mary Trow, Eds. Current Biography: Who's News and Why 1942 (New York: the H.W. Wilson Company, 1942), 79.

both. As a result, Bethune waged her war for racial equality on two fronts. In the African American community, she used women's organizations as her vehicle, particularly the National Council of Negro Women. In the white community, she used the power structure as the means to an end: namely, the National Youth Administration's Division of Negro Affairs.

Bethune was obviously successful. In today's world, memorials to her can be found around the nation. A statue depicting her likeness stands in Lincoln Park in Washington D.C. The US Postal Service has produced a stamp in her honor. Her writings have been preserved in manuscript collections at various institutions. Perhaps the greatest tribute is the school she founded, presently Bethune-Cookman College. It stands as a pinnacle to her devotion to education.

Bethune also headed many national associations. She served President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a racial advisor before her appointment to the Division of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration. During World War II she was a special assistant to the Secretary of War responsible for selecting the first officer candidate schools for Women's Air Corps (WACS).³

She founded the National Council of Negro Women, served as president of the National Association of Colored Women; was president of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools; she was also a member of the National Council of Women of America. Bethune also served as a special consultant to the 1945 San Francisco Conference on the United Nations. The Red Cross, the Methodist Church, and the NAACP also claimed Bethune as an activist.⁴

Clearly, Bethune had an impact. She showed a prejudiced nation the potential of black America through her many works. However, the key example came during the turbulent 1930s. By successfully operating within the National Youth Administration and the National Council of Negro Women simultaneously, Mary McLeod Bethune set an example. She showed that one person could make a difference when it came to race relations. In other words, the unique timing which found Bethune at the head of two

³ "Mary Bethune, Founder of Florida College, Dies," Richmond Times Dispatch, May 19, 1955

⁴ "Mary McLeod Bethune," Richmond Afro-American and the Richmond Planet, May 28, 1955.

prominent agencies made her unique among black activists. It was the culmination of these two organizations which gave her real influence within American society: black and white. By successfully maneuvering the NYA and the NCNW she insured herself a power position.

All this is extraordinary considering the little girl born in South Carolina during the Reconstruction period, the fifteenth child of former slaves, on July 10, 1875. However, she never regarded this date as the beginning of her quest in life. She looked to Africa, her family's ancient homeland, to help define herself as a person and to trace the beginnings of her struggle. Around 1776, just as the nation Mary McLeod Bethune would call home was beginning its struggle for independence, her ancestors' independence was being brought to an end as they were captured and sold into slavery. Her family was of royal blood, ruled by matriarchs, in Guinea where they had governed according to an ancient tradition. No longer would they be decorated with the finery of tribal royalty nor would they roam with the freedom they had long enjoyed.

Once in the United States, many proud traditions began to fade. Languages, religions, and various other aspects of individual cultures became a collage. For many, a homogenized, indistinguishable blur blinded following generations to their proud heritage. Mary McLeod Bethune's great-grandmother, who was sold to a rice plantation near the coast of South Carolina, was not so forgetful. She "...was of stubborn stock. She did not forget who she was or where she had come from." Her oral history survived, reaching her freeborn great-granddaughter born over one hundred years later. This provided Bethune with an inner strength she would use her entire life.⁵

Once released from slavery, the McLeods meager means of existence meant that work outside the family home and farm would often be required. On one such occasion, Mary's mother agreed to take in laundry for a neighboring white family. On one of these business ventures, Mary accompanied her mother. While the elder McLeod was taking care of business, Mary wandered into the resident children's playhouse. On investigating the interior, she stumbled upon a book and proceeded to inspect it further. Lost in analysis, Mary was startled as she was severely rebuked by the book's owner. She was

⁵ Emma Gelders Sterne, Mary McLeod Bethune (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.), 1957, 7-8. Gerda Lerner, Black Women in White America (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 135.

commanded to put the book down and abruptly informed that she and her kind could not read anyway. This incident was burned into young Mary's mind and from that moment on; education for herself and others became the prime issue of her early life.⁶

Two years later, Mary's dream of education came true. An organization sponsored by the Northern Presbyterian Church opened a small mission school not far from the McLeod home. This was the first free school for the people of that area. The world she had lived in had always seemed to be out of the reach of those of her race. Now, things were going to change. To young Mary, education symbolized the missing link between black and white societies. Remembering the incident with the book, she saw the simple task of reading and writing as the factors that had set the two apart. Bethune later recalled thinking, "Maybe the difference between white folks and colored is just this simple matter of reading and writing."⁷

McLeod attended the mission school for three years and, during her tenure, rose to the top of her class. Bethune recalled of the experience, "Of course I became a very definite favorite in the family: people in the community loved me."⁸ Indeed, her parents and her siblings were proud of her. She was unique in their community and gained a level of prestige and trust among blacks and whites. Members of both communities came to her asking advice on one thing or another. For example, many asked that she verify the math on bills of sale for cotton crops to make sure they were not being cheated. Others would bring personal correspondence and other mail for young Mary to read.⁹

Having completed the curriculum at the mission school, McLeod received a scholarship to Scotia Seminary in Concord, North Carolina. The community rallied when they heard the news. A black girl going away to school was something very unusual in those days in the south. Donations poured in to help McLeod prepare to meet her goal. Bethune remembered, "Some neighbors knitted a pair of stockings, some gave me little

⁶ Walter I. Trattner, ed., Biographical Dictionary of Social Work in America (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986) 86.

⁷ Edwin R. Embree, 13 Against the Odds (New York: The Viking Press, 1946) 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹ Eloise Greenfield, Mary McLeod Bethune (New York: Thomas Y Crowell Company, 1977) 9.

linsey dresses and aprons....”¹⁰ Even whites aided her cause. The owner of a local store gave McLeod’s father a new pair of shoes, claiming they were an item he had simply been unable to sell.

Soon, McLeod was well supplied with the necessities for school – all from the goodness of proud people; black and white. Mary Jane McLeod had become a symbol to these proud people and they all shared, “...in her victory over almost insurmountable obstacles.” One of their own was going away to college. She was paving the way for the future.¹¹

At Scotia, Mary Jane McLeod entered a new world, a world which, “ broadened my horizon and gave me my first intellectual contacts with white people, for the school had a mixed faculty. The white teachers taught that the color of a person’s skin has nothing to do with his brains, and that color, caste, or class distinctions are an evil thing.”¹²

McLeod graduated from Scotia in 1894 after seven years of intense study. By this time, her dreams of education for herself had been obtained. However, her outlook for the education of others had changed. She no longer desired to educate them solely in reading and writing. She now wanted to include religion. She determined that her life’s calling was to be a missionary to Africa. After two years of study at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, McLeod applied for field-work. The application was denied. McLeod would not be allowed to go to Africa. The reasoning behind this is unclear. She only received word that there were “...no openings for Negro missionaries in Africa.”¹³

McLeod soon redirected her energies by taking a teaching position at the Haines Institute in Augusta, Georgia. Here she came under the tutelage of Lucy Laney. Laney already had a reputation as a prominent black educator and would have a great impact on Mary McLeod. The two of them became devoted to the underprivileged children of the

¹⁰ Embree, 13.

¹¹ Sterne, 66-67.

¹² Block and Trow, eds., 79.

¹³ Rackham Holt, Mary McLeod Bethune: A Biography (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964) 39-45.

area. As a result, demands for McLeod's teaching services soon came from black communities all over the south.¹⁴

Over the next seven years she traveled to Sumpter, South Carolina, Savannah, Georgia, and Palatka, Florida. It was in Sumpter that she met and married fellow teacher Albertus Bethune in May, 1898. Two years later, while teaching in Savannah, Bethune's only child, a son, was born. For this event, Bethune gave up teaching for a year, but, as she put it, "...this married life was not intended to impede things I had in mind to do. The birth of my boy had no tendency whatever to dim my ardor or determination." Throughout her life, she held the idea that marriage and family were secondary institutions in race relations.¹⁵

In 1900, the family moved to Palatka, Florida, to aid in the opening of a Presbyterian mission school like the one Bethune had attended as a child. Her extreme devotion to building and promoting the new school combined with her teaching duties put a strain on the marriage. Although the couple never legally divorced, they went their separate ways.¹⁶

While Bethune was in Palatka, construction of the Florida East Coast railroad was underway. Large numbers of black families migrated to such construction areas to find work. Many passed through Palatka on their trek southward. Bethune, with her inquisitive nature, confronted these people and gathered information as to what lay ahead for them. She learned – as no big surprise – that blacks were being discriminated against, the living conditions were deplorable, and, as far as anyone knew, there was no real school for the children to attend. In these circumstances, Bethune heard her calling – she could help the down-and-out by starting a school. Preparations were made and, in 1904, Bethune and her son hitched a ride with railway workers and headed for Daytona Beach.¹⁷

¹⁴ Madeline Robinson Stratton, Negroes Who Helped Build America (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1965) 80.

¹⁵ Embree, 15.

¹⁶ Alden Whitman, ed., American Reformers (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1985) 75.

¹⁷ Alice Fleming, Great Women Teachers (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott Company, 1985) 75.

When she arrived in Daytona, what met her shocked her. She recalled, "hundreds of Negroes had gathered in Florida for construction work. I found there dense ignorance and meager educational facilities, racial prejudice of the most violent type – crime and violence." Here was a place she could make a difference.¹⁸

While staying with an old acquaintance, Mary McLeod Bethune speedily set about to bring her plan together. Right away she found an old abandoned cottage on the edge of the city dump and persuaded the white owner to rent it to her. From there she seemed to overcome obstacles exponentially. The Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls opened on October 3, 1904. "I opened the door of my school with an enrollment of five little girls, ages eight to twelve, whose parents paid me fifty cents' weekly tuition. My own child was the only boy in the school. Though I hadn't a penny...I had faith in a living God, faith in myself, and a desire to serve."

She burned logs and used the charred splinters as pencils. Mashed elderberries served as ink. Bethune appealed to strangers for items she needed and regularly 'haunted' the city dump and trash piles behind hotels and the like. From such endeavors she gained cleaning materials and instruments, lamps, and even linen and dishes. As a result of such dedication, the school grew quickly. In 1905, it was chartered as the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Scholars.

"In less than two years I had 250 pupils...I hired a large hall next to my original little cottage, and used it as a combined dormitory and classroom. I had many volunteers and a few regular teachers, who were paid from fifteen to twenty-five dollars a month and board. I was supposed to keep the balance of the funds for my own pocket, but there was never any balance – only a yawning hole."¹⁹

To fill the yawning hole, many financial ventures were explored. A choir was organized to give concerts in churches, hotels, and private homes. Through such endeavors, Bethune became acquainted with several northern businessmen. With such a potential clientele, Bethune never missed an opportunity to explain the tremendous need

¹⁸ Linda K. Kerber and Jane De-Hart Mathews, eds., Women's America, Refocusing the Past (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 267.

¹⁹ Jennifer S. Uglow and Frances Hinton, eds., Dictionary of Women's Biography (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 267.

for education among blacks in the south. Sewing machine manufacturer Thomas White, oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, and industrialists Henry J. Kaiser and James M. Gamble were among those who took an interest in the school and especially, the woman behind it all.²⁰

Over the years, these men kept a close eye on Bethune. Never being overly generous at first, these prudent businessmen were waiting to see how determined Bethune actually was. As the school continued to grow, Bethune made a key move in the eyes of these men. “Nearby was a field, popularly called Hell’s Hole, which was used as a dumping ground. I approached the owner, determined to buy it. The price was \$250. In a daze, he finally agreed to take five dollars down, and the balance in two years. I promised to be back in a few days with the initial payment. He never knew it, but I didn’t have five dollars. I raised the sum selling ice cream and sweet-potato pies to workmen on construction jobs, and I took the owner his money in small change wrapped in my handkerchief.”²¹

Soon afterwards, Gamble arranged a meeting with Bethune. She gave him a tour of the recently acquired land and told him of her plans. He asked many detailed questions and determined that she knew exactly what she wanted. He later informed her that he and Mr. White and the others had decided to serve as her board of trustees.²²

She had persuaded these benefactors with her own determination. They were greatly impressed by her dedication to her project. In fact, Thomas White told Bethune that he had, “...never invested a dollar that has brought greater returns than the dollars I’ve given you.” White and the others would continue to aid Bethune in her struggle. Out of his admiration for Bethune, White, who died seven years later, left the school a large trust fund.²³

Soon, through Bethune’s determination and the wealth of new benefactors, the campus and its curriculum began to expand. Bethune even built a small twenty bed hospital on

²⁰ Ibid., 58; Sterne, 122-127; 135-160; Patricia C. McKissack, Mary McLeod Bethune: A Great American Educator (Chicago: Children’ Press, 1985) 68.

²¹ Kerber and De-Hart, 267.

²² Sterne, 158-160.

the campus to serve the black community. In 1923, the school merged with Cookman Institute and was renamed Bethune-Cookman College. This consolidation made the institution stronger. Bethune's one little cottage was now surrounded by a beautiful 32 acre campus on which 14 buildings rested.²⁴

During World War I, Bethune traveled extensively up and down the east coast for the Red Cross. From 1917 through 1924 she served as president of the Florida Federation of Colored Women [a state branch of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW)], she worked with wayward girls and opened a home for delinquents. She also founded the organization which would evolve into the Southeastern Federation of Colored Women.²⁵

In 1920 she was elected to the Executive Board of the National Urban League. Through this, Bethune became involved in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In this capacity she attended the National Council of Women of the United States at which she was the only black member. She also served on the National Child Welfare Commission during the Coolidge and Hoover Administrations. "To the voiceless millions of colored men and women in the South, Mary Bethune was on the way to becoming a symbol. She was a new source of hope and pride."²⁶

In 1927, Bethune had a brief break in all of the demands the organizations required of her. As a surprise, a group of friends planned a trip to Europe for her. This trip confirmed Bethune's celebrity. She dined with the Lord Mayor in London. In Scotland, she was invited to visit McLeod Castle (the McLeod's ancestors had owned Bethune's ancestors) and in Paris she met with notable African scholars. While in Rome, she had an audience with the Pope.²⁷

²³ Malu Halasa, Mary McLeod Bethune: Educator (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989) 48-49.

²⁴ Stratton, 84-85.

²⁵ McKissack, 78; Barbara Sicherman, Carol Hurd Green and others, Notable American Women: The Modern Period (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) 78.

²⁶ Sicherman, 78; Whitman, 76; Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds., Dictionary of American Negro Biography (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982) 42; Sterne, 191.

²⁷ Sterne, 195-196; McKissack, 85

Upon her return to the United States, Bethune was invited to the home of Mrs. James Roosevelt, mother of Franklin D. Roosevelt, for a luncheon. Due to the Roosevelt affair, Bethune became acquainted with someone who was to become one of her greatest allies, Eleanor Roosevelt. Through the course of their first meeting and subsequent meetings, the Roosevelt women and Bethune became close friends.²⁸

By 1933, the depression had taken a devastating toll on the black population. Black lynchings increased and the black community complained of being overlooked by national relief efforts. The Negro press appealed to Eleanor Roosevelt through a series of private correspondence. They told her, "...the only way the Negro is going to get fair treatment is for the government to see to it that a strong, capable Negro...is appointed to get things moving in the right direction for Negro relief."²⁹

Bethune received a call from the Roosevelt administration asking her to accept an appointment on the advisory board of the National Youth Administration (NYA). Later, Roosevelt created the office of Division of Negro Affairs of the NYA and appointed Bethune its director. As already mentioned, this was the first such post filled by a black woman in the history of the United States.

In this post, she and her staff were able to educate millions of deprived children. In one year alone she managed to arrange the enrollment of 600,000 students in NYA classes. She also sought to better the plight of black women by creating the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). The NCNW united the numerous Negro women's clubs throughout the country.³⁰

Still, black officials within the Roosevelt administration were rarely recognized for their achievements. To pool their individual talents, Bethune organized black leaders into what became known as the Black Cabinet. Unofficial of course, it still served as a powerful force. As it was described at the time, it "arouses public interest through the

²⁸ Mary McLeod Bethune, "My Secret Talks with FDR." *Ebony* (April, 1949) 45.

²⁹ Sterne, 208-210; Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971) 514.

³⁰ Embree, 21.

press and the pulpit, approaches influential white persons, puts heat under congressmen with large Negro constituencies, and frequently goes to the White House.”³¹

After the NYA was abolished, Bethune continued to fight for the black race for the remainder of her life. She was a Special Civilian Assistant to the War Department where she fought discrimination within the armed forces. She served as a US delegate and representative of the NAACP at the first meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco. Bethune also served President Truman as one of the twelve on the Committee for National Defense and served as a special envoy to Liberia.³²

However, by this time Bethune was in her late seventies and her health was failing. She returned to her cottage on the Bethune-Cookman campus where she “...sat quietly in her study surrounded by mementos of the amazing number of careers she had managed to crowd into a lifetime.” She died at the age of 79 on May 18, 1955. Her life ended 92 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, a year and a day after the historic Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education* and seven months before the historic Montgomery bus boycott. The flame for equality she had always carried did not die; it fell to the earth, igniting an entire nation to her cause.³³

Taking this into consideration, it is interesting to note that many of the works available on Bethune neglect to look at how central the simultaneous positions within the National Council of Negro Women and the National Youth Administration were to her career and to the potential effect she had on society. Harvard Sitkoff’s A New Deal for Blacks recognizes Bethune’s power briefly, referring to her as “an iron fist inside a velvet glove.” The reasoning behind this power is not addressed.³⁴

The same can be said for John B. Kirby’s Blacks in the New Deal. Kirby takes a close look at Bethune and her positions in Washington; however, he focuses mainly on her

³¹ Roi Ottley, New World A-Coming: Inside Black America (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1943) 264.

³² McKissack, 94; Patricia and Frederick McKissack, The Civil Rights Movement in America (Chicago: Childrens Press, 1987) 182; Trattner, 87; Walter Russell Bowie, Women of Light (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963) 48.

³³ Sterne, 258-259

³⁴ Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 79-82.

relationship with the president and first lady and/or with other black government employees. The same is true of Nancy J. Weiss's Farewell to the Party of Lincoln and Jacqueline Jones' Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow. B. Joyce Ross does the same in the article, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Youth Administration: A Case Study of Power Relationships in the Black Cabinet of Franklin D. Roosevelt." These writers do not address the issue of the NCNW and the NYA as being Bethune's vehicles to power. They recognize her as being a powerful black leader and a white community consultant. She is recognized for her unique relationships with FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt and in her position as the linchpin of the Black Cabinet. What these prominent works fail to address is the idea of the NCNW and the NYA as being the key issues to Bethune's prominence in the 1930s.

However, one work in particular takes a stance in this direction. James P Kearney's Anna Eleanor Roosevelt: The Evolution of a Reformer recognizes the importance of Bethune's relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt. However, it does not go as far as placing the NYA and the NCNW's leadership as being of corresponding importance. Without Bethune at the reins of these dual positions, she would not have obtained her position as the most powerful black woman of the period.

Of course, as Kearney points out, the initial source of this power came from Bethune's unique personal relationship with Sara and Eleanor Roosevelt. Her relationship with such insiders gave her an edge over the competition. Black leaders, male and female, deferred to her because of what would become a close personal friendship with the First Lady of the United States. White leaders would do the same due to FDR's apparent fondness of Bethune. Still, the fact that she ran the NCNW and the NYA's Division of Negro Affairs successfully cemented her position.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NEGRO WOMEN

According to Mary Church Terrell, “The first and real reason that our women began to use clubs as a means of improving their own condition and that of their race is that they are progressive.” Strength was seen in numbers and devotion to a common goal. “The realization of this self-evident fact gave birth to the club movement among our women.”³⁵

Numerous black women’s organizations sprang up around the nation. Some were religious, some political, others were educational. They reflected the interests of the women of whom they were composed. The problem with this structure, as far as Mary McLeod Bethune was concerned, was the lack of central organization. Like all groups composed of people, there develops animosities, rivalries, and chasms. At times, it appeared that these women’s organizations had different goals altogether, pursuing what was of particular interest to that group, independent of the other organizations. To Bethune, this was the major shortcoming of the club movement as it existed prior to 1935.³⁶

Also, the prominent black women’s organization of the period, the National Association of Colored Women, had become an organization that had outgrown its usefulness. Many of the agencies and organizations it had spawned were, by this time, independent. They simply did not need the mother organization anymore. Also, the NACW began to narrow its focus in light of the depression. It pressed for women to maintain their families and their ways of live during this trying period. Unfortunately, this was unrealistic. Work, government, and other aspects of political life were beginning to take precedence. The NACW did not support these avenues of expression.³⁷

This was particularly true in the case of youth oriented groups like the Delta sigma Theta Sorority. It was an organization composed mostly of young college educated

³⁵ Records of the NCNW, Series 13, Box 1, Folder 6, African American Women’s Journal, Summer/Fall 1940.

³⁶ Records of the NCNW, N.C.N.W. 1935-1980, Dr Bettye Collier-Thomas, 01.

³⁷ Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter (William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984) pp.204-15.

women who wanted more than to be good wives and mothers. They wanted opportunities to follow their dreams. The NACW had turned its back on them, Mary McLeod Bethune would not.³⁸

She dreamed of a council which would “ harness the great power of nearly a million women into a force for constructive action.” Together, they would work to eliminate the barriers of a prejudiced nation. It is with this conviction, this “dream,” that Mary McLeod Bethune proposed what would come to be known as the National Council of Negro Women.³⁹

The proposal for such a unifying organization was not met with resounding acceptance. Too many issues existed that had to be ironed out. The same chasms, rivalries and animosities that had bogged down women’s clubs in the past, threatened to impede the formation of a central union. For example, Mary Church Terrell claimed to agree with the theories of unity that Bethune proposed; however, she stated, “...I can’t see how this organization can help. I do not see how the mistakes made by other groups will not be made by this one.” Zola Neale Hurston, a black novelist of the period, remarked, “ ...she has never uttered nor written a quotable line, never created any art form, nor even originated an educational idea. She has not even improved on any [ideas] that have been originated.”⁴⁰

In December 1929, despite peer disapproval, Bethune called leaders of national black women’s associations to meet with her in Florida on the campus of her college, Bethune-Cookman. Not surprisingly, many failed to attend the first conference on the proposed national black women’s organization. This was nothing new to Bethune, she had met opposition in the past, seemingly at every turn.

A large portion of this peer disapproval was due to simple personal rivalries. In many of the major black women’s organizations of the day, Bethune and others such as Mary Church Terrell and Ida Wells-Barnett were opponents. They vied for many of the same

³⁸ Paula Giddings, In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the challenge of the Black Sorority Movement (William Morrow and Company: New York, 1988) 141.

³⁹ Collier Thomas, 01.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 03.; Herbert Aptheker, ed., The Correspondence of W.E.B. DuBois: Volume III selections, 1944 –1963 (The University of Massachusetts Press, 1978) 42.

positions of power. Ida Wells-Barnett remarked in her personal writings that it was “always the personal element. It seems disheartening to think that every single move for progress and race advancement has to be blocked this way.”⁴¹

Also, prominent leaders like Ida Wells-Barnett and Mary Church Terrell were often seen as radical. R.W. Tyler, from Booker T. Washington’s inner circle, commented that Mary Church Terrell should be muzzled because, as he saw it, the black race needed “less agitators and more constructors.” Because of Ida Wells-Barnett’s desire to “tell the world the truth,” she was also seen as someone who brought friction between black and white societies. Bethune was less of a threat and more prominent.⁴²

Planning meetings continued. From these meetings, two major goals of the proposed organization were laid out. First, it would be the source for “...disseminating information from the leaders of national groups down to constituent memberships.” Secondly, the organization would serve as “...a medium through which Negro Womanhood might reach upward to co-operate with national or international movements affecting questions of peculiar interest to women.” These were to become the basic tenants of what Bethune saw as a successful national council.

After years of careful planning and lengthy discussions, Bethune finally overcame personal rivalries, doubts, and fears. Meetings which began in December 1929, finally saw fruition with the formal creation of a national black women’s organization. It had been a long struggle, but one in which Bethune never lost faith.⁴³

Bethune’s personal relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt had also progressed. The once friend of the Governor of New York was now friends with the First Lady of the United States and was serving the President as a racial advisor. A position this close to the center of white power could not be ignored. Mary Church Terrell and other prominent black leaders recognized this fact. If they were to experience the power that was Mary McLeod Bethune they would have to be compliant.

⁴¹ John Hope Franklin and August Meier, eds., Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 57

⁴² Manning Marable, WEB DuBois: Black radical Movement (Twayne Publishers: Boston, 1986) pp 58-59. Sylvia G.L. Dannett, Profiles of Negro Womanhood, 20th Century, volume II (Educational Heritage, Inc.: Yonkers, 1966) 24.

At the first meeting, on December 5, 1935, Bethune served as temporary chairperson. On opening, she stated,

“Most people think I am a dreamer. Through dreams many things have come true. I am interested in women and believe in their possibilities.....we need vision for larger things, for the unfolding and reviewing of worthwhile things.....through necessity, we have been forced into organization.....we need a united organization to open doors for our young women so that when it speaks, its power will be felt.....for seven years I have been dreaming, but I have given no publicity to my ideas until today.....my appeal to you is to begin to think of the big things done by past leadership who dared to stand for right and let us fight today with Negro womanhood in mind. If we are on the right track, let us know.”

After much discussion, approval for the idea was given. Addie Hunton of New York, representing the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, made the motion that the group become a permanent entity known as the National Council of Negro Women. The National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses representative, Mable Staupers of New York, seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. The National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) came into being.

Mary Church Terrell and other national leaders such as Lucy Slowe, who had opposed the formation of a national organization, were included in the planning and organization of this new group. Though the NCNW was Bethune’s brainchild she made other black female leaders aware of its importance and of their importance to it. Consequently potential opposition was quelled. Bethune’s position within the power structure drew them in, but her own cunning involved them in the process. They were where they wanted to be, close to the power, but a real part of the action.

Shortly, Mary Church Terrell made a motion. She asked that Bethune be made the first president of the NCNW. A move was then made that Bethune appoint a committee to draw up the organization’s plans. Again, the vote was unanimous. The entire business took only two and one half hours. Again, this is indicative of Bethune’s personal influence and the influence of her circle of white friends.⁴⁴

⁴³ Collier-Thomas, 2-3.

⁴⁴ Records of the NCNW, First Minutes of the NCNW, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 1, Annual Meetings, 1935.

The broad articles of the NCNW constitution reflected the diverse subdivisions that made up the new organization. Of the organizations that made up the new council, while some had no requirements, some required professional training as a membership prerequisite, others required a college education. Some focused all their assets into one particular area of interest, such as organized labor, while others had an array of focal points.

Bethune was very aware of these differences. For this reason, questions of membership were not a hotbed of discussion. Bethune realized it would be more diplomatic just to absorb the groups as they were. Their membership requirements would become the requirements of the national organization. Their goals would become the goals of the National Council, in theory anyway. Clearly, this left a lot of room for the National Council to grow without stepping on the toes of its constituents.

Influential leaders such as Mary Church Terrell and Lucy D. Slowe, who had been opposed to the idea of a national council in the beginning, were elected as officers of the NCNW. Large groups now had their own leaders holding high offices within the new NCNW. This gave them more confidence and a feeling that their goals and ideas would not be usurped. These actions allowed the NCNW to project an image of unity from the beginning.⁴⁵

The organization's constitution also reflected broad ideas. It did not delve into specifics, but stated its purpose in broad terms, terms with which one in opposition to the idea of a national council could not disagree. Of course, the main goal was to unite the many women's organizations into a singular entity. This entity would inform, disseminate, and incite black women for the good of their race (see appendix A).

The initial constitution went on to outline dues, meeting schedules, officers, the executive committee, officer duties, annual meetings and elections. By-laws and constitutional amendments and committee functions were also outlined.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Collier-Thomas, 3.

⁴⁶ Records of the NCNW, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, Constitutions 1936-1949.

This made the first national black women's club coalition a reality. It brought the larger organization into being without stunting the aspirations of the smaller member groups. Or, as she would later describe it:

The paramount objectives of the Council is to bring together the representatives of all types of national organizations among Negro women – church, and fraternal, business and professional, federated clubs, sororities, etc. – representing youth and maturity, in order to pool the best thinking of the entire group for concerted action upon the problems pertinent to the race, the nation and the world. The Council seeks further to integrate the thoughts and ideals of the Negro womanhood of our nation into the planning and thinking of the women of other races in America and the World.

The program of the National Council will not replace or usurp the specialized programs of the individual organizations but, acting in a similar relationship to that of the federal government to the states, will represent the coordinated action and unified front of Negro womanhood at a time when cooperation is most necessary and most fruitful of results.

In other words, as Bethune stated earlier, it would "harness the great power of nearly a million women into a force for constructive action."⁴⁷

This gave Bethune a center of power of her own. She had been in Washington as a consultant. Now, she was the head of an organization, an organization with large numbers and a voice that could not be ignored because of the voting strength of northern black women. Now, via the NCNW, Bethune herself was a power to be reckoned with. She would use this position to further her goals. A group that consisted of so many potential black voters who had abandoned the Republican Party could not be totally ignored by a democratic administration. In fact, by 1938, fully 84.7 per cent of Black voters were Pro-Roosevelt.⁴⁸

During its early years of existence, Bethune ran the Council from her own living room. As the NCNW was originally set up, it consisted solely of the many national women's organizations it represented and of those who paid lifetime membership fees.

⁴⁷ Records of the NCNW, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 3, Annual meetings, 1937.; Darlene Clark Hine, et al, eds., Black Women in America: An Historic Encyclopedia (Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1993) 853.

⁴⁸ William e, Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963) 187.

This structure was soon seen as inadequate for a functional organization. It existed as a central entity in Washington D.C., while its member organizations claimed affiliation but went about their own business. The same was true for the lifetime members; they were often busy with their own interests though they claimed membership in NCNW. This gave the Council membership but not functionality.⁴⁹

By 1937, the Council settled into a format suited to the ideals of a functional national organization. It rooted itself in the nation by implementing a program of Metropolitan Councils of the NCNW. These Metropolitan Councils were instituted in areas which claimed at least five NCNW member organizations. The member organizations were then asked to centralize their NCNW activities through the local branches. The local branches reported to the main branch in the nation's capital. Rural communities and youth organizations were also commissioned. This gave the Council a more federal form of operation.⁵⁰ It allowed the Council to work...

with organizations and associations in every area of American life. In addition to the national women's organizations, the NCNW extended its contacts to every major social, educational, governmental, and community organization. Focusing upon public affairs, employment, citizenship, family life, religion,..., consumer education, rural life, membership, personnel, and the publication of the Aframerican Woman's Journal, the committees successfully utilized the media and collaborated with key national organizations, governmental agencies, educational institutions, and individuals to educate and effect change.⁵¹

Now Bethune's vehicle for change not only had the numbers, it had the organizational structure it needed to be an effective influence. It now had the ability to push for change throughout the nation in a synchronized, uniform manner. This functionality transformed the NCNW and Bethune from figureheads into an agency and leader with real power.

One of the most prominent examples of this functionality from the founding period (1935-1940) is the Council's adamant support for the Harrison-Black Bill for the Federal Aid to the States for Education. In a meeting from February 9 through 11, 1937, the

⁴⁹ Collier-Thomas, 4.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 4-5.

NCNW drafted a statement to be delivered to Senator Hugo L. Black, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education and Labor. Within the statement, the members of the NCNW defined their organization and its goals. They lent their support to the Harrison-Black Bill with a resounding stipulation. The monies would have to be “administered and distributed” on an equal basis; that is, without regard for race, color, or creed. To validate their request, the members of the NCNW provided a statement of facts to the legislators.

Pointing out that 80 percent of all blacks resided in the south, the Council focused on the fact that southern states spent less on black students and black schools than state governments anywhere in the nation. However, the Council also pointed out that the same held true for white students. In fact, when compared to the remainder of the nation, some white students were receiving 50 percent less aid than their counterparts in other areas of the country. They requested tighter control and more observation in these areas to insure a more adequate return on the education dollar (see appendix B). The Council closed its petition by claiming that any disregard of the recommended amendments would only result in further discrimination. They declared, “The Negro women of America look to the present Administration with more hope than ever before in our history for a more equitable share in the constitutionally guaranteed benefits of citizenship in the American Democracy.”⁵²

This is an example of the kind of power Bethune desired to wield. It reflects her idealistic side. She had served as an advisor from the black community with limited influence. She wanted to wield more power and influence. When she stepped into a room, she wanted people to see, not only Mary McLeod Bethune, but the power she represented – the million women strong organization known as the NCNW. Her idealism had brought her far.

Later that year [1937], at the NCNW’s national meeting, the Council laid out its plans for the year 1938. The Pittsburgh Courier called the Council’s proposed programs for the coming year “unique.” Bethune proposed what she saw as the important issues of the coming year and they were resoundingly accepted by the members. The newspaper

⁵² Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 2, Folder 26, Harrison-Black Bill: NCNW Testimony, 1937. The numbered (1-5) and lettered (a-e) segments are directly quoted from the Council’s Senate petition.

reported that of the thirty plus organizations present, not a single organization dissented with Bethune's proposals. The NCNW laid out four planks: politics, economics, race relations, and the arts as areas of focus for the coming year.

It seems Bethune's dream of a powerful organization had been realized. The Pittsburgh Courier reported that Bethune was "enthusiastic over the outlook of the council." "I believe we have started the thing that will bring results. Our program is along the right track...it is up to women to keep it moving swiftly and surely to victory."⁵³

Bethune would remark to the members of the Council that:

I am filled with gratitude for the confidence that you have extended to the idea of a National Council of Negro Women. It has taken us...years of working together to try to find out within our own minds what it is all about, what it is we want to do. It has taken me nine years to try to unfold my own mind regarding the purposes and spirit of the National Council, to so unfold it to you that you may get a glimpse of the thing that is wrapped up in my soul. We have been stumbling and falling down, and getting up; we have been writing constitutions and rewriting them, and I am very happy to say that I think now we have just about gotten to the point where our feet are on the ground and our minds are made up as to the real purposes and ideas of our Council, and we are congratulating ourselves on the privilege of having so many of you at this early date of our existence to feel that you are a part and are willing to lend your influences and your thought matter to the building of an organization that will be just a mouthpiece for the fourteen million Negroes of America and particularly for things regarding Negro women.⁵⁴

Bethune was speaking from the heart. She was adamant about changing American society. As she said, it had consumed her soul. Her cunning and determination had united a million member organization to her cause. At last she felt confident, her agency was strong. Like her favorite subject in history, Henri Christophe, she would do what was necessary for change. He had once stated that, "I will teach pride if my teaching breaks every back in my kingdom." Bethune agreed.⁵⁵

⁵³ Records of the NCNW, Series 16, Box 1, Folder 1, News clippings, 1937-39; 1942-44.

⁵⁴ Records of the NCNW, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 4, Annual Meetings, 1938.

The first of the NCNW's historic national conferences took place April 4, 1938. Bethune called the meeting to order and stated her pleasure at seeing the NCNW grow into such a potentially powerful group. She also stated her regret at the rate at which black Americans, particularly women, were being included in the changes taking place since the Roosevelt administration took office.⁵⁶

Her particular example was the lack of actual participation within the administration. Though she admitted that there were more blacks within the Federal government under FDR than any other administration, she felt the need for further participation of black women, or, as she put it, "every minority group needs special representation. Whether we are Negroes or Japanese or Chinese, or what we are [black women], if we do not have special representation we are so often forgotten in the general set-up and in the administering of our program."

For all these years we have been standing in the waiting line, we have been standing outside complaining to ourselves and to our newspapers in our little committee rooms, that we are not receiving an equal share. I don't think we have been bold [sic] enough; I don't think we have had courage enough to come right to the front lines and to stand up, not as an individual but as a group, representing the mass and say, we feel, as we have observed entire programs in the field, that we are not adequately represented. And we are real American citizens and we crave, like other women, our opportunity to share in this program, particularly as it affects the group that we represent.

This clearly reflects Bethune's dual nature. More pointedly, it reflects her idealism. The realist in her knew the current state of America. Women, black or white, rarely participated on such a high level. That did not matter, Bethune had a goal in mind and she would fight to see that goal obtained.

With this in mind, Bethune went on to tell the group that as a national organization, they would have to have the courage to do what was necessary and put their demands before the nation. "...The day has come now for us, as Negro women, to be counted

⁵⁵ Halasa, 43. Henri Christophe was a black soldier who overthrew white control of Haiti to establish the world's first black republic.

⁵⁶ Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 7, Conference on the Participation of Negro Women and Children in Federal Welfare Programs, News clippings, 1938.; Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 1,

among the women of this country who are making plans and administering the programs of the people of America.” Having this as their goal, the NCNW stated the official purpose of their conference – the participation of black women and children in federal welfare programs. However, the underlying goal would be to promote the “integration and participation” of black women into the whole of the Federal government.⁵⁷

Stating that though they had a goal, the path was unclear; that would be the Council’s job, to decide which path would be the best and quickest to achievement of the goal. She reminded them that they need not get bogged down with past injustices, but to see where they were at present and to go from there. “That is what I am concerned about this morning, where are we going from here, what are we willing to start here today and do?”

Bethune was obviously dedicated to her cause; she wanted the members of the organization to feel the same. Though she realized their ideas for the Council might vary, she was ever the propagandist. She constantly bombarded them with her ideals, constantly led the Council in her direction. She seemed to continuously push the members to develop complete dedication to her goals. In other words, it seemed to be her way and no other.

For example, after some discussion as to what should be included in the written report of the conference, a delegate suggested that they should include, in the body of the report, their gratitude to Eleanor Roosevelt. Bethune jumped in stating that gratitude was fine; however, “We are not complimenting Mrs. Roosevelt... today, we are trying to get a job over here today....You know, these things will go up before the President himself....So we don’t want to put any sentiment in this, this is just concrete business.”

Despite the Council’s numbers and the presence of other black women leaders, Bethune was always insistent. She was bold and direct. She ran the Council the way she felt it should be run.

From that point, business seemed to flow well. Committees on different issues were formed. The inclusion of agricultural and domestic workers in Social Security benefits,

Folder 4, Conference on the Participation of Negro and Children in Federal Welfare Programs, Morning Session, 1938.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9-13.

labor organizations, and other areas that had proven of interest for the many bodies that made up the National Council of Negro Women.⁵⁸

Bethune reiterated her ideas for the reasoning behind the NCNW conference. First and foremost was the infiltration of qualified black women, such as those that were present at the conference, into governmental positions. Secondly, concern was for the youth of the nation; from those who simply needed relief to those who needed aid in continuing their education. Representatives would interrupt with examples from their communities.

Bethune answered

Let me tell you something, we must begin playing ball with ourselves and face our inefficiencies. (Applause) We must prepare. A group of women like you, just watching these people all the time...don't get discouraged. You know you have done a marvelous job...Don't get discouraged because you are not getting your immediate needs now. Just keep on at it. Keep on getting these people ready and prepared. These doors that are now bolted, you take it from Mary McLeod Bethune, they are going to come out. The only thing I am concerned about is whether we are ready to enter.⁵⁹

As far as the functioning of the Council itself:

The thing we need is a little closer knitting together and the unselfish use of our minds and a finer appreciation for the things that individuals and organizations are doing. I think we can do that and when we can begin to, without prejudice, evaluate our accomplishments, whether an individual appeals to you or not, if that individual does a worthwhile job let us see it as a worthwhile job and not condemn it. (Applause) I think that is what we need, to become more impersonal. Many of you have said to me, Mary McLeod Bethune, you are a fool, you stand upon the platform and you talk about yourself all the time; but do you know, I talk about myself as impersonally as that chair over there, it doesn't affect me, it doesn't make any difference who does it if it is a thing that can tell our story and can give the information and impression we want given.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid., 34-36.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 53,62-63, 68.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 73.

Again, Bethune's idealism is present. She preached to the Council members that they must be ready. Change is in the air, they simply must continue to fight until the time comes. Using herself as the prime example, she implied that the group needed to become focused and goal oriented. She seems to imply that the end justifies the means. Henri Christophe would have been proud.

Still, Bethune expressed pleasure to the group to see her dream of a national women's organization come to life. An organization which could reach into all areas of America through member organizations and make a real difference in the lives of black Americans. She also divulged an underlying personal goal. "In setting up this conference I tried so hard here and there to reach your type because I knew Mary Church and myself and Addie and the rest of us, can't do it much longer." As an organization, they needed to, reach the young college women and fill them with our ideas and our ambitions and let them get a real vision of what we are trying to do."⁶¹

Here we see a combination of Bethune the idealist and realist. The realist accepts the fact that if change does not take place, a new generation of dedicated leaders will be needed. The idealist implies that these future leaders must learn the way of the Council, the idealistic Council that existed in the mind of Mary McLeod Bethune.

The afternoon session of the Conference on the Participation of Women and Children in Federal Programs of the National Council of Negro Women was held in the East Room of the White House on April 4, 1938. The conference was attended by Eleanor Roosevelt and sixty-five women from the various organizations that made up the NCNW.⁶²

Eleanor Roosevelt opened the conference by stating that it was her hope that the work being done by the present administration would set a pattern. If the government were more open and integrated, this would eventually filter throughout the nation as a whole. Acknowledging her pleasure at being a part of this historic conference, Roosevelt turned the meeting over to Bethune.

Bethune welcomed everyone to the historic meeting on behalf of the 12 million Negroes of the United States. She stated that those in attendance did not come just to

⁶¹ Ibid., 81.

visit the White House or to meet Eleanor Roosevelt, but they came with real purpose. They were there because of their real convictions to change the nation for the better. More specifically, they were there because of “a yearning in their souls for larger opportunities for the women and children,” particularly those of their own race. Proud of how far they had come, they looked to the future with hope and promise.

Clara Bruce, Executive Secretary of the NCNW, reiterated the point. Praising such innovations as the Social Security Act, Bruce stressed the importance of insuring the participation of all Americans in such “humanitarian leadership.” To guarantee the participation of all, Bruce stated the Council’s main objective was to insure that Negroes are integrated into legislative bodies that oversee such programs. Only by balancing this under-representation within the government could they feel assured that they were helping take “full responsibility” and experiencing the same “privilege” as other Americans.⁶³

She continued,

It is the definitely formed conclusion of this group that the work influencing the health, industrial conditions and general welfare of the women of the United States is administered by certain commissions and bureaus here innumeraed [sic]. It is our conviction that the appointment of Negro women to each [sic] of these bureaus is of paramount importance not only to more than 11,000,000 Negro citizens of the United States but the country as a whole in order that the meeting of the peculiar and specific problems of Negro women and children should be well integrated into the well prepared program of the Federal Government. Because the children of any race represents what the next generation will be, the National Council of Negro Women is particularly concerned about the welfare of Negro children who proportionately form the largest group of child labor in America. We therefore urge that a capable Negro woman be placed in an administrative position in the Children’s Bureau in order that she may better safeguard the interests of Negro children of America.

Bruce pointed to the Bureau of Health to make her example. Despite the high mortality and morbidity rates among the black population, the Bureau could only claim one black

⁶² Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 7, Conference on the Participation of Negro Women and Children in Federal Welfare Programs, News clippings, 1938.

⁶³ Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 5, Conference on the Participation of Negro Women and Children in Federal Programs, Afternoon Session, 1938, 1-3.

health officer as a member of its staff. No physicians, nurses, administrators, or nutritionists were on staff to uphold the need of the “Negro people.”⁶⁴

Moving onto employment, Bruce pointed out that the supply of skilled and unskilled labor among black Americans was not being fully utilized. She went on to add that women were becoming an ever increasing number amongst those workers. She pointed to the fact that more black women were employed outside the home than their counterparts of other racial groups. Because employment and education often go hand in hand, the Council called for education on all levels of society. This must be an impartial and equally distributed form of education. To help ensure this impartiality, the Council recommended that a woman be placed on the staff of every governmental bureau whose programs were involved in the “...educational well-being of women and children.”

Bruce went on to state the Council’s desire to have black women placed in an administrative position within the Federal Housing Administration and in the US Housing Authority. She also addressed the need for a black administrator within the American Red Cross and on the Social Security Board.

In summation, Clara Bruce stated the Council’s overall position; that Negro women and children do not participate in Federal Welfare in according to their degree of need.

As good Americans we should aspire to makr [sic] our rightful contribution to the social advancement of our nation. We do not feel that this can be accomplished as long as so large a sector as we represent is so largely excluded from the full benefits of Social Welfare legislation. We therefore definitely recommend that steps be immediately taken to include representative leadership among Negroes in the various administrative positions strategic to the full participation of Negro women and children in the several government programs. Only in this way do we feel that the Negro viewpoint will be adequately presented and the special programs and difficulties of Negro women and children be satisfactorily approached and met.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 5-6.

This reflects how well Bethune had done her job. She had merged hundreds of women's organizations, all with different goals. Now she had their representatives reiterating her personal goals for her in a White House meeting with the First Lady.

Eleanor Roosevelt did not see things on the same level. She stated that there was "undoubtedly" a need for more representation for the millions of black Americans. However, she reminded the members of the NCNW that theirs' was not the only minority group in the United States. She stated that all groups were entitled to equal representation, but fulfilling this entitlement would be difficult. According to Roosevelt, there simply would not be enough positions within an organization with a finite number of employees. Recognizing that if qualified minorities were available, she states that they should certainly be represented.⁶⁶

Consultation would be the place to start. By forming consult groups to work with other organizations, much like the NCNW, and to work with the various administrative branches, minorities would be on the way to making their positions known to those who are in positions to bring about change. Of course, Roosevelt remarked, progress in Washington was going to be much different than making progress in the localities.

Progress in localities would vary. Some areas of the nation are not as racist as others. Theoretically, Roosevelt reported, every American citizen has the same rights: "...equal rights before the law, equal rights to have an education, equal rights to have a chance to earn a living," rights that should not be questioned. The national theory was not at fault, it was the social interactions of people that were to blame. The battle must be waged where it is most needed, slowly at first where the opposition to equality is the greatest. Too much could possibly stir up violence.

The example should come from Washington. The true struggle will be on the local battlefield. It, according to Roosevelt, would have to be a battle of individuals. By changing one mind at a time, the difference would be made. They would soon be swayed to follow a new national conscience. The First Lady stated that in all her travels, one factor remained true. "Nobody now will tell you that they don't want to see certain things

⁶⁶ Ibid., 11-14.

done.” ”They are a little bit ashamed if they are not doing the right thing which I think is pressed forward.”⁶⁷

This is where the unique structure of the NCNW could come into play. The Council should utilize its local members to see that the proper actions are carried out. Local members should be ever watchful of indiscretions and be willing to point them out to the proper officials in the community.⁶⁸

Bethune returned stating, “We have very few representatives in the community ranks.” She continued,

I think if I in my official work with the government have done any outstanding thing it has been the interpreting of my people to the local people that I have touched all over the country and the change of attitude in helping them to feel [sic] that they could and would do the things that we are now trying to do. I say that the money that has been spent on me will come back many many fold in the opportunity I have had in our southern sections where things are difficult and in the other sections just in interpreting and getting hold of the local people and being the mediator between the community and the people.

An unnamed representative jumped to Bethune’s support. “That is the idea we have. If we could have someone like Mrs. Bethune...who could go in the communities and interpret to these local authorities what they could so easily do for the Negro people it will be more effective than all of us together because she comes as a government agent.” She went on to say a representative of the black race could interpret programs better than any white person could because she “knows our failures and opportunities.”⁶⁹

Another member agreed. She felt that the Council’s main concern should be to get qualified blacks, particularly women, into positions which allowed them to take part in this improvement. “We feel that some of us are qualified to be paid workers and it would help the underprivileged in an indirect way and in a different way where we have the spirit of influence that Mrs. Bethune is interpreting.”

⁶⁷ Ibid., 15-17.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 23-25.

A fellow colleague concurred. “If you earn something you are in a position to help somebody.” She detailed some of their work in Mississippi where they were unwanted wherever they went. She felt that the only way to overcome such deep-rooted prejudices would be to have an influential person working for change.⁷⁰

Of course, this reflected Bethune’s idealism. It also reflected determination in the fact that Bethune and others were willing to take a stand despite the fact that Eleanor Roosevelt disagreed. To Bethune, Roosevelt’s position did not matter. In her mind, they had a job to do. They would attempt that job no matter who stood in the way

Noticing time was drawing to a close, Eleanor Roosevelt made her recommendations to the Council. She advised the group to make a list of the most important issues that should be addressed for the benefit of women and children. These should be looked at by geography because issues would vary based upon where certain groups resided within the country. Find out what will or will not work and adjust “your thinking and your programs” to fit specific locals.

The First Lady also recommended that the NCNW, on the local level, have mixed committees. “Have your committee made up of white and colored so that you would never have a purely colored group but a group of women interested in the community as a whole” By doing this, “you would then be able to point out not whya [sic] thing should be done for the colored group but why it must be done for the colored group because it is necessary for the community as a whole”

As to placing black women in high positions, Roosevelt advised:

There are few colored women to do big jobs probably, particularly in the south where you have had very restricted educational opportunities. You might as well face that because it is not only the colored women but a great many white women and children who have strictly restricted educational opportunities throughout the south and it is more important for you to have qualified people just as it is for us because if one falls down it wipes out the whole picture for a time just as it does for a woman to fall down on her job it wipes her out for months or years so when you choose a woman to do a job it is better to have a white woman doing it until you are so sure of your colored women that you are sure she won’t fall. As long as it is something sympathetic to your program and I wouldn’t rush in until I was perfectly

⁷⁰ Ibid., 25-29.

sure because I have always felt that it is a dreadful thing to put a woman into a job no matter what she is, white or colored, and have her fall down because they can say no woman can do anything. So that is really what I'd like to leave with you.⁷¹

However, the NCNW did not concur with Eleanor Roosevelt. A Council representative stated:

I know that one of the most important things that we as Negro women can do is take advantage immediately of the Democratic Administration that has been given to this country, take advantage immediately of the fact that it has been possible for Ms. Bethune to bring us here because of a particular administration, begin as pioneers this moment if we have not done it before, to understand the theory of government in the United States at least as we never have, understand something of the philosophy of government and begin to do that thing locally in connection with the government which we usually [blank in original text] and which most of us shy away from not realizing how important a matter it is to us as Negro women because we have never been able to participate normally in American life because we do not participate normally, educationally, religiously and politically can we not hope simply in this particular sphere of our national life ...⁷²

The NCNW then finalized their discussions into a four page declaration of purpose; listing the Children's Bureau, the Bureau of Public Health Service, the Women's Bureau, the Bureau of Education, the American Red Cross, and the Federal and US Housing Authorities and Social Security Board as particular areas of concern. Their demands were then delivered to the President and various administrators.⁷³

Later that fall, in a NCNW meeting, the Council's executive secretary viewed their Conference on the Participation of Negro Women and Children in Federal Welfare Programs as "the most significant" program of 1938. Bethune concurred. She told them their efforts had not been in vain, that they were making progress. They had not achieved all they wanted by any means, "we are just scratching a little bit." "The Negroes will never have the setback that they had twenty or thirty years ago." "We want mass

⁷¹ Ibid., 36-38.

⁷² Ibid., 42-43.

⁷³ Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 6, Conference on the Participation of Negro Women and Children in Federal Programs, 1938, Findings, News Releases.

pressure; we want the thinking of the best mental material that we have so that we might get these things over.” “That is the only reason for the National Council of Negro Women.”⁷⁴

The black press lauded the efforts of the Council. The Baltimore Afro-American reported that the delegates did not come” with palms outstretched as mere recipients but came with an abiding belief in the value of the contribution that capable well trained women could make in the planning and carrying out the federal programs for social betterment.” The Africo-American Presbyterian praised the Roosevelt administration for its achievements to date. FDR had exceeded his predecessors in the fact that he was willing to place more black Americans in high positions within the government. It also remarked that, “...the colored woman has not been forgotten in Mr. Roosevelt’s liberal program. The latter remarked of Bethune”...as the logical successor of the late Booker T. Washington.” It stated that she was seen as acceptable to black and white Americans as a minority leader. The article stated that not since Booker T. Washington had a black leader had such an influence on the inner circle of government.⁷⁵

Again, this reference reflects Bethune’s duality. She was comfortable meeting with a group of black women on her college campus. She was just as comfortable meeting white leaders at the White House. To her, she was a vessel, a vessel of vision. She would pour out her desires in the same manner, no matter the audience.

Early in 1939, the NCNW held its second annual conference of major concern, the problems of the Negro and Negro youth. The meeting was held at the Department of Labor Auditorium on January 12. Bethune invoked President Roosevelt’s own words to mark the NCNW’s position. “Democracy, the practice of self-government is a covenant among free men to respect the rights and liberties of their fellows....In meeting the troubles of the world we must meet them as one people....If another form of government can present a united front in its attack on a democracy, the attack must be met by a united democracy. Such a democracy can and must exist in the United States.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Records of the NCNW, Series 2, Box 1, Folder 4, Annual Meetings, 1938, 11, 39-40.

⁷⁵ Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 7, Conference on the Participation of Negro Women and Children in Federal Welfare Programs, News clippings, 1938.

She used Roosevelt's idealism to voice her own. She offered a challenge. If Roosevelt truly believed his own words, America would have to change. Regardless, she was ready to fight. She and the NCNW would move ahead with their plans of social integration.

Aubrey Williams, of the NYA, officially opened the conference. He, too, called for the support of democracy in a world where some people "...so easily give it up [referring to European nations giving in to Hitler]." He stated that he felt that these tragedies abroad would hit home in America. They would highlight the inequalities in American society causing an awakening, "we are going to be aided by this whole thing."⁷⁷

As to the conference itself, Lester Granger, chairman of the committee on employment and economic security reported first. He noted that unemployment among blacks had reduced very little. In some places, it had not decreased at all. He indicated further aid, on behalf of the black worker, would be needed from the Federal Government. Blacks continued to be excluded from labor unions and organizations; however, the formation of the CIO had been a blessing because of its nondiscriminatory practices.⁷⁸

Mr. Granger pointed out that the Federal Government was still making grants of public funds for uses which blacks were excluded. He also reported that the US Housing Authority had turned its control over to localities and as a result, black occupancy in such facilities had dropped from 40 percent to 38 percent. Also, federal monies were not being loaned to blacks or whites when the residence in question was not in a predominantly black or white neighborhood. On the positive side, Mr. Granger noted that 26,000 more blacks who were in farm tenancy or agricultural work applied for federal aid.

However, loans from the Farm Security Administration, distributed locally, were not given out in proportion to the need among blacks, but based on the number of blacks who applied. To the committee this did not reflect a real number. Granger also reported that

⁷⁶ Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 2, Folder 27, Second National Conference on the Problems of the Negro and Negro Youth, morning session, 1939, 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 7, 11-12.

blacks were not serving in any local capacity on county and state advisory boards for the Farm Security Administration.⁷⁹

The landlord-tenant situation had not improved according to Granger. Old customs were still being followed and oral contracts were being broken. The landowners were swallowing up the profits and no actions were being taken by state or local authorities. In the area of domestic labor no further action had been taken to implement federal minimum wage laws though one or two state legislatures had passed the minimum wage law. However, the National Advisory Council on Social Security had recommended to the President that these workers be included in the minimum wage and unemployment insurance by 1940.

Railway workers found themselves in worse conditions than earlier. Blacks continued to be excluded from employment; in fact, the number of positions held by blacks in the railroads of America were actually decreasing. The only bright spot was the Brotherhood of the Pullman Porters. The Pullman Porters had been designated by the National Labor Relations Board and as such, aided in the protection of positions currently held by blacks.

As far as technical and professional workers were concerned, their employment within the Federal Government remained bleak. Positions vacated by prominent blacks were not being refilled. Federal agencies continued to discriminate against black nurses; keeping them out of the Army, Navy, Veteran and Public Health services.⁸⁰

In the past, the NCNW had called for greater involvement by the States with control remaining with the Federal Government. What actually happened was that the States took over greater responsibility and the Federal Government relinquished more and more control, this, unfortunately had not brought the desired result. Under some State governments, blacks suffered greatly. Mr. Granger pointed out that, at present, there was a move in Congress to remove the Federal government from the WPA all together. As he pointed out, this could be detrimental to black workers. Without Federal guarantees and quotas, the number of black laborers would surely decrease. Finally, in closing, on the

⁷⁸ The NCNW would involve local organizations throughout the nation to be involved with their conferences. This accounts for a number of men being the head of committees.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 22-29.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 30-33.

participation of blacks in the administrative and policy-making roles of the government, Granger reported no progress or improvement.⁸¹

Similarly, John Davis, Chairman of the Committee for Education and Recreation reported that, “in the 17 states where land-grant colleges for Negroes are maintained,...\$1,190,000 on federal funds had been expended for the military training of white students, no expenditures have been made for such training for Negro students.” The same held true for cooperative agriculture and home economics extension programs. This prevented black colleges from properly training their students, which in turn, hurt the rural blacks they were intended to help. However, in the area of adult and health education, strides were being made. The committee reported that within the last two years, over 100,000 blacks had been taught to read and write or had improved what educational skills they possessed. Also, over 160 parent education and nursery projects had been established around the nation.

The committee also reaffirmed the need for an end to discrimination in all areas where public funding was received. From housing to national parks, the group demanded action and equal treatment of the US government. But until that point in time, the committee pointed out that, in particular, black women and children were being left out of the efforts being made at a higher rate than others.

In summation, the committee reported that there was present in the nation and the government,

the lack of adequate cooperation with the recommendations of this committee on the part of organizations, national and state and municipal, at work in the field of Negro life. If this cooperation had been carried out more would have been accomplished in the execution of these recommendations. There are so few Negro advisory committees in the local communities that the practical operation of our recommendations has been greatly handicapped. In addition there has not been adequate integration of Negroes into the supervisory capacities and administrative agencies of the federal government dealing with Negro education. However, we have noted with approval the appointment of persons to the staff of the National Youth Administration and in the pre-school, adult education and recreation

⁸¹ Ibid., 34-36.

programs. This progress, nevertheless, has not been as extensive as your committee would hope.⁸²

Dr. M. O. Bousfield, chairman of the Committee on Health and Housing pointed out that under the subject of health, “no notable change in the approach to Negro health problems” could be noted. No advances had been made in gaining residences for training black physicians and only slight advances in the employment of black nurses. The same held true for the use of federal monies for the construction of local health centers; however, seven million in federal funds went into building black hospitals or black wings. This excluded monies from the PWA and another million and a half spent on sanatoria in the south. No progress could be reported on the opening of black Veteran hospitals or the use of black personnel within the Children’s bureau.

As far as housing was concerned, the committee focused on the recently passed Wagner-Allenbogen Bill. This bill provided \$800,000,000 to be apportioned for housing projects. In relation to this \$800 million, the committee asked that as least one member of the Housing Commission be of the black race. They also asked that black laborers and professionals be protected from discrimination and that blacks be included in the management of Federal Housing Projects.⁸³

On the subject of Civil liberties, Thyra Edwards, referring to lynching, stated that the “democratic process broke down” when southern congressmen filibustered the Gavagan-Wagner-Van Nuys Anti-lynching bill. She remarked that southerners had not expressed a willingness to punish lynchers; in fact, she noted, not a single lyncher had been tried and convicted in the past two years. According to her committee’s report, there was no excuse for not passing a federal anti-lynching law. It called the US Administration’s protests against oppression in Europe a mockery due to this very fact.

The committee also reported that no progress had been made in “incorporating and integrating” blacks into the Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, and Aviation. No progress was seen in the direction of a corrupt practices act which would ease black

⁸² Ibid., 40-45.

⁸³ Ibid., 54-58.

suffrage. And, as of yet, no federal legislation existed which prevented the discrimination of blacks in areas sponsored with federal monies.⁸⁴

Before the morning session disbanded, Bethune made a final statement.

I felt that while we had not done all that we wanted to do, we had made some strides, and I am definitely sure that if we will continue to think together and to face these problems squarely, we will come out...It is now apparent that there have been specific gains, some of them as a result of certain procedures and actions taken by the Federal Government. It is equally apparent that there is very much that remains to be done.

She praised the WPA, the NYA, and the PWA for the “increased opportunity for employment and economic security...and the increased educational and recreational opportunities” that they offered. She delighted at the “more healthful housing and living conditions” offered by the United States Housing Authority and at the “new stability” brought to family life by Social Security benefits and welfare services. The Farm Security and Farm Credit Programs were bringing people out of tenancy and teaching them how to be their own bosses.

These distinctive gains have been in some degree effected by certain significant governmental techniques. We would emphasize the importance of the presence of a growing number of trained and competent Negro executives in administrative and policy-making Federal positions, especially in the so-called New Deal agencies.

While our gains have been definite and distinct, there is much, oh very much yet to be done. Our task has just begun. [Our]...needs are but steps in our approach to the benefits of full American citizenship. One of the great tragedies of American life has been and still is the denial of opportunity to a rising army of trained Negro youth. We are equipping them for service then slamming the door of opportunity shut in their faces.

We express the hope of this Conference that our recommendations may be considered in the light of possible contribution to the aspirations of this group of young American people. By so doing we contribute not only to the strengthening of our own racial group, but to the cause of democracy. (applause)⁸⁵

Bethune summarized the conference by stating

⁸⁴ Ibid., 65-69.

These are but steps in our approach to the benefits and responsibilities of full American citizenship. American need have but little fear of subversive un-American activities and doctrines if our full energies are devoted to bringing the democratic ideal within the grasp of the lowliest citizen, regardless of race, color or creed. One of the great tragedies of American life has been and still is the denial of opportunity to a rising army of trained Negro youth. We express the hope of this conference that our recommendations may be considered in the light of a possible contribution to the aspirations of this group of young American people. By doing so we contribute not only to the strengthening of our own racial group, but to the cause of democracy.⁸⁶

This conference reflects the extent of Bethune's idealism. It delved into every aspect of black life, leaving no stone unturned. Her concerns for the black race were all inclusive. She did not simply wish to elevate black women, but she desired to bring the entire race along on the trek up the ladder. Better jobs for men, better education for children, more respect for women; they all were important issues to Mary McLeod Bethune and the NCNW she represented.

The year 1939 ended a dynamic yet unique period for the NCNW. It was formed at the latter part of the year 1935. It quickly set about making a name for itself and its cause by being vocal on issues and by holding national conferences. "The National Council of Negro Women has been endeavoring for four years to establish itself as a force in the life of the nation, -- working especially toward the betterment of Negro womanhood. We feel now, that we have achieved some measure of success, the time is ripe to push forwardly more rapidly." Bethune then continued, noting the changes that she saw as necessary for the new decade.

Her main concern was financial.

"We have had the moral support of...a great many... organizations who have not formally joined and paid their membership fee. We have made no drive for financial aid, depending upon the few loyal organizations and individual members who believed in the aims of the organization. Now, that we are broadening our activities, we need more financial support. We

⁸⁵ Ibid., 74-78.

⁸⁶ Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 2, Folder 30, Summary Reports, 1939.

are especially anxious to get started on our quarterly magazine. We need not only your moral support but your financial support as well.⁸⁷

The reasoning behind her concern for money is evident when examining the Council's financial records. For example, they ended the year 1937 with an \$18.25 surplus. Their balance in November of the next year was \$111.17, and in November of 1939, they boasted \$122.58.⁸⁸

Though the money had been in short supply, Bethune had succeeded in establishing a national organization of women. It was centrally organized with branches reaching into rural and urban America. It was a watchdog for equality and petitioned the Federal government as to what it saw as necessary changes that needed to be made in policy and society. It was created as a vehicle for Bethune and her ideals. It was a structure which she could use for social conscience.

At the same time, the liberal ideals of Franklin Roosevelt were creating the same environment for change within the nation. Through his vision, an official structure had been created through which the NCNW could work. However, Bethune soon found herself a part of the Roosevelt idealism. She found herself on the inside. She was made a part of the structure of change known as the New Deal.

⁸⁷ Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 9, Correspondence, 1939.

⁸⁸ Records of the NCNW, Series 11, Box 4, Folder 1, Miscellaneous Correspondence and Statements, 1937-1939. Financial report, November 27, 1937, November 7, 1938, and November 4, 1939.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION

At the height of the Depression, Eleanor Roosevelt remarked that she feared losing an entire generation of American young people. As far as age groups were concerned, the Great Depression hit the youth of the nation the hardest. Statistics suggested that approximately 30 percent of Americans aged sixteen to twenty-four were completely unemployed. Franklin Roosevelt, inaugurated President of the US in March of 1933, quickly set about his plan to remedy his wife's concerns and his nation's woes.

On June 26, 1935, President Roosevelt created, by executive order, the NYA as a branch of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The NYA would address the shortcomings of earlier programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps. It would not be a quick fix, it would provide skills for life. Also, unlike the CCC, it would attempt to aid males and females while implementing local programs so that young people could remain in their own communities.

In doing so, the NYA looked at its constituents in two categories: students and non-students. It would provide grants to students to stay in school and would provide relief and job training to non-students. It would do so through a liberal program which would allow program directors to initiate pertinent procedures on the local level. To promote racial equality, the NYA implemented a Negro affairs division.⁸⁹

The NYA outlined what it desired from a Division of Negro Affairs. First of all, the Program of the National Youth Administration as it would apply to Negro Youth would make "a definite contribution to the solution of the many problems peculiar to the Negro youth in America in three areas: education, industry, and recreation.

To achieve these goals, it was suggested that the Negro Affairs division serve as a "clearing house" for problems presented concerning black youth. It should "discover, generate, appraise, and institute creative ideas to promote the development of Negro youth and their integration into American life. These would benefit black youth but should be used in a way that promoted the national good. It should coordinate these

⁸⁹ Otis L. Graham, Jr. and Meghan Robinson Wander, eds., Franklin D. Roosevelt: His Life and Times (New York: 1985) 278-279.

activities and plans of action with other agencies. It should also serve as a depository of the information gathered concerning activities and surveys involving black youth.

The Negro Affairs Division was also instructed to cooperate with its counterparts on the state level. If necessary, the agency would “stimulate” these state agencies in carrying out state and community youth programs. The program also indicated that rural black youths were to be given special consideration.

Under the education heading, the program recognized four categories of need. First, to see to the equalization of educational opportunity for black youths throughout the nation. Second, the division should promote and extend vocational education. Next, black youths should be given leadership training through regional training centers. Finally, plan to meet the educational needs of the black race as a whole.

The program was designed around tenets that were derived from the National Conference on Fundamental Problems in the Education of Negroes which was held in mid 1934. This conference determined that at least 80 percent of the entire US black population lived in fifteen southern states where separate school systems were maintained. In these states, more tax money was collected for educational purposes, yet less was spent per student than in the remainder of the nation. Of course, blacks suffered this monetary disparity to a greater extent than whites (see Appendix C).

At the conference conclusion, the idea was accepted the south could not afford to educate its children on the same level as the rest of the nation. To raise their level of education, monies would have to be supplied by the federal government. Of course, these funds would be distributed on an equal basis among black and white students and black and white facilities. This was to be the job of the NYA.

The second tenet of the education heading was vocational education. The NYA based its plan of action on the Committee on Vocations from the National Conference on Fundamental Problems in the Education of Negroes, reported in May, 1934. This conference determined that despite the glaring need of vocational education among the black population there was “little or no” planning taking place which would promote such educational ventures in black schools and colleges. In fact, the curricula of black schools and colleges was mainly academic. What little vocational education that was provided employed “obsolete machines” and “antiquated methods.”

The committee also sought to remedy the lack of leadership training among black youth. Through the many New Deal agencies, the NYA sought to give black youth proper leadership skills which would prepare them for public service. Through recreation centers, camps, and special education programs, the NYA could provide many youths with supervisory skills they ordinarily would have not received. According to the committee, the NYA would be able to provide definite guidelines for this training. They noted that the present situation of black training had fallen under the control of philanthropic organizations whose training methods were inconsistent.

As far as industry was concerned, the NYA would integrate the black youth of the nation into industry and agriculture through two main ideas/goals. First of all, vocational training would be provided through “work study” programs and apprenticeships. The second plan was to establish a national bureau for guidance, occupational research, and placement. The NYA itself would serve as a guidance bureau, “providing a clearing house of information concerning training facilities, employment opportunities, occupational research, placement, and follow-up.” The NYA would also serve as a consultant to schools and colleges in all aspects of converting to a higher quality vocational program. Taking this into account, it was determined that, “the fundamental function of the National Youth Administration would be to devise means to widen the opportunities for Negro youth for profitable employment in all fields of endeavor commensurate with their interests, capacities, and abilities.”

Finding “great inadequacy” in recreational opportunities for black youths, the National Committee proposed six ideas to shift the balance. First, they saw a need to implement recreational leadership classes. Next, they recommended that state and local governments consider providing recreational opportunity to prevent crime and promote better citizenship. The committee called for the expansion of such groups as 4-H and the boy and girl scouts wherever possible. Schools should be provided with the resources to supply adequate playground facilities and recreational activities. Encourage volunteer groups to continue to promote interest in the arts, sports, etc. The committee also suggested that in all areas, social agencies and people in leadership positions promote coordinated leisure activities for the black youths in their communities. Taking these

factors into account, the NYA would serve as the instigator of recreation programs in urban and rural America.

With these three main areas of focus (education/vocation, industry, and recreation) the National Youth Administration could "...serve as the leverage greatly needed in the meeting of the problems peculiar to American Negro youth." "It could direct the attack upon the...great mass problems of Negro youth."⁹⁰

Seven months after the creation of the Division of Negro Affairs, at a Division meeting, NYA Executive Director, Aubrey Williams, stated that, though the goals of the agency had been spelled out, the agency as a whole was not following those goals.

Your problem and aim should be to see that Negroes are given their proper portion of the NYA, but not to set up a Negro organization to take care of Negroes. That is fundamentally unsound. Your main job is to help your State Director. You must be careful not to become a shock absorber and defeat your own purpose. You are doing an excellent job and I have received no criticism from the State Directors. I wish we could place every Negro and every southern white boy on a piece of land the [sic] he himself could till. You should teach him how to till it, how to keep books and figure up his accounts, teach him about repairing farm materials and other simple things. You must get down to the real problems. You can help the situation by the simplest kind of things. This is where the value is.⁹¹

Comparatively, in an unsigned report covering the first six months of the Office of Negro Affairs, the unnamed author complains that:

The office of Negro affairs began activities December 2, 1935. There was no definite outline for a program at that time. I was here two weeks before having any consultation...concerning the work to be done. There may have been some question in the minds of the Administrations to the real need of a specialist to look after the interests of this particular group.⁹²

Clearly, the Division of Negro Affairs was not an effective force at this point.

⁹⁰ Records of the NYA, Division of Negro Affairs, Folder titled Negro Administrative Assistants, A Suggested Permanent program for the National Youth Administration as it would apply to Negro youth, 1-6.

⁹¹ Ibid., Folder entitled Conference of January 1936-1941, January, 1936, 7.

⁹² Ibid., Report covering first six months of the Office of Negro Affairs, NYA, one page report.

Shortly thereafter, Bethune was appointed as the Director of Negro Affairs for the National Youth Administration. She had been serving FDR as an advisor to the NYA since 1933. Now, she would be a real part of the machinery of change. A structure created by the federal government would empower her to attempt the same ideals she had held for the NCNW. The problem was that the Civil Service Commission had not officially recognized the Division of Negro Affairs or its new director. The same was true of other members of government agencies. Blacks seemed to think the position insignificant. That did not last for long. Bethune played up her friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt. She worked at bringing the other black members of agencies together into a unified force for change. Within months, Bethune was a power to reckon with. Washington correspondent, Edward Lawson of the Associated Negro Press, stated, “either they were unaware of her tremendous energy and grasp of things or they underestimated the potential power of her position.”⁹³

In a personal statement regarding her appointment, Bethune noted that the Division would:

be a natural continuation and extension of the services I have been rendering Negro youth during the past 33 years. My present objective is to promote the full integration and participation of Negro youth in the program of the National Youth Administration and thereby to promote increased opportunity for training, guidance, employment and adequate recreation. My experience in founding and directing Bethune-Cookman College; my study of the needs and possibilities of the underprivileged youth of the south and of the nation; my appreciation of their yearnings for larger opportunities, have fitted me peculiarly for the work in which I am now engaged.

To carry out this work, Bethune stated:

It was first necessary to prepare the ground by...interpreting the NYA program to Negroes in such a manner as to gain their confidence and support, and, second, interpreting the needs of Negro youth to the officials and citizenry of the white race in various sections of the of the country. To the first task, I was able to bring a long record of leadership and wide acquaintanceship among Negroes in all walks of life through my life-time activities touching every phase of Negro life – religious, economic, social

93 Charles M. Chriatian, Black Saga: The African American Experience (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995) 354, Giddings, 220-21.

and political. To the second, I was able to bring a technique learned through years of experience in developing a Negro college in Florida, the confidence of the leading white figures in the educational world...therefore, I feel that my present work as a field of expanded service, is the climax of the training and experience of my entire life-time.⁹⁴

As Director of the Minority Affairs Division she would report directly to the Deputy Executive Director of the NYA. Her main responsibility was to “promote the full integration and participation of Negroes in the program of the National Youth Administration.” In doing such, her official position was to see that NYA policies were adapted to the needs of the black people and to make sure that they understood the programs available to them through the NYA. These goals were to be obtained based upon certain factors set forth by the Administration (see Appendix D).⁹⁵

With these goals/guidelines in place, Bethune set about her historic work. In a letter to President Roosevelt, she stated, “It is very necessary that something very outstanding be done for my people to assure them of the gains which have been made under your administration” In less than a month, Mary McLeod Bethune filled the void in the leadership of the Division of Negro Affairs. Indeed, during her first year, gains could be seen.⁹⁶

For example, in the annual report on the Conference of Negro State Administrative Assistants and members of State Advisory Committees , the ambiguity Aubrey Williams had addressed was still present. Bethune, serving as General Chairman of the conference, ordered all formal reports be dispensed with. She divided the delegates into regional committees, northern and southern, and asked them to compile a list of problems that were common to them all. Within three days, the committees had presented Bethune with a list of suggestions which would benefit all representatives.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 8, Correspondence, 1936-1938.

⁹⁵ Records of the NYA ,DNA, Duties of the Director, DNA, 1-3, Relation of Negro Affairs to the General Program of the NYA, 1-3.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Letter from Ms. Bethune to President Roosevelt.

⁹⁷ Ibid., National Youth Administration, Division of Negro Affairs, Report of Conference of Negro State Administrative Assistants and Members of State Advisory Committees, Conference of February 11-13, 1937, Objectives and Procedures, 1.; Ibid., Recommendations of the Conference, 13-15.

Through this action, Bethune subdued the individual concerns held by the members. Each was made to feel as important as the others; their input was as important as the input of the other delegates. On the surface, it appears that Bethune successfully calmed the potential for unrest among the state representatives. They were placated and the Division of Negro Affairs had a clearer picture of what was going on in the various regions of the nation. Bethune seemed to be well aware that an efficient national program could only develop from an efficiently run home office.

Armed with more information and organizational unity, the NYA's Negro Affairs Division presented its first annual report in July of 1937. According to the report, special emphasis would be placed upon the progress made in the last six months. This, of course, includes the period during which the State Advisors met and created common goals.

According to the annual report, 950 young black men and women had been placed in vocational training centers in some ten southern states. The report stated that their expectations for this program were great and that it would expand rapidly, especially in the south. Construction projects, though no numbers were given, reflected the creation of new shop buildings and even schoolhouses. Repair projects for chairs and desks and related items were also implemented. New community centers had been built and old facilities had been remodeled for the same purpose. Sanitary outhouses and tuberculosis isolation cabins were constructed, land had been cleared for new ball parks, playgrounds, and picnic areas. "Definite training" was being supplied to black youths.⁹⁸

In the field of graduate education aid, the report announced that 100 students had been placed into four different library science training centers. These new librarians would then be placed into black schools who could not get accreditation because of the simple fact that they lacked a trained librarian on staff. This was one of the areas in which the Division was particularly pleased. It represented a cycle of blacks aiding blacks via the NYA.

As far as guidance and placement were concerned, the report announced that "considerable numbers" had attended occupational information classes in Chicago. The

⁹⁸ Ibid., Letter from Ellen Rogers to NYA, DNA staff requesting aid.

state of Georgia published a manual specifically directed at black youths, they then set up a state-wide committee to provide guidance. The state of North Carolina set up a counseling center in Durham. North Carolina, Georgia, and other states also began publishing bulletins of occupational information and opportunity along with placement services. In Washington D.C., the NYA Negro counselor was merged into the staff of the U.S. Employment Service.

However, the annual report pointed out, as far as the Division of Negro Affairs was concerned, there were four areas that needed focus. First of all, there was a need for more projects for black college students. There were few compensatory endeavors available to them which would meet their financial need, the number of students and graduates exceeded the number of placements.

Next, "NYA administrative expenditures indicate only slight participation of Negroes." However, the report points out that in such states as Illinois and Georgia, where the number of blacks participating was high, "the programs reflect the wisdom of investment in competent personnel." Where possible, the NYA should try to compensate for the lack of blacks in administrative and supervisory positions. Also, these administrative and supervisory personnel should be provided better compensation and working facilities. The Division noted that as it evolved from an emergency agency to a functional governmental agency, the need for a competent, well-trained staff became increasingly necessary.

Thirdly, as far as the Division of Negro Affairs was concerned, their most important work was the vocational training centers, "These projects are one of the most hopeful developments for Negro youth in the entire NYA program." They urged that the number and variation of projects increase. And where local participation is lacking, the federal government should step in with contributions so that blacks in all areas would benefit from the NYA.

Finally, the Division called for a "concentrated attack" upon the need of black youth in the areas of guidance and placement. Again, they praised the efforts of Georgia and Illinois. "There is need for carefully edited occupational information, testing facilities, counseling and, above all, energetic placement activities by interested parties. This

appears to be the capstone to the entire NYA program of student aid, work experience and work projects.⁹⁹

Many of the concerns indicated the lack of advancement made by the Division of Negro Affairs. The Division of Negro Affairs was created on December 5, 1935. By the time of this conference, in mid 1937, the agency was still facing what to do about its original goals. Vocational education and guidance and placement were of primary concern. In almost two years, the Division of Negro Affairs had been dragging its feet.

In a private letter to Aubrey Williams, Bethune painted a fairly bleak picture of black participation in the NYA (see appendix E).

I have covered every state in the Union where there is an appreciable number of Negroes. I have studied with an open mind and a discerning eye, programs where Negroes are specifically concerned and I am glad to advise that many forward steps have been taken in most of our states as regards to the participation of the National Youth Administration. There is yet, much to be done.¹⁰⁰

However, just one month later, in the annual report of the Division of Negro Affairs, Bethune reported that, Division of Negro Affairs staff had traveled more than 40,000 miles, visiting 21 states and 69 different NYA centers. The agency had disseminated the functioning of the national agency to the black citizenry of the nation. Thereby, people were educated and “interracial good-will and understanding” were furthered. Perhaps most importantly, a National Conference on the Problems of the Negro and Negro Youth had been called. The “Conference and report [are] considered one of the most significant achievements in Negro life and progress in many years.” The President was presented with a personal copy of this report and 3,000 other copies were distributed throughout the nation. The follow-up conference of the State Administrative Assistants was considered enlightening, “resulting in a new grasp of the spirit of the NYA.” The report also announced that the state representatives had formulated a definite

⁹⁹ Ibid., Negro Youth in the NYA for 1937, 1-2; Ibid., Recommendations, 1.; Letter from Bethune to Mr. Robert Vann, The Pittsburgh Courier, dated December 23, 1936.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Letter from Bethune to Aubrey Williams on Negro participation in the NYA, dated June 10, 1938.

set of ideas to strengthen the Division of Negro Affairs and its work. The report recognized that this had been aided in the appointment of 21 black state administrative assistants.

The report also praised the Division's own work of printing and distributing 2,500 copies of a brochure titled, "New Opportunities for Negro Youth." The Division praised its efforts in reaching hundreds of thousands of black youths through public meetings in 21 states. They also boasted 28,335 students on school aid, or 11.8 percent of the total. 6,983 college students were on aid, or 5.4 percent of the total. Graduate aid was given to 369 persons or a total of 7.4 percent. This graduate aid role represented an increase of 128 from the previous year.¹⁰¹

This was quite a different picture than the one painted confidentially in which Bethune stated that, "there is no really outstanding NYA project for Negroes in the country." No one really knew the numbers of blacks youths involved in programs due to the lack of adequate record keeping on the part of the states. In fact, there seems to be no definite form to the state reports. Some were simple narratives while others broke their progress down into numerical form.

The confidential report also stated that black youths "have practically no part" in apprenticeship programs. Resident training programs often focused on training that the Division considered "too narrow." The states had very few black employees in administrative, supervisory, and clerical positions. Black youths had "very little share" in the counseling and placement activities of the Vocational Guidance Program. "Work projects for Negro youth are generally poorly organized and supervised and his participation is not equitable nor does it begin to meet his need." Finally, the report stated that black youth participation was very weak in the health program.

As to this confidential report, Bethune noted:

Practically all of the above observations ...have been made by the Director of the Division of Negro Affairs in quarterly and yearly reports....Stanley High's recent articles on the Negro in the Saturday Evening Post accentuate the fact that with all of NYA and other youth activities,["] The chances of Negro Youth to get a job are mighty slim." NYD [NYA] has before it an opportunity to help Negro youth

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Annual Report of the Division of Negro Affairs, 1938, 2,5.

smash through the vicious restrictions that bind him. It remains now for us of the NYA to accept the challenge.¹⁰²

So, on one hand we have Bethune praising the advances being made. This was Bethune the realist, Bethune the public figure. For every black boy or girl who received an education, the future was changed. For every boy or girl who received skilled training, the future was changed. The fact that by March of 1939, 28,492 black youths were in the out-of-school work program and 38,887 black youths were receiving student aid could not be ignored. She was pleased that her office was staffed by five black individuals: the director, the assistant director, two secretaries, and one typist. Nineteen states could claim a black administrative assistant and eight states had black state project supervisors. Blacks were members of the state advisory committees in 17 states and New York City and Texas had “Negro Advisory Committees.” 385,110 blacks were employed in WPA projects throughout the nation. Of these, 106,303 were blacks employed in white-collar positions. There were 60 resident training centers employing 3,707 black youths. These were all gains that Bethune could not scoff at. The realist would not scoff, but praise the advances made. The idealist would strive for more.¹⁰³

However, issues beyond her control began to plague the New Deal and the idealistic promises it held for the future. Conservative elements were growing within the government which attacked Roosevelt’s policies for national recovery. The rising concern of war in Europe (and American involvement) began to be the main focus of many. By mid 1940, the NYA would begin a shift toward war preparedness.¹⁰⁴

Williams supported this point in a speech at the NYA conference held in Washington on June 15, 1940.

The total program needs to be re-examined in the light of the new situation which America faces. The new situation provides opportunities for NYA which it never had before....None of us want war and none of us want to

¹⁰² Ibid., undated Confidential Report on the Negro Program, 1-4.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Some Facts Concerning NYA and WPA, Figures approximate as of March 31, 1939.

¹⁰⁴ Graham and Wander, 278-280.

yield any more than we have to of our present way of life. Tendencies may arise to do away with much of the present program due to the needs of national defense, yet these needs still persist and NYA ought to carry on....The program must be made so good that it serves this hour and its needs....All the various aspects of...projects of NYA need to be toughened up and made much more effective. Some of it may need to be wiped out if the effectiveness cannot be raised....The most essential part of the NYA program is concerned with these aspects which make American living worthwhile. A few good programs are more valuable than a lot of messy ones.¹⁰⁵

Bethune disagreed, pointing out that blacks had limited opportunities at home in the armed forces. Blacks were not allowed in the Marine Corps and the army held very limited opportunities. Stewards and messmen were the only jobs for blacks in the navy. There also had been a marked decrease in the number of black appointments in the State Department, the Department of Justice, the War and Navy Departments. Although the number of blacks employed has increased overall, the number of blacks with positions within the government has actually decreased. She noted that she was concerned this would result in “embarrassing questions” about the work of the Division of Negro Affairs.¹⁰⁶

Williams’ desire prevailed, at a special meeting of State Administrator’s called by the WPA in August of the same year, delegates were told (based upon an investigation of NYA projects) that “...all our agencies dealing with youth need to be streamlined and made more efficient and that immediate steps should be taken to bring about certain improvements.” Four major suggestions were made: First, more careful selection must be used in obtaining youths for programs, they must be people who can actually benefit from the program, not just a body to make numbers look good. Secondly, training facilities must be sanitary and healthful. Thirdly, work projects must give opportunity for real work. It was noted that the CCC was actually doing a better job of this. Finally, the NYA should take greater opportunity in citizenship training.

¹⁰⁵ Records of the NYA, Mr. William’s Speech at NYA Conference in Washington, D.C., Saturday Morning, June 15, 1940, Summarized by Dr. Emerson, 1-4.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., letter from Bethune to Aubrey Williams, dated October, 17, 1939.

At a conference on Student Work Programs held at the same time, it was pointed out that as far as education was concerned, no foreseeable changes of policy were planned. This meant that the administration of the Student Work Program rested ultimately with local school administrators and that the training of the students ultimately rested within the individual schools. Unfortunately, this meant that the type of programs, transportation, and related activities also rested with local authorities. As a result, as one delegate pointed out, due to the inefficiency of local authorities, it would be possible for a young person to “hold up a gas station, get arrested, become a juvenile delinquent, get committed to a state institution, and there find the facilities provided for a good vocational education.”¹⁰⁷

This delegate’s concerns can be seen in a report from two years earlier when a compilation was created of projects, racial breakdowns, and training supplied from 39 states. For example, in Alabama, of 583 youths in resident projects, 163 were black with a total of 60 being unidentified. Of the 583, 152 are males of which 140 are employed in construction and an additional 12 in homemaking. Of the remaining 431 females, 154 are blacks who were employed solely in homemaking activities. In Arkansas, 1,081 youths were employed in similar projects. Of these, 52 are black and 62 are white females, the remainder being white males. Black females were not represented on the state roles. The 520 black youths were employed in farming, landscaping, and gardening. The whites were employed in construction, auto mechanics, woodworking, forestry, and dairying.

In total, the report indicates that 12,469 youths are employed in resident centers in the above mentioned 38 states. Of these, 28 are identified as Indian, 1,384 black (of these, at least 437 were female), 300 unidentified, and the remainder, 10,757 are identified as white. Taking these issues into account, it is easier to see the concern of the delegate who posed the gas station robbery scenario. Bethune agreed. Blacks clearly were not getting an equal share. In fact, based upon the above numbers, black females were participating at just over three percent while black males participated at a little over seven

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Special Conference for State Administrators, Work Projects Program, August 16, 1940, 1-4.; Special Conference called on Student Work Program, August 14, 1940, 1-4.

percent. Of course, Native Americans were represented at a rate of less than one quarter of one percent.¹⁰⁸

As World War II approached, “America’s biggest job [was]...to defend herself from any possible enemy.”

This effort will be the biggest thing in America for the next few months, and perhaps for several years. It is of extremely vital importance to every Negro citizen. America’s 13 million colored persons must either get themselves fully integrated into the vast defense program or find themselves left on the side lines. Negro citizens everywhere must put themselves behind the national conscription program in order that there may be no question as to the Negro’s loyalty and willingness to defend his country. Negro citizens everywhere must study the defense program from every angle in order that they may understand what its purposes are and what its possibilities may be for improvement of the Negro’s status. America’s colored citizens must lay before those who are in command of the program those hindrances and frustrations of Negro life which must be corrected in order that national unity may be attained. We must fight for the advancement of democracy in the United States – a battle which is even more important to us than the fight for democracy abroad.¹⁰⁹

Like the integration of blacks into other NYA programs, the struggle for progress into national defense was no different. The War Department and the White House were bombarded with pleas to integrate the Nation’s armed forces and reserves. Claims were that the War Department itself was a threat to democratic ideology because of its racist actions. In strained periods such as wartime, in a racially divided nation, there may be the opportunity for “propagandists” to “stir up trouble between white and colored people.” Threats of anti-Semitic feelings among denied blacks were even predicted.¹¹⁰

Mary McLeod Bethune, the idealist, agreed and proposed that all black reserve officers be called to immediate active duty along with white Army and National Guard

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Resident Projects from Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, July 1, 1938; Mary McLeod Bethune, “My Last Will and Testament,” *Ebony*, August, 1955, 105..

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Folder titled The Negro and National Defense, “National Defense, What does it mean to us?” prepared and published by the National Urban League, New York City, 1-5.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., National Urban League, National Defense, What does it Mean?, 6-15.

units for training. Permanent training camps should be established for black soldiers near black colleges. She continued to call for vocational training for blacks on par with that of whites. As far as defense and the black youth was concerned, Bethune called for “immediate steps to be taken to open the doors of existing schools for the training of air corps cadets, mechanics and ground crews, to Negro citizens.” She also continued to appeal to the Navy to end its exclusionary policies against blacks with the exception of mess attendants.¹¹¹

Opposition remained great. For example, J.H. Kindelberger, president and general manager of North American Aviation, Inc., told the Detroit Star that, “We will receive applications from both black and Negro workers. However, the Negroes will be considered only as janitors and in other similar capacities...Under no circumstances would Negroes be employed as aircraft workers or mechanics in the plant. While we are in complete sympathy with the Negro, it is against the company policy to employ them as aircraft workers. We use none except white workers in the plant here in Inglewood and in the plant in Dallas and we intend to maintain the same policy in Kansas City. Regardless of their training as aircraft workers, we will not employ them [blacks] in the North American plant.”¹¹²

As late as August, 1942, Bethune was facing many of the same concerns, plus she was bedeviled by increased budgetary limitations within her own agency. In letters to regional administrators, Bethune reported of a “serious problem which relates to... Negro youth on many of our war production training projects.” Overall, “difficulties surrounding the recruitment, registration, selection and assignment of Negro youth” meant that the integration that the Division of Negro Affairs had been striving for had not been obtained.¹¹³

The realist could find solace in the fact that, in 1940, the Civil Aeronautics Authority announced that 300 blacks would be trained as pilots, the numbers were expected to increase in coming years (of course, this was only .000027% of the eleven million the

¹¹¹ Ibid., Untitled two page report from the Negro and National Defense folder

¹¹² Ibid., From statistics on the state of Texas, newsclipping from the Detroit Star, Limit Negro Air Jobs, March 17, 1941.

CAA desired in 1939). Black WWI vets urged the integration of the Marines and Navy and praised the Army for widening the opportunities for blacks. The Director of the Selective Service System appointed a black administrative assistant and the War Department appointed a civilian aide to the Secretary of War.¹¹⁴

The realist would also find satisfaction in the fact that, in mid 1941, the Office of Production Management (OPM) created the Labor Supply Branch of the OPM. This Branch would have the responsibility of investigating the defense industry. One of the main goals was "...integrating Negroes into national defense employment." Among policies passed down was the announcement of training and employment for blacks where they had previously been excluded. Also, in areas short of labor, minorities would be looked at before labor was imported. Backing all this up was an Executive Order dated June 25, 1941, which reaffirmed "the policy of full participation in the defense programs of all persons, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin"

Bethune the idealist saw a different scenario. The problem was that defense industry employees had to complete the required defense industry training. Of course, according to Bethune, "the President's Executive Order may prove ineffective in many areas unless Negroes prepare themselves for these opportunities by taking advantage of defense training courses."¹¹⁵

By this time, the US was essentially at war, though undeclared, with Germany. Roosevelt had been escorting British ships. The first real blow came with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Initially, the US declared war on Japan. Its allies, Germany and Italy, under a tripartite defense pact, responded by declaring war on the United States. World War II was official. The nation focused on the war effort. The NYA was no different, by 1942 its entire focus was on preparing people for the US war machine.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid., letter from Bethune to Rufus Watson, dated August 29, 1942.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Folder entitled Research and Reference Materials, Memorandum of CAA Training of Negroes, dated October 28, 1940; Ibid., Folder entitled National Defense, Reports relating to Defense Program, November 30, 1940, 1-7.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Office of Production Management, Labor Division, Report for Immediate Release, dated July 11, 1941, 1-2; Ibid., Office of Production Management, Labor Division, Report for Immediate Release, dated July 1, 1941, 1-2.

¹¹⁶ Graham and Wander, 465-466, 279.

In fact, it was this determined focus on the war effort that finally brought an end to the short-lived NYA. Born in mid June, 1935, it was abolished in mid 1943, being just a few days over eight years old. Despite FDR's attempts to save the NYA, more conservative elements (and radical southerners) had their way. The monster that was the federal government trimmed what it deemed all unnecessary fat focusing only on those vital to the war effort.¹¹⁷

Yet, during those eight short years, an irreversible trend had been loosened within American society. Based upon the final NYA report, using 1930 statistics, blacks had been reduced to working in low paying, unskilled jobs (two-thirds were in agriculture and service positions) from which they were being displaced by technology and rapidly growing unemployment. If one included black farmers and tenants in 1930, then fully 95 out of 100 blacks was engaged in manual labor. Black children were forced to start working at a younger age, black adults were forced to continue working long after their white counterparts had retired. These discrepancies were especially true among black females.¹¹⁸ Applied to 1940s America, this meant that 75 percent of defense industry employees would have to be skilled laborers. Based upon the 1930 study, this left only 5 out of every 100 blacks eligible for defense industry labor. Racist attitudes would reduce the number even lower.¹¹⁹

These employment concerns, for all Americans, were the basis of many of the New Deal agencies. The parent organization of NYA, the WPA, was one of many idealistic approaches to solve the nation's depression woes. Open-mindedness on the part of leaders like FDR and the First Lady and the dedication of such people as Mary McLeod Bethune led to greater opportunity for all Americans.

As already mentioned, the Division of Negro Affairs had been created over six months before its director was appointed. During that time, it seemed lost among the great issues that it faced. It was a ship at sea who had no captain. Its members squabbled over the proper direction to take. When Bethune was appointed, the great ship that was the

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 279.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Final Report, NYA,DNA, 1943, 1-14.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

Division of Negro Affairs was captainless no more. Though she may not have had a definite plan; she had the desire to serve. In no time, the Division of Negro Affairs was forging ahead, full steam, in its attempt to integrate African Americans into the American dream. Her philosophy was simple, “Be American...do not apologize for yourself because you are colored; it isn’t how you look but what you are and how well you are prepared to meet life that counts; don’t go into the world with an inferiority complex.” With this philosophy in tow, she began to bring the Division of Negro Affairs into a productive mode.¹²⁰

Many blacks were elevated through the work of Bethune and her dedicated colleagues. Roosevelt’s less than conservative ideology helped pave the way. By the end of the NYA’s short lived existence, over two million young people had received assistance of some sort. Many black adults had learned to read and/or write. Skills were gained. From construction, to stenography, to aviation, the door was opening to black Americans. It was by no means flung wide, but it was open. It was no longer barred and locked.

For example, from the NYA’s final report, using statistics from February, 1941, in Virginia, of the 10,522 youths on employment lists, 2,811 were black. This reflects a percentage of over 26.5 percent of young blacks on NYA employment projects. In New York City and Long Island, of the 26,000 on the rolls, 4,161 or 16 percent were black. Of the eighteen southern states, 177,456 youths could be accounted for in one month. Of these, 37,173 were African American. This is just under 21 percent of the total for black youths. Clearly, with a rate of 21 percent, changes were being made in the minds of some in the racist south. Whether it was the blacks themselves exclaiming, “yes I can,” or if there was one white business owner who proclaimed, “maybe I was wrong,” the dreams and hard work of Mary McLeod Bethune had not been in vain.¹²¹

1930 statistics had been challenged and undone. The youth of America had been served well by the NYA and the Division of Negro Affairs. Their entire well being was looked after by a federal agency. Their academic education, their health, their social lives through recreation, and, their job skills were all looked after by the federal

¹²⁰ Ibid., Folder entitled Florida, newsclippings, FloridaNews, “Hundreds Hear Noted Educator at Tampa Meet.”

government. Of course, the system was nowhere near perfect. It was an awesome attempt employing imperfect people. Racist attitudes prevailed and internal conflicts hindered progress. Whites certainly benefited to a greater extent than blacks. Still, what impression had been made? A taste of what could be had been savored. Mary McLeod Bethune had dedicated her entire life to this cause. She found a national voice in FDR. Together, they and the many dedicated individuals involved set the stage for a future which would give way to greater integration.¹²²

In a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt less than a week after the NYA was terminated, Bethune reiterated this idea:

As you know, the final stroke came to us I have felt like a mother at the burial of her murdered child from that moment until now. It is hard to give NYA up. I think of the thousands of youth all over America who had no other chance but that they got through the National Youth Administration. Then I also know that the work the National Youth Administration has done these past eight years will be inerasable....We are so grateful to you and our President for your vision in establishing and maintaining this unparalleled opportunity for youth.

She realized that African Americans had a long way to go, yet she was thankful and mindful of the obstacles that had been overcome. She relayed this thought to Roosevelt in a poem with which she ended her letter and her term as Director of Negro Affairs for the NYA: “Though I am hurte [sic] I am not slaine [sic]. I’ll lay me down and bleede [sic] a while, And then I’ll rise and fight again.”¹²³

Clearly, Bethune the idealist survived the Great Depression and the New Deal. She had struggled for eight years, trying to improve conditions for the black race. She had met opposition from within the government and the citizenry. Still she fought and made real progress. She had made a real attempt and had won real goals. Bethune the realist was satisfied, Bethune the idealist was not. She truly believed she would rise and fight again.

¹²¹ Ibid., NYA, DNA Final Report, end tables.

¹²² Ibid.

CONCLUSION: THE IDEALISTIC REALIST

“Sometimes as I sit communing in my study I feel that death is not far off,” wrote Mary McLeod Bethune. “ I am aware it will overtake me before the greatest of my dreams – full equality for the Negro in our time – is realized. Yet I face that reality without tears or regret.” Perhaps this was because Bethune felt confident her labors had not been in vain; that dedicated individuals would carry her work to fruition and equality. Perhaps it was because she was a woman of faith, confident that she had not been toiling in vain. Her belief in a higher power convinced her that American democracy would, in time, include all people. Perhaps it was a combination of both. Perhaps Bethune the realist had accepted victory despite the failure of Bethune the idealist. Regardless of the reasoning behind her thinking at the end of her life, the fact remains that during the peak of her years in Washington, her work brought irreversible gains.¹²⁴

Her main interest had always been her own race, to raise black America to the same level as white America. However, she was also very aware that in some areas, particularly the south, black and white were, with the exception of racist attitudes, on a similar level. Many were uneducated, poor, and unskilled. They struggled just to survive. In this area, Mary McLeod Bethune set herself apart. She desired changes for all, not just her own race. In the NYA, she sought to extend governmental “blessings to all young people in the nation, no matter what their origin, race, or religion. It is our duty to reach out and grasp the hands of our youth and give the encouragement and guidance they need to help them on to their desired goals.” Whether they realized it or not, white as well as black, had an ally in Bethune.¹²⁵

However, in dealing with her own race, Bethune played two different roles during her Washington years. She was guard dog and attack dog, chihuahua and bulldog. In the NCNW, she and her organization were constantly snapping at the heels of society and the government, letting them know they were a real presence and would not go away until

¹²³ Eleanor Roosevelt Papers from VA Tech’s Newman Library, Blacksburg, VA, letter dated July 6, 1943, from Bethune to E. Roosevelt.

¹²⁴ Mary McLeod Bethune, *Ebony*, “My Last Will and Testament,” August, 1955, 105.

¹²⁵ Records of the NCNW, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 13, Correspondence, December, 1940.

things changed for the better; in other words, the chihuahua. In the NYA, Division of Negro Affairs, Bethune was the bulldog. She went headstrong into her battles, pulling the entirety of the available federal power her office possessed for her cause. More often than not, the two teamed up and planned concentrated attacks. In essence, Bethune the head of the NYA, Division of Negro Affairs had her own cheering/support group in the NCNW. Together they worked for democracy within the world's so-called greatest democracy. In fact, she was ever adamant that government agencies and other large private organizations not view her position and the NCNW as opponents. She was determined to make people see that the two complemented, not competed. Their goals were basically the same.¹²⁶

Bethune was well prepared for these challenges. She had been involved in black women's organizations practically her entire professional life. She had struggled to found and sustain her institute of higher learning in Florida, Bethune-Cookman. She also had the real-life experience of not only being a woman, but a black woman. And, not only was she a black woman, she was a southern black woman. She already had three strikes against her at birth. So what set her apart?

Combining inner issues such as faith with fierce determination and early experiences in women's organizations and education, it is clear that Bethune was well qualified for her years in Washington. She was well aware of conditions in the south. She knew the needs of poor southerners, black and white. She also knew very well the shortcomings of the educational system for blacks.

Though she was well qualified for the positions (official and advisory) she held, was she someone the administration would recognize as being of consequence or significance? After all, as previously mentioned, she was southern, black, and a woman. Black men were participating in governmental agencies at an unprecedented rate. However, given the sexist state of America, was it likely that a black woman be placed in a similar position (see appendix F)? More than likely, the answer would be no, but Bethune had an advantage, an ace up her sleeve. She had Eleanor Roosevelt as an ally.

The women had met by chance after Bethune's return from Europe. They quickly became more than simple acquaintances. They shared many of the same visions and

¹²⁶ Giddings, 228-29.

would become steadfast warriors for change. Still, it was probably this one fact that made her stint as an agency head possible. Of course she was knowledgeable, of course she was competent. She was more than capable of performing any job she might be given. But, she also knew the right people on the inside. This relationship was the key to her governmental placement.

Regardless, Bethune had already begun to plan an organization to give voice to her concerns when she was appointed to a governmental post. The NCNW would provide black women the nation over a forum from which they could propose change and attack what they viewed as inappropriate actions on the part of governing bodies. The NCNW was a great undertaking in the fact that support for the organization, as well as the organization itself, would have to be built from the ground up.

Bethune had been a club participant for many years and was well aware of their functions and goals; however, she wanted to carry them a step further. She saw the need for centralization. She wanted a body which would direct the numerous women's organizations into a unified powerful voice. A voice that had real power and authority due simply to the great number of individuals it represented.

The road to the creation of the NCNW was not an easy one. She had to overcome peer disapproval and uncertainty. Planning that began in 1929, would not see final results for six years. What evolved was an organization which would transmit information to constituent members and an organization which would provide the smallest of the member groups an equal voice on matters of national and international relevance to women.

The constitution of the NCNW did not stunt the aspirations of the smaller member groups, but held tenets which were very broad so as to theoretically include all constituent goals. At first, the NCNW was a central organization located in the District of Columbia. From there, it attempted to disseminate information and to organize unified efforts on behalf of its many members. This proved to be too difficult for the newly created agency. The result was a revamping of the centralized ideology initially proposed. Considering the need for an effective organization, Bethune developed a more federal form of organizational functioning. The NCNW developed Metropolitan

Councils in areas with at least five groups that claimed NCNW affiliation. Rural communities and youth organizations were also formed.

Interestingly, this reorganization of the NCNW took place while Bethune was serving as Director of the Division of Negro Affairs. It would seem that being on the inside of a federal agency was a valuable experience for Bethune. The NYA was not a highly centralized organization. It served as the center of a multi-spoked wheel. Disseminating and instigating and mediating as necessary. After experiencing the effects of such an organization, Bethune reorganized her NCNW, tossing out years of planning for a more developed mode of function.

The result was a National Council which organized its own activities and then delivered them to its constituents via the Metro and local Councils.

Their first real action as a newly structured Council was to throw their support behind the Harrison-Black Education Bill. The main goal of this bill was to have federal monies distributed equally without regard for race or color. The Council came out full force in favor of the passage of the Harrison-Black Bill. They compiled a detailed report covering the disparity southern black children faced. They then made their own list of recommendations to remedy the situation. The Council then provided copies of their report to the Education Committee and members of the legislative body. Despite their hard work and strong stance, the bill died. More conservative ideals won the day.

The NCNW fought on. In 1938 it held its historic Conference on the Participation of Negro Women and Children in Federal Programs. Again, they approached their goals professionally and concisely. They formed committees based upon the interests/special focus of the independent members. Together they prepared a moving plea to the President to continue to integrate American institutions.

Interestingly, a portion of the conference was held within the White House. In a nation where segregation was commonly practiced, the fact that a group of African American women could, at the invitation of the present inhabitant, freely enter an esteemed American monument, have the ear of the First Lady and the President, reflected a real change stirring in American society.

The stirring may not have come from the mass of white America; nevertheless, change was taking place. It was taking place at the top. Though FDR cannot be looked at as an

enlightened individual where racial issues were concerned, he can be seen as a fair individual in making available the opportunity to improve the plight of black America.

Bethune used this rare opportunity. She moved forward using her federal position and the independent NCNW. At times, it seemed that she did not distinguish between the two. Her goals were so similar that it appears she did not care which vehicle she used, just so she reached the proper destination. In the simplest of terms, Bethune had two slices of the opportunity pie, not one.

The National Council of Negro Women and the National Youth Administration, Division of Negro Affairs were on the same path. They were involved in the same conferences. They sought out the same sort of information and held the same goals for black youth and the black race as a whole. So, in essence, Bethune was not the sole director of the Division of Negro Affairs, she had the numbers and convictions of thousands of black women behind her. Together they worked for a more equal society.

Only one difference stands out as varying among the two organizations, the placement of qualified black women into high offices. As a federal employee, Bethune's job description had been spelled out for her. She had certain duties that had to be completed and certain goals that had to be pursued. And, as already stated, the NCNW supported her in these endeavors. However, the NCNW did not have such limitations. As an independent organization, it was free to pursue whatever goals its members agreed upon. At the forefront of these goals was the desire to improve the plight of black women, particularly the participation of qualified black women in the machinery of change known as the New Deal. There was no doubt that Roosevelt's policies had brought more promise to black America than any other since Reconstruction. Bethune and others realized this. They were aware that gains could be smashed with the simple change of administration, while the opportunity was available, it must be taken. Bethune was doing all she could for all of America's youth in the NYA. She would have to use the NCNW to pursue her other goal of integrating black women into positions of importance.

In fact, this was Bethune's idealistic goal for the NCNW. The Council would be the lever which elevated black women. Bethune's position and influence, along with the concern of herself and others for America's social state, would be the fulcrum on which the lever would turn. Her primary goals were to provide an entity which could keep

women apprised of issues of concern. Secondly, it would be a vehicle which women could use to make their voices heard on a national and international level.

As far as these two main goals are concerned, Bethune and the NCNW were shining successes. The goals had been achieved. The Council did serve as a disseminating agency for its member organizations and promulgated the nation and leaders with their conferences and recommendations. The hopes of the realist had been met. A national organization had been created which carried the unified voice of a million black women.

The dreams of the idealist did not fare as well. The integration of black women into the power structure failed. Bethune remained the only black woman with a prominent position in Washington. It was the belief of the NCNW that these higher positions were of definite importance. As the states were given more and more control over the programs that were administered by the NYA and similar organizations, more and more the high ideals of the agencies they represented gave way to a more local way of thinking. This meant that in a highly racist area, blacks were likely to be excluded.

The Council felt that this could be countered by having a powerful representative of the black race on the federal agency's payroll. An official visit from this person, the Council theorized, would give them a stronghold on the local level where they had once had no support. It appeared to be their idea that by having a minority in such a power position that the localities would be less apt to discriminate in carrying out their programs, especially if this person were given to surprise spot checks and carried real authority.

So, depending on how one views Bethune, the realistic view of the NCNW was a success, the idealistic side was a failure. Though Bethune would never openly admit to failure, she would not view the NCNW as a total success. She would have preferred to see the Council blossom, meeting all her goals. This same view can be seen in the National Youth Administration.

During her stint as Director of the Negro Affairs Division, she constantly complained to Aubrey Williams that enough steps were not being taken to insure blacks a proper share of the opportunity the New Deal offered. Publicly, she praised the NYA for its forward thinking and its inclusion of blacks. But again, this reflects the two sides of Bethune, idealist vs. realist.

On the most minute level, she was pleased that even one child might receive an education or skills training. This was a step forward. Bethune the realist would have been pleased with the fact that the attitudes of a few white southerners had been changed. Bethune the idealist would have seen the nation swept with social revolution. However, the former was more the truth of the matter.

Changes were taking place within society. Black adults were learning to read and write. Black students were being provided supplements to allow them to continue their education. New skills were opening up to the black race that had not previously been available to them. Over two million youths were in some way touched by Bethune and the New Deal agency she represented. Certainly great strides had been made.

These advances were nothing to scoff at. For each African American touched by the ideals of FDR, there were family members and friends who held new hope for the future. Tomorrow was not so bleak. Bethune, the brightly burning pyre of the dark days of suppression, spread sparks of hope throughout the nation. So, on her realist level, Bethune was not a failure in the NYA.

On a basic organizational level (in the NYA), Bethune was also a success, though not to the extent that she was successful in meeting the organizational goals of the NCNW. In the NCNW she wanted to provide an organization which would be a source of dissemination and would provide a voice for black womanhood. She did. In the NYA, Division of Negro Affairs she was to interpret the programs of the agency to the black population and get them involved, all-the-while interpreting the needs of black youths to the nation as whole.

As far as these issues are concerned, Bethune made attempts. She and her representatives traveled thousands of miles, held information meetings, and spoke through the press trying to reach black youths while all-the-while trying to explain their program to white America. Of course, the NYA playing field was much larger than that of the NCNW, the goals much more difficult to obtain.

In the NCNW, Bethune was, for the most part, dealing with her own race and gender. She wanted an agency which would be an information pipeline and an agency which would give black women a voice in national and international affairs. Of course, this was

no easy task. It took years of planning and lots of intraracial diplomacy, but the basic outcome she sought was obtained.

The NYA was a completely different story. She was working within the liberal New Deal of FDR, but was ever mindful of the southern, conservative, white power structure that was the real power within the national and many state governments at that time. Of course, broken down to its most simple form, Bethune and her counterparts were facing racism on an individual level. These racist individuals made up the local, state and federal governments which stood in the way of racial progress. They proved to be a far greater obstacle than any experienced in the pursuit of the NCNW.

Also, the black women that would make up the NCNW were more unified in their efforts. As the head of the NYA, Division of Negro Affairs, Bethune was facing the nation's entire black population. Some were scared to make the move. Others were discriminated against. Some seemed to fall outside the circle of help.

Though reform measures were proceeding, many people just did not seem to be participating in the programs. Whether they simply did not trust the government, whether they were being discriminated against, or whatever the reason, Bethune's goal of involving black America in the reform programs was not completely successful. She was getting the message across; there were resources available. Of those who spoke up, many admitted they were aware of programs available to them. The problem was getting the benefit of the available programs.

The job of the NYA, Division of Negro Affairs was not an easy one. It was much more complex. Still, its achievements are staggering. Millions were helped. Bethune the realist had no complaints though she was not as successful at achieving the basic goals of the NYA, Division of Negro Affairs as she had been in the NCNW. However, in looking at the NYA records, it seems that for every report of progress, Bethune has a confidential reply indicating her concern that not enough was being done. In fact, when faced with the results of certain regions, Bethune may have agreed with the idea that a young person was more apt to get skilled training by robbing a gas station and going to prison. Consequently, to Bethune the idealist, the NYA, Division of Negro Affairs, like the NCNW, was not a success.

To decide which of the two organizations was the more successful is a difficult task. She did achieve her basic goals in the NCNW. Basic goals were only partially obtained in the NYA. However, taking the complexity of the NYA into account, one would have to conclude that she was a success, though not 100 percent, in meeting the basic goals set forth by the agency. But more pointedly, as initially proposed, was she more successful in the black or the white realm?

The founding of the NCNW was not an easy task. Many obstacles had to be overcome. In the end, she overcame these obstacles. The NCNW presented a unified front. The NYA was a different story. It was embedded in the white power structure. It did not possess the mutual experience of black women. It also did not hold Bethune in such high esteem as did many of the women of the NCNW. In the NYA, she was just another official –though friendly with the President and First Lady – who had a job to do.

She had to work within the confines of her office. She had to follow certain paths and procedures. Perhaps the most difficult of all, she had to do her job within a racist nation, facing obstacles at every turn and prejudices which held her goals with contempt. In this sense, the NYA was a much more difficult task, but it also brought greater reward. The fact that two million people were aided in one form or another makes Bethune's stint in the NYA a greater success than the achievements of the NCNW. She was able to use the white power structure to achieve greater goals.

So, this made her career within the white world a more productive endeavor. Due to the vastness of the federal government, Bethune was able to make more of an impact throughout the nation. Though she may have been viewed as an outsider because of her color, the white power structure provided her with a more powerful tool than any available in black America. It provided Mary McLeod Bethune a step up; not a step up in the sense of personal betterment, but a step up in racial perception. She became a model. White America saw a black woman doing a job of enormous proportion and doing it well.

The National Council of Negro Women could not have provided this step. Though it was a great undertaking, it was still viewed by many as a black women's organization. It simply did not have the same value attached as did the federal position. The NYA was a grander stage with a larger audience. As far as influencing white America, the NYA, Division of Negro Affairs was the realm of success for Bethune.

Still, she was an effective leader in both. She unified the black women's organizations, overcoming individualism and personal animosities. She provided black women a strong voice which could not be completely ignored. In the NYA she set a precedent. She swayed the President with her powerful pleas for help and aided millions. She definitely was not a larger than life leader of a black organization and a token minority in the white structure. She was a cunning, influential leader, one who had dreams for her organizations and who fought to see that these dreams were made realities. This made her one of this nation's greatest civil rights leaders.

This is an issue which is not questioned. There is no need. Bethune's record speaks for itself. But, the record does offer hints as to another side of her: the idealistic realist. She met her basic organizational goals. She did not; however, gain placements for black women. She constantly complained that not enough was being done quickly enough for black youths. Though she said she knew that she would not see full equality for the black race during her lifetime, she claimed she viewed that fact without "tear or regret." This was the realist talking. Bethune the idealist had always claimed, "Without faith, nothing is possible, with it, nothing is impossible." She held dreams of great success; dreams she did not obtain. She had always claimed, "The drums of Africa still beat in my heart. They will not let me rest while there is a single Negro boy or girl without a chance to prove his worth." The drums were silenced before the goal was achieved. Bethune the realist could rest after a fight well fought, Bethune the idealist would lament the confines of the grave¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Halasa, 101-102.

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The desire was to look at Bethune's personal records at Bethune-Cookman College. However, the records were in use and I was denied access to them. As a result, I relied upon public documents.

APPENDIX A

1. To unite member organizations into a National Council of Negro Women.
2. To educate and encourage Negro women to participate in civic, political, and economic activities in the same manner as all other Americans participate.
3. To serve as a clearing house for the dissemination of information concerning activities of organized colored women
4. To initiate and promote, subject to the approval of member organizations, projects for the benefit of the Negro.

The membership articles reflected the same idea. They were written as broad ideas so that all member organizations were to be included:

- A. National organizations with active memberships in at least five states.
- B. National organizations with a membership limited by the specialized work of their constituencies.
- C. Individuals in sympathy with the purposes and programs of the Council may become life members by payment of \$50. Such members are entitled to attend meetings of the Council and to receive its publications, but shall not be entitled to vote.
- D. Individuals in sympathy with purposes and programs of the Council may become associate members by payment of \$2.50 annually. Such members are entitled to attend meetings of the Council and to receive its publications, but shall not be entitled to vote.

APPENDIX B

1. Of the 11,891,143 Negroes in the United States, 80% live in 15 southern school states where separate school systems are maintained.
2. In these states, the average expenditure per pupil enrolled in public schools in 1930 was \$35.42 - \$44.31 for each white pupil and \$12.57 for each Negro pupil, while the average for the United States as a whole was \$99.00.
3. The average per capita wealth in these states in 1930 was \$1785, while the Average for the U.S. outside the South was \$3609.
4. The largest state east of the Mississippi River with over a million Negroes comprising one-third of the school population, spent during 1931-32 on the white children more than six times as much of the public funds for the salaries of teachers, ten times as much for school equipment, ten times as much for health services, thirty times as much for luncheon for the underfed and a hundred times as much for the transportation of pupils.
5. So well established is the practice of disproportionate or unequal expenditures of state funds for the education of Negro and white children in southern states like Georgia that when federal funds were made available through the CWA and the FERA for the improvement of school property in that state, expenditures of the federal funds were made according to the same disproportionate pattern which had been customarily practiced. The facts indicate that under the CWA in Georgia 86.1% of the federal money spent for repairs and additions to buildings and work on school grounds was spent for whites and only 13.9% was spent on these purposes for Negroes; and under the FERA 94.7% of the federal funds spent for these educational purposes in the states was spent for whites and only 5.3% for Negroes. Notwithstanding the appalling inequality of educational equipment which already existed between the races and the lamentable conditions of school buildings, grounds, and equipment for Negroes compared with those for whites, Negroes were given a pitiable small share of these federal funds.

Taking these facts into consideration, the National Council of Negro Women made the following recommendations to the Senate committee:

- A. that no public school in the state or territory shall be maintained for less than one hundred and sixty days, closings due to epidemics, fires, and acts of God excepted;
- B. that wherever separate schools are maintained in a state or territory under authority of law, no state or territory shall receive any part of the apportionment under the bill for any year unless during the school year preceding the year for which such apportionment is made it has expended from state or territorial or local revenues, through state or territorial or local units combined, a sum of money for the white and Negro schools respectively not less than the amoing [sic][amount] on them as separate educational divisions during the school year ending in 1934;
- C. that wherever separate schools are maintained in a state or territory under authority of law, the monies apportioned to the state or territory under the bill shall be divided and expended for white and Negro schools respectively in the proportions that the white and Negro children, aged five to twenty years, inclusive, bear to the total population of the state or territory, aged five to twenty years, inclusive;
- D. that the chief educational authority designated to represent the state or territory shall annually, within six months after the close of the fiscal year in such state or territory, prepare, and within thirty days thereafter shall file with the Unites States Commissioner of Education a report which shall include: (1) an audit of the funds apportioned to the state or territory, showing the manner of distributing the same, and the work and improvements accomplished thereby; (2) a report showing the number of days in which each public elementary and high school was open during the school year next preceding the date of the report; (3) an audit of the state or territorial or local revenues expended through state or territorial and local units combined, during the school year next preceding the date of the report, showing the distribution between white and Negro school, where separate schools are maintained under authority of law;
- E. that if the United States Commissioner of Education finds that the apportionment made to a state or territory for the current fiscal year is not being expended for educational purposes or that the state or territory has violated provisions of the bill as regards the length of school term or the distribution of school funds, he shall

give notice of these facts the chief educational authority and to the governor of such state or territory. If, after being so notified, a state or territory continues in such failure or violation, the United States Commissioner of Education shall report thereon at once to the Secretary of the Interior, who shall be authorized and directed to withhold all payments to the state or territory until the terms and conditions of the bill have been complied with.

APPENDIX C

The program was designed around eight tenants that were derived from the National Conference on Fundamental Problems in the Education of Negroes that was held in mid 1934:

1. Of the 11,891,143 Negroes in the United States, 80% live in fifteen southern states where separate school systems are maintained.
2. The average per capita wealth in these states in 1930 was \$1785, while the average for the U.S. outside the south was \$3609.
3. Of the tax collections expended for schools, the average of southern states was 41.3%, while the average for the U.S. as a whole was 40.2%
4. In the southern states, the average expenditure per pupil enrolled in 1930 was \$35.42 – \$44.31 for each white pupil and \$12.57 for each Negro pupil, while the average for the U.S. as a whole was \$99.00.
5. The percentage of funds expended for Negro pupils is in inverse proportion to the percentage of Negro population, for example, in Oklahoma, Negroes constitute 7.2% of the total population and received, in 1930, 5.6% of the school funds. In Mississippi, where Negroes make up 50.2% of the total population, they received only 10.0% of the school funds.
6. In many cases, the expenditure of “Equalization Funds” has increased the inequality instead of reducing it.
7. Eleven southern states spent a total of \$240,150,180 or \$35.42 per pupil enrolled in 1930. It would have required an additional \$431,171,266 to have brought the average expenditure for white and colored pupils of these eleven states up to the average of the United States which was \$99. The eleven states spent \$23,461,959 on Negro public schools, which was \$12.57 per pupil enrolled. It would have required an additional expenditure of \$39, 688, 052 to have brought the expenditure per Negro child up to the average expenditure per white child in these eleven states.

Public school property in fifteen southern states was valued at \$1,086,942,000 in 1930. This represents an investment of \$123 per pupil enroll, white and Negro. It

would have required an expenditure of \$1,000,000,000 more to have brought the per pupil value up to \$242 which was the average for the United States. The value of Negro public school property was \$72,000,000, an investment of \$37 per pupil enrolled. It would have required an additional expenditure of \$240,000,000 to have brought the investment up to \$157 which was the value for each white child enrolled.

APPENDIX D

1. It should be understood that any meeting or conference of the executives or administrators affecting policies involving the activities of the Division of Negro Affairs should be open to a representative of this office.
2. Because of the special problems involved, it is highly advisable that all correspondence pertaining to the Negro participation in this program will be handled directly by this office in cooperation with the approval of the Deputy Executive Director.
3. Complaints should be referred direct [sic] to the office of the Negro Division and it should be the job of the Director to investigate and take up these complaints with the head of the proper agency.
4. Due to the extensive scope of work and importance of educating Negroes in the character of the program it will be necessary for the Director and Administrative Assistant to travel and to have ready access to travel authorization upon the approval of the Deputy Executive Director.

With these goals in mind, the NYA defined the Director's duties in nine broad statements:

1. Should be able to bring to the personal attention of the responsible officers the problems confronting Negroes as they relate to this Administration.
2. Should be responsible for reviewing complaints and seeing that they are properly followed through.
3. Should devise new programs and new ideas – be able to sift from the ideas that come in those that will best suit the needs of the Negro group for a well-rounded program and will fit smoothly into the national picture.
4. Should be able to interpret at all times to the Negroes themselves and to the Administration, the work of the Youth Administration as it affects the Negro group.
5. Should have sufficient data compiled in order to give a picture of the program to the public at any time.

6. Should be able to bring occasionally to the Administration those persons and those ideas among Negroes which relate to the program, also should interpret Negro reaction to the program of the NYA.
7. Should coordinate the work of the NYA with the work of other government departments so that the work dovetails as well as possible, one with the other.
8. Should act as Advisor to the Negro State Administrative Assistants and the Negro members of the Advisory Committees as to methods of integration of the Negro and as to their participation in the program.
9. Should be responsible for the representation of the Youth Administration with the approval of the Deputy Executive Director, at meetings and conferences of Negro organizations and agencies which would be beneficial to the advancement of the youth program.

Taking these restrictions into account, The NYA divided the Director's time into four categories:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Field Work and Investigation | 35% |
| 2. Advisory | 35% |
| 3. Creative | 20% |
| 4. Correspondence | 10% |

Field work and Investigation were broken down accordingly:

- (a) By observation in the field to keep in close touch with the details of the NYA program for Negroes
- (b) To discover effective projects and techniques as well as the special difficulties and obstacles to be overcome.
- (c) To investigate complaints as to the operation of the NYA programs among Negroes and to refer them to the Deputy Executive Director and to the heads of the several divisions with recommendations for adjustment.

- (d) To recommend to the Deputy Executive Director the appointment of Negro State Advisory Assistants, regional or District Supervisors and project supervisors wherever the need exists.
- (e) To supervise the Negro State Administrative Assistants, project Supervisors, etc.
- (f) To contact Negro members of State Advisory Committees.
- (g) To make whatever other contacts deemed necessary (1) to keep highly sensitive to the needs of Negro youth; (2) to know intimately the extent of the operations of the NYA program in meeting the needs; (3) to keep those responsible for formulating policies of the NYA informed as to the necessary adaptations of the program to meet the needs of the Negro youth.

Advisory was interpreted as follows:

- (a) To interpret program of the NYA and the Negro people of the Nation.
- (b) To interpret the needs of the Negro youth to the NYA.
- (c) To advise the Deputy Executive Director and the heads of the several Divisions as to the effectiveness of their programs among Negro youth.
- (d) To act as an advisor in the field, to the Negro State Administrative Assistants and the Negro members of the State Advisory Committees as to the effective integration and participation of Negroes in the program of the NYA.
- (e) To represent the NYA at meetings and conferences of Negro organizations and agencies which could be beneficial to the advancement of the NYA program among Negroes.
- (f) To coordinate the work of the NYA with the work of other Government and outside agencies so that the needs of the Negro youth are most effectively and efficiently met.

Creative:

- (a) In the light of special needs and difficulties of Negro youth to devise any ideas, projects and techniques to extend the advantages of the NYA program to the Negro youth of the Nation.

Under correspondence:

- (a) Through the office of the Deputy Executive Director to contact the State Director in the interest of full participation of Negroes in the NYA program.
- (b) To contact the Negro State Administrative Assistants, Project Supervisors and Negro members of the State Advisory Committees.
- (c) To receive complaints arising from the operation of the program of the NYA among Negro youth and, after investigation, to report them to the Deputy Executive Director and to the heads of the several divisions with recommendations for adjustment.
- (d) To conduct such other correspondence as will be conducive to the full integration and participation of Negroes in the program of the NYA.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Records of the National Youth Administration (NYA), Division of Negro Affairs(DNA), Duties of the Director, Division of Negro Affairs, Relation of the Division of Negro Affairs to the General Program of the National Youth Administration, 1-3., Duties of the Director, Division of Negro Affairs, 1-3.

APPENDIX E

1. The general projects for Negroes have been far too meager.
2. In too many places we have had serious difficulties in getting Negro youth certified.
3. There is a great dearth of social workers among Negroes.
4. Negro youth have practically no part in the program of the Apprenticeship Training.
5. The Resident Training Projects hold real promise for Negro youth, providing their program is sufficiently elastic.
6. Very few states show adequate participation of the Negroes in administrative, supervisory or clerical employment.
7. Negro youth as yet have little share in the Vocational Guidance Program, either in counseling or placement activities, outside of the states of Georgia, Illinois and North Carolina.
8. Work projects are too often poorly organized and supervised, however, great improvement is being made in providing equitable consideration for Negro youth in most of the states.
9. The health program is weak among Negro youths.

As far as special projects were concerned:

1. NYA should promote a few, definite, well organized outstanding projects for Negroes in key cities of the nation, including something permanent and imposing in the way of construction and facilities. Negroes have had so little, therefore we have a long way to go in just partially meeting their needs.
2. In a number of salient cities, real effective and attractive youth centers need to be built and set up, offering facilities for recreation, guidance, et cetera.
3. The building of a Little Theatre and Art Center, certainly in the District of Columbia, would be a fine thing. There is much talented leadership here – Negroes are barred from the few legitimate theatres; Negroes admittedly have

a flair for the stage and other artistic expression. The building of an imposing and beautiful art center for Negroes here could offer facilities for a Little Theatre, for music and choral groups, for painting, for display of African art, etc. NYA and WPA could cooperate in such a project.

4. NYA should foster, and gain the cooperation of WPA for the setting up of a curative mecca for crippled Negro children similar to the nationally famous Warm Springs Foundation from which Negroes are barred.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Ibid., Letter from Bethune to Aubrey Williams on Negro Participation in the NYA, dated June 10, 1938.

APPENDIX F

The 1938 unofficial Black Cabinet:

Mary McLeod Bethune

National Youth Administration

Edgar Brown

Civilian Conservation Corp

Dr. Roscoe C. Brown

Public Health Service

Dr. Ambrose Caliver

Department of the Interior

Joseph H. Evans

Farm Security Administration

Charles E. Hall

Department of Commerce

William H. Hastie

Department of the Interior

Dr. Frank Horne

Housing Authority

Joseph R. Houchins

Department of Commerce

William I. Houston

Department of Justice

Henry A. Hunt

Farm Credit Administration

Dewey R. Jones

Department of the Interior

Eugene Kinckle Jones

Department of Commerce

Edward H. Lawson, Jr.

Works Progress Administration

Ralph E. Mizelle

Post Office

Lawrence A. Oxley

Department of Labor

J. Parker Prescott

Housing Authority

Alfred Edgar Smith

Works Progress Administration

William J. Trent

Federal Works Agency

Dr. William J. Thompkins

Recorder of Deeds

Dr. Robert C. Weaver

Housing Authority

Arthur Weiseger

Department of Labor

John W. Witten

Works Progress Administration

* *Note, Bethune is the only female in the unofficial Black Cabinet.*¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Charles M. Christian, Black Saga: The African American Experience (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 355.

VITA

R. Brian Wright is a native Virginian. Left in a single parent family due to the Vietnam War, Brian flourished under the care of his mother and grandmother. His mother encouraged his educational interests while his grandmother shared her love of books. He graduated high school one year early. Received a BA in History, Summa Cum Laude, then entered Virginia Tech to pursue an MA in History. At some point he would like to attempt a Ph.D. Until that time, he will remain dedicated to his family while sharing his love of the past at the community college level.