

# LP-MAJC-1

## AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN EDUCATION

*Ellen Bagby*

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**Properties:** President's Home of Harbison College (Abbeville)  
(Attended by Jane Edna Hunter)  
African American School Site (Anderson)  
(Attended by Jane Edna Hunter)  
Voorhees College Historic District (Bamberg)  
(Founded by Elizabeth Evelyn Wright)  
Birthplace of Mary McLeod Bethune (Sumter)

**Properties not listed:** Woodburn Plantation (Anderson)  
Mayesville (Sumter)

**Standard Indicators:** 8-4.4; USHC-5.7

**Literacy Elements:** B, E, O, P

### Essential Questions

1. How did African American women influence education post-reconstruction and during the Jim Crow era?
2. Where were the sites of emerging education that African American women influenced or founded?

### Historic Content

In ten short years from 1872 to 1882 three southern women were born who would help to form social networks and enact social reform to make education an attainable goal. Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, Mary McLeod Bethune and Jane Edna Hunter were African American women who participated in the transformation from slavery to the classroom. Life was difficult in the aftermath of the Civil War and the beginnings of an approaching industrial era. Poverty, illiteracy and exploitation were the norm for African Americans. These women knew it was through education that freedom would truly be attained.

Elizabeth Evelyn Wright was born on April 3, 1872 in Talbotton, Georgia. She was one of twenty-one children growing up in the rural South reeling with poverty and with little means of supporting oneself. At age fourteen she found an advertisement urging poor African Americans to enroll in Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. She went to Tuskegee and graduated in 1894. She promised herself she would found a school much like her mentor, Booker T. Washington, had done at Tuskegee. Following her dream, Elizabeth bought land in South Carolina and opened Denmark Industrial School on April 14, 1897. Its humble beginnings with fourteen students grew when Ralph Voorhees, a blind philanthropist from New Jersey, and his wife, Elizabeth, donated money to the school, which was later renamed in the Voorhees' honor. The name changed once again in the 1940s and lastly in the 1960s to Voorhees College. Unfortunately, Elizabeth Wright died at the early age of 34 in 1908.

Mary McLeod Bethune (d. 1955) was born on July 10, 1875 in Mayesville, South Carolina. She was one of seventeen children whose parents had been former slaves. She entered Presbyterian Mission School in Mayesville when she was eleven years old. In 1893 she graduated from Scotia Seminary, a school for African American girls in Concord, North Carolina and then Moody Bible Institute. Her role as an educator took her to Daytona Beach, Florida where she opened Daytona Literacy School for Training Negro Girls in 1904 with six students. In 1912 she gained considerable financial help from James Gamble of Proctor and Gamble. In 1923 Bethune's school merged with Cookman Institute of Jacksonville, Florida, which was a school for boys, and Bethune-Cookman College was born.

Jane Edna Hunter (d. 1971) was born on December 13, 1892 on Woodburn Farm near Pendleton, South Carolina. In 1896, at the age of 14, she attended a boarding school on the campus of Ferguson and Williams College (renamed Harbison College in 1898) in Abbeville, South Carolina. Jane relocated to Charleston, South Carolina for work after an unhappy marriage to Edward Hunter, where she entered Cannon Street Hospital and Training School for Nurses with the help of friends. In 1904 she completed advanced training at Dixie Hospital and Training School and at Hampton Institute in Virginia. Jane moved to Cleveland, Ohio to seek employment and felt firsthand the difficulties of an African American woman in a large city. With the help of friends she founded the Working Girls' Home Association where unemployed women could find shelter, resources, and education. By 1912 the home was expanded and known as the Phillis Wheatley Association. In 1925 Jane passed the Ohio bar examination having graduated from Baldwin-Wallace Law School in Cleveland. Her autobiography, *A Nickel and A Prayer*, tells of her struggles and was published in 1940. She went on to found the Women's Civic League in 1943.

### Sources Needed

#### **Primary Sources (in addition to the historic sites)**

Bethune, Mary McLeod to Booker T. Washington. 3 November 1902 in *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World*, eds. Audrey T. McCluskey and Elaine M. Smith. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Hunter, Jane Edna. *A Nickel and a Prayer*. Cleveland, OH: Elli Kani Publishing Co., 1940.

#### **Secondary Sources**

Barton, Rebecca C. *Witnesses For Freedom*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1948.

Blight, David W. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Bodie, Idella. *South Carolina Women*. Orangeburg, SC: Sandlapper Publishing, Inc., 1978.

Jones, Adrienne Lash. *Jane Edna Hunter: A Case Study of Black Leadership, 1910-1950*. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1990.

Jeffries, Dr. Leonard, Jr. "The African Americans Search for Truth and Knowledge: African American Educators and Their Sacred Mission," <http://africawithin.com/jeffries/aapart29.htm> (accessed 9 January 2008).

Peterson, Carla. "Lifting as We Climb: African American Women and Social Activism: 1880-1920," in Beth Savage, ed., *African American Historic Places*. Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1994.

South Carolina Department of Archives and History. "African American Historic Places in South Carolina." Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 2007.

South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, "Harbison College President's Home, Abbeville County, South Carolina," National Register of Historic Places nomination, [www.nationalregister.sc.gov/abbeville/S10817701010/index.htm](http://www.nationalregister.sc.gov/abbeville/S10817701010/index.htm).

\_\_\_\_\_. "Voorhees College Historic District, Orangeburg, South Carolina," National Register of Historic Places nomination, [www.nationalregister.sc.gov/bamberg/S10817705009/index.htm](http://www.nationalregister.sc.gov/bamberg/S10817705009/index.htm).

## Lesson Procedures

1. Have students imagine that they are someone like Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, Mary McLeod Bethune, or Jane Edna Hunter growing up African American in South Carolina between the years 1877 and 1900. Have them make a plan for their future. They need to be specific as to how they would get an education.
2. Discuss where African Americans might turn to get an education (churches, communities, missionaries, Northerners) between the years 1877 to 1900.
3. Have students write a chronological sketch of Jane Edna Hunter, Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, and Mary McLeod Bethune and tell how these women furthered education.

## Assessment Ideas

1. Students write letters to one of the women studied asking for advice in furthering their education. Other students would answer their letters.
2. Students write obituaries for Jane Edna Hunter, Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, and Mary McLeod Bethune.

## Lesson Activities

1. Locate places where African Americans received an education between the years 1865 and 1945.
2. Visit a historically black college or university in South Carolina and learn its history.
3. Create a South Carolina map showing where African Americans might turn for educational opportunities.
4. Visit one of the three sites associated with Jane Edna Hunter, Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, or Mary McLeod Bethune.