



1-1-1988

Editorial

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Recommended Citation

Butler, Anne (1988) "Editorial," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 15: No. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1607>

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Editorial

This issue of **Educational Consideration** evolved from the first Mary McCleod Bethune Institute held at Kansas State University during the spring of 1987. Funded through a grant from the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA), entitled "Improving the Academic Performance and Persistence Rate of Black Females K-12," the Institute, one of the first of its kind, focused on the interaction of race and gender as issues related to schooling and education.

A discussion about the Institute and about this issue would be incomplete, however, without recalling the significant contributions made by Bethune to the education of Black Americans, especially Black females.

Historians remind us that Bethune was a major figure in Black American history. Born in 1875, she is said to have developed a special insight into the everyday problems of the average Black youth while growing up in South Carolina. As a young woman, she first pursued studies for missionary work, but later switched to teaching. In 1904, with little more than a dollar in her pocket, Bethune purchased a plot of land and founded the Daytona Normal and Industrial school for Black females. In later years, Bethune established what is now known as the Bethune-Cookman College, the result of a merger between her school for females with Cookman Institute for males.

It is recorded, also, that Bethune was one of the leading figures (and the only woman) in the unofficial "Black Cabinet" that led the early fight for integration in the 1930s, a movement that targeted the federal government. First, President Hoover and then President Roosevelt appointed her to key positions during their respective administrations. She molded these positions into ones that would help further the nation's efforts in the education of Black Americans.

Bethune died in 1955, at the age of 80, but not before writing a powerful last will and final testament for those she was leaving behind. The legacy, inscribed on her memorial in Washington's Lincoln Park, reads in part:

"I leave you love, I leave you hope. I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another. I leave you the thirst for education. I leave you respect for the use of power. I leave you faith. I leave you racial dignity. . . ." (Mary M. Bethune)

As conveners of the Institute on Race and Gender in Education, the WEEA staff could think of no other figure more deserving for recognition than Bethune.

We note, too, that more than 30 years after her death the type of dedication to excellence and equity in education for which she worked so diligently is still quite necessary. For, while issues of race, gender and class have received much attention during the past 30 years, much work remains to be done. Legislation has been successful in tearing down structural barriers to access in educational institutions, but has not removed all the vestiges of attitudinal barriers. Such barriers have proven to be formidable to women and minorities in pursuit of equitable educational outcomes.

This issue addresses many of those barriers at every stage of education. Articles here focus on research findings and issues relevant to the creation of nonracist and nonsexist learning and employment environments. It is hoped that this issue will renew the vigor and energy needed to keep the educational experiences of minorities and females in the forefront of every major educational reform agenda of the future.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the support and assistance of several people who made this issue possible: Iris Riggs, Dr. Nancy Smith, Marjorie Williams, and Pamela Vann-McNeely, of the WEEA staff. Additionally, the support of Kay Garrett, Suzie Wisdom, Kim Fouts, and Lisa Rothel was invaluable in bringing this special issue to fruition.

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Guest Editor

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