

SEGREGATION AND THE POLITICS OF RACE:
MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE AND THE NATIONAL YOUTH ADMINISTRATION
1935-1943

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Ben Hall

1996

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Professor Richard B. Sherman, under whom this work was begun, and Professor Cindy Hahamovitch, under whose patient guidance and criticism it was completed. I also wish to thank Professors Cam Walker and Melvin Ely for their careful reading and criticism of the manuscript, and my wife Katie DeYulia, who read and critiqued each draft of this work as I revised it.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the ways in which Mary McLeod Bethune, as Director of Negro Affairs for the National Youth Administration, used a strategy of voluntary segregation in order to maximize the participation of African-Americans in the NYA's youth programs, its administration, and in government service in general.

Drawing on her experience as a black southern educator, Bethune also made crucial alliances with influential white figures such as Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt to secure her status as one of the nation's most notable and influential black spokeswomen during the Great Depression.

Throughout her tenure with the National Youth Administration, Bethune's promotion of segregation was a pragmatic strategy, aimed at reaching her ultimate goal of full civil and social equality for all African-Americans in an integrated society.

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In 1935, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People recognized Mary McLeod Bethune's achievements as a black southern educator, clubwoman, and civil rights activist by naming her the twenty-first Spingarn medalist, making her the second woman to receive the award. Named for white Columbia University professor Joel E. Spingarn, who originated the idea while a member of the NAACP board of directors, the medal was awarded annually for the "highest and noblest achievement by an American Negro."¹ In her acceptance speech, Bethune said, "If I have merited the honor of receiving the Spingarn Medal, it is because my life has been dedicated to the task of breaking the bars to brotherhood." She noted, however, that "brotherhood depends upon and follows achievement." Achievement, she told her audience of sympathetic whites and African-American dignitaries, required extending the "educational advantages" of the black elite to "the lowest strata of the masses; that mass that is waiting for you and me to administer the human touch." It was also essential, she told them, that blacks act as spokesmen and women for their race, spreading the truth about African-American

achievement and the barriers to it.²

That same evening Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Josephine Roche, a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt and chairman of the executive committee of the National Youth Administration, approached Bethune about serving on the NYA's advisory board. The NYA, Roche explained, was a new government program devised to deal with the problems facing American young people during the Depression.³ Bethune was already a well-known figure in education and in the black women's club movement, and this encounter marked the beginning of her emergence as nationally-recognized African-American political figure. Working with liberal whites and other African-Americans, Bethune set out to promote African-American achievement, break the barriers to brotherhood, and "administer the human touch" from Washington.

From her position in the National Youth Administration, Bethune pursued a policy of voluntary segregation within the NYA. Having grown up during the climax of Booker T. Washington's career and under the influence of his ideas, Bethune had built her own reputation as a black conservative. She was willing to accept and even expand segregation on NYA projects, but for her this was a way of challenging relief discrimination rather than accommodating to it. Voluntary segregation in the NYA also meant that African-Americans could play a larger part in the administration of the NYA and its segregated projects.

Taking advantage of Roosevelt's appointment of black advisors to various government departments and programs, Bethune also organized the all-black Federal Council on Negro Affairs to lobby the administration on behalf of America's 13,000,000 black citizens.

Bethune's use of voluntary segregation arose primarily as a strategy to deal with the dire economic and social effects of the Depression on African-Americans. She was not an intellectual or an ideologue. Above all, Bethune was an organizer, spokesperson, and consensus-builder who tended to straddle the major ideological debates of her time. She believed quite strongly in Washington's ideas about self-help and the value of industrial education for African-Americans. She also saw the need for W.E.B. Du Bois's college-educated black leadership. She practiced both accommodation with whites and protest against discrimination. Bethune's advocacy of voluntary segregation during the 1930s also coincided with W.E.B. Du Bois's shift from promoting integration to calling for a self-sustaining black "nation within the nation."⁴ Though she grew more impatient with white intransigence during World War II, Bethune was not hostile toward whites, nor did her acceptance of segregation during the New Deal assume a need for any permanent separation of the races. In fact, Bethune's ultimate goal, though she did not live to see it achieved, was a racially integrated American society. For

her, voluntary segregation was a pragmatic means of dealing with the particular problems facing African-Americans during the Depression.

In their assessments of the black experience in the National Youth Administration and the New Deal, historians have analyzed Bethune's acceptance of segregation within the NYA in primarily negative terms. Joyce B. Ross, Elaine Smith, and Paula Giddings share the view that, while Bethune made more of her symbolic position at the NYA than Roosevelt intended, her support of a separate but equal program for African-Americans achieved very little, and according to Giddings, may have done more harm than good to black civil rights by not challenging segregation. Giddings also links Bethune's support of voluntary segregation with Du Bois's depression-era shift toward separatism. Harvard Sitkoff and Susan Ware argue that Bethune's greatest success was simply to make herself a visible symbol of African-American potential for participation in mainstream white society.

Bethune's leadership in the NYA, in the black cabinet, and in the larger African-American community as a national spokesperson was less an indication of her accepting discrimination than a proactive strategy for advancing black concerns during a time of crisis in American history. She also provides a visible bridge between the accommodationism of Booker T. Washington and the separatism of Du Bois. For Du Bois, separatism and voluntary segregation were

ideological solutions born of frustration with white liberals and socialists, while Bethune worked within the context of a large government program administered and protected by white liberals. Unlike Du Bois, Bethune managed to pursue voluntary segregation within the NYA without alienating her contacts in the NAACP and the interracial movement at the same time Du Bois was forced to sever his ties with the NAACP.⁵

Bethune's strategy also serves as a link to groups like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee or even the present-day self-segregation among African-Americans on college campuses. The major difference between Washington, Bethune, and for instance, Stokely Carmichael, was the racial and political environment in which they lived. Certainly all three faced different obstacles, but their use of voluntary segregation rested on the central assumption that, faced with white hostility and scant government support for civil rights, only an all-black environment could provide blacks the opportunity to develop and exercise leadership and gain a sense of self-worth and pride. These were the same factors, according to August Meier, which influenced Booker T. Washington's ideas about self-help and racial solidarity.⁶

For millions of young black men and women, such opportunities were scarce and the Depression made their already uncertain future seem completely desolate. What

meager employment opportunities existed before 1929 disappeared as whites and adult African-Americans filled the jobs traditionally held by young people. For both white and black youth, college, careers, homes, and families suddenly seemed unreachable goals. Experts began to worry about a possible "lost generation," or worse that the children of the Depression might become "social dynamite," susceptible to the spark of socialist or fascist influence.⁷ NYA surveys revealed that 57 percent of African-American youth in the NYA had left school for economic reasons, compared with 44 percent of white youth. Unemployment figures for 1937 suggest that roughly 35 percent of African-Americans in the labor force between the ages of 15 and 24 were unemployed, compared with 29 percent of white youth. African-Americans also tended to enter the work force at an earlier age, often quitting school to do so, and they remained in the work force longer, suggesting that unemployment was an even more serious crisis for black youth. Compounding this problem was the fact that widespread poverty and unemployment among African-Americans as a whole left them even less able to combat discrimination or to demand relief from local and state resources.⁸

During his first administration, President Franklin Roosevelt had not paid particular attention to African-Americans' plight. He preferred to let the First Lady serve as his link to the African-American community. The

President was responsive to political pressure, but African-Americans were still relatively weak as a political constituency, though their influence was growing. Roosevelt saw civil rights as a social rather than an economic issue, and during his first term economic recovery was his primary concern.⁹ More importantly, Roosevelt had relied heavily on Southern Democratic support for the presidential nomination in 1932, and he needed the votes of southern legislators to pass much of his New Deal legislation. The few liberal Democrats in the South were far too weak politically to challenge the racial conservatives so Roosevelt preferred the relative safety of the status quo.¹⁰

Despite Roosevelt's reputation for radically expanding and centralizing federal power, most of the New Deal relief programs reflected the President's respect for state and local rights and his fear of uncontrolled bureaucracy. Cities and states exercised a great deal of control over who was eligible for relief and how much they received. The result, in both the North and South, was that African-Americans were poorly served by most New Deal programs.¹¹ Federal Emergency Relief Administration director Harry Hopkins, though he specifically banned discrimination, allowed lower wage rates for African-Americans and allowed many state and local administrators to suspend relief entirely or discharge African-Americans in response to demands from southern planters for cheap seasonal farm

labor. Local Civilian Conservation Corps committees regularly gave employment preference to whites, despite higher unemployment among African-Americans. African-Americans were largely unrepresented on local committees responsible for administering the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, whose crop reduction program led to widespread eviction of black tenant farmers.¹²

As he approached the end of his first term, however, Roosevelt began to build a new electoral coalition, which included not only his traditional Democratic supporters in the North and South, but also black voters, whom he courted with a series of largely symbolic gestures. Responding to pressure from African-American groups and liberal New Dealers like Harry Hopkins, Harold Ickes, and Eleanor Roosevelt, the President began appointing "negro advisors" to some of the existing relief programs.¹³ At the 1936 Democratic National Convention, Roosevelt invited African-American reporters to sit in the regular press box for the first time; he had a black minister give the invocation; and he had an African-American give the seconding speech in support of his renomination. These gestures were heartening to many African-Americans, including Mary McLeod Bethune, who began to look to the President for a more meaningful commitment to civil rights.¹⁴

The National Youth Administration was a unique factor in the Roosevelt administration's appeal to blacks because

it combined the most influential of the African-American advisors, one of the most liberal white administrators, and the personal involvement of Eleanor Roosevelt. The NYA adopted several FERA programs designed to aid the young people not eligible to work in the Civilian Conservation Corps. For young men and women between sixteen and twenty-four, the FERA established a college aid program, summer camps for women, and an apprenticeship training program.¹⁵ When the Works Progress Administration replaced the FERA in April 1935, the youth programs went with it, but plans were soon made for a separate youth agency within the WPA. There were two basic proposals for a federal youth relief program on the President's desk in the spring of 1935. The first, proposed by Katherine Lenroot of the Department of Labor, and supported by Eleanor Roosevelt, would have continued and expanded the FERA programs. The second, suggested by Commissioner of Education John Studebaker, called for similar programs under the supervision and control of educators rather than relief experts. Roosevelt sent both proposals to a "brain trust" for the new organization, which was led by Charles Taussig of the American Molasses Company, and included Mrs. Roosevelt, Owen Young of General Electric, and David Sarnoff of RCA. The program that emerged leaned toward the Lenroot plan, and went on to Harry Hopkins, who worked with his deputy Aubrey Williams to finalize the details. No African-Americans were involved in these early

planning stages. On June 26, 1935, the day after Bethune received the Spingarn Medal, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 7086, which created the National Youth Administration.¹⁶

Aubrey Williams had worked for Hopkins at the FERA and was deputy director of the new WPA as well as director of the NYA. Williams was an unconventional white southerner from Alabama, whose sympathy for African-Americans arose primarily from his religious beliefs. Williams went on to theology school, but dropped out in 1916 and worked briefly for the YMCA before joining the French Foreign Legion during World War I. He earned a degree in Philosophy at the University of Bordeaux and returned to the United States where he began his career in social work as the director of the Wisconsin Conference of Social Work from 1922 until 1934. Williams then joined the influx of academics and social workers who moved to Washington to be a part of the New Deal, and he and Hopkins became close friends who shared a concern for the conditions facing African-Americans during the depression. Hopkins considered Williams the natural choice for director when the NYA was established in 1935.¹⁷ Williams divided his time between the NYA and his duties as Harry Hopkins's deputy at the WPA. As Hopkins became more of a political advisor to Roosevelt, he left his relief responsibilities to Williams, who in turn left his NYA duties to NYA deputy director Richard R. Brown, a former

Colorado public school teacher. Brown was an effective administrator and was primarily responsible for successfully getting the NYA programs underway by 1937. Williams made broad policy decisions, dealt with the press, and handled crises, but Brown had complete control of daily operations until Williams came to the NYA full-time in 1938.¹⁸

After meeting Bethune at the NAACP Conference, Josephine Roche suggested to Eleanor Roosevelt that Bethune be appointed to the NYA advisory committee as an African-American representative. Mrs. Roosevelt spoke with WPA director Harry Hopkins, who appointed Bethune to the committee along with Howard University president Mordecai Johnson. This would prove to be the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship between Bethune and Eleanor Roosevelt, who already knew each other, though Bethune remained an outsider to the network of white female reformers that centered around Mrs. Roosevelt. Aside from the deep friendship they formed, Bethune benefited from Roosevelt's contacts and support while Roosevelt relied on Bethune for her knowledge of the African-American community and for information about racial issues.¹⁹

Bethune's talent for networking with influential whites was the product of a lifetime of experiences. She was born on July 10, 1875, in Mayesville, South Carolina, the fifteenth of Samuel and Patsy McLeod's seventeen children. Mary was the first to be born after the abolition of slavery

and one of the first to receive an education, initially through a black Presbyterian missionary and then through scholarships provided by a white Quaker teacher. Like many other prominent African-American women of her day, Bethune trained as a educator, though her dream was to travel to Africa as a missionary. Unable to fulfill that dream, she founded the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute in 1904, a school for African-American girls which would eventually become Bethune-Cookman College, a four-year, coeducational school. In Daytona, Bethune found support for her school from both the black and white communities. The black community often supplied labor on building projects, but it was from whites like the wealthy women of Daytona's Palmetto Club and businessmen like James Gamble of Proctor and Gamble that Bethune received her earliest monetary support. These were primarily northerners who summered in Florida and provided Bethune with contacts throughout the North, especially in New York. In fact, it was during a Bethune-Cookman fund-raising campaign in New York in 1927 sponsored by Franklin Roosevelt's mother Sara that Bethune was introduced to Eleanor Roosevelt. Bethune's other philanthropic contributors included the Rosenwald Fund, the Slater Fund, and the Presbyterian Church.²⁰

While she was making friends among white philanthropists, Bethune was also becoming a leader within the African-American community through the black women's

club movement. Bethune attended a meeting of the National Association of Colored Women for the first time in 1909, in part to make an appeal for financial assistance for her school. By 1924, however, Bethune had become president of the organization, defeating Ida Wells-Barnett. Under Bethune's leadership, the NACW pushed for a federal anti-lynching bill, developed programs to help female agricultural and industrial workers, expressed concern for the status of African and Caribbean women, and launched a successful fundraising campaign to establish a national headquarters in Washington, D.C.

When the Depression struck, however, the NACW returned to a more traditional focus on black home life, virtually ignoring the plight of black working women. Bethune eventually decided to break with the NACW and found her own organization to promote African-American economic interests, the National Council of Negro Women, an umbrella organization for black women's clubs, much like the predominately white National Council of Women to which the NACW belonged.²¹ Less than six months after receiving the Spingarn Medal in 1935, Bethune founded the NCNW at a conference in New York City and was elected its first president. Dr. Mary Waring, the president of the NACW, attacked the NCNW as "segregationist," warning that, "we should beware of forming organizations based on color. Our ideal should consider, not what is our color, but our

ability to achieve."²² For Waring, the NCNW represented an abandonment of cooperation with white women's organizations. For Bethune, however, the NCNW represented not an end to cooperation, but a means to interact with white organizations on an equal level. Even before she adopted a policy of voluntary segregation within the NYA Mary Bethune had begun to believe in the value of separate black institutions.

When Bethune joined the NYA she arrived with impressive credentials. Her years of fund-raising among white philanthropists to support her school had helped her develop a talent for making whites feel good about the small steps they took on behalf of African-Americans, while constantly reminding them of what they had not yet done. She also knew from her experience with the NACW and the NCNW that African-Americans would have to organize to protect their own interests during a time of national crisis when blacks were at the bottom of the nation's list of priorities. In many ways, her style of racial politics was reminiscent of Booker T. Washington's, and Bethune received a fair amount of criticism for it. However, confrontation, at least in the early years of the New Deal, had proven ineffective in moving Roosevelt, who still refused to risk offending southerners in Congress. Realizing this and using the cautious style she had learned as a black southern educator, Bethune became, from 1935 to 1943, one of the most

influential African-Americans in the nation.

At her very first meeting with the President, Bethune established herself, in Roosevelt's eyes, as a passionate spokeswoman for her race. The NYA National Advisory Committee met for the second time on April 28, 1936, and afterward went to the White House to make a progress report to the President. In a conference that lasted for two hours, Bethune alternately flattered Roosevelt for his efforts on behalf of African-Americans and urged him to do more. Breaking from her formal presentation, she thanked him for his "wholesome integration of Negro youth into the program of the National Youth Administration." She recommended that he continue such efforts by hiring African-Americans for state and local NYA positions and urged him to recognize "the value of Negro supervisors for strictly Negro work projects."²³ It was the impression that Bethune made on Roosevelt at this meeting that would lead him to place her in charge of African-American affairs for the entire NYA in May of 1936.

In December 1935, Aubrey Williams had appointed Juanita J. Saddler "administrative assistant in charge of Negro activities" in the NYA national office. Saddler was the YWCA secretary for interracial education and a proponent of the integration of welfare programs. Her role in the NYA, like that of other African-American appointees before her, was to act as an advisor to the national office on racial

matters. Saddler was openly hostile to the Roosevelt administration's slowness on civil rights issues, and she did not hesitate to express her great disappointment when it became obvious that white NYA officials had no intention of running a completely equitable agency. Other African-Americans involved with the NYA also expressed their frustration at a conference of black administrative assistants in June of 1936.²⁴

By the time the conference convened in Washington, eleven African-Americans had been hired to advise state directors with regard to incorporating blacks into the NYA, largely through pressure from Bethune. The two-day meeting was essentially a brainstorming session, led by Saddler and attended by Bethune, other NYA staff members, and several Negro Advisors from other government departments. In the summer of 1936, the NYA still consisted only of the educational aid and vocational guidance programs inherited from the FERA. Early in the conference, director of Recreation Arthur Williams addressed the main concern that white officials had regarding black participation in the NYA:

Your problem and aim should be to see that Negroes are given their proper portion of the program 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 the State Director.²⁵

After some discussion, however, the consensus among the group, including Williams, was that something like a

separate program was exactly what African-Americans would need in order to take advantage of the NYA.²⁶

The conference came up with a list of specific proposals to make the NYA more accessible to African-Americans. They recommended that black administrative assistants should be hired in every state. They insisted that black advisors ought to be paid the same as white assistant state directors and given adequate office space, equipment and support. They also demanded that African-American District Supervisors be hired in predominantly black districts, and they wanted those supervisors to be able to hire other black supervisors for black projects. In addition, they emphasized the importance of increasing funds for educational aid and establishing a special fund for first-year African-American graduate students. Finally, they "recognized that separate projects for Negroes offer more employment and more supervisory positions" for blacks even though all-black projects might result in "less financial aid from the Administration," and that such projects would not "always bring about the kind of integration we desire."²⁷ Above all, Bethune and the other African-Americans involved in the NYA wanted to avoid wasting energy on achieving token integration and focus on the real economic needs of black youth and their families. Within the context of the New Deal, they decided that the best way to do that was through a separate program.

Sometime after Bethune met with Roosevelt in April, the President decided to offer her the position of Negro Advisor to the NYA. Bethune accepted the offer and officially took over Juanita Saddler's job on June 30, 1936. Saddler was to remain as Bethune's assistant, but she resigned in July, uncomfortable with her demotion.²⁸ It seems likely that Roosevelt wanted to place Bethune in a position where she might promote the New Deal among African-Americans. It is also quite likely that, believing Bethune to be a black leader much like Booker T. Washington, Roosevelt felt that she would be more acceptable to white southerners and serve to muzzle protest from African-Americans within the NYA.

Bethune did have much in common with Booker T. Washington. Like Washington, she came from a rural background and believed in the value of manual labor and a strict moral education. She believed that racial progress depended on black achievement and cooperation with the "better class" of whites. Bethune also relied heavily on her relationships with powerful whites for her influence. Yet unlike Washington, Bethune was involved in a wide range of African-American and interracial organizations, with sometimes conflicting agendas, never relying on any one as her sole base of support and influence. Throughout her years at the NYA, she remained closely tied to Bethune-Cookman College, the NAACP, the National Council of Negro Women, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, the

Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, among others. She considered herself a representative of both African-Americans and women in all of these organizations.

By the 1930's, however, the mantle of leadership no longer belonged to just one privileged African-American with access to white power. Eleanor Roosevelt had arranged for other black leaders to meet with the President and would continue to do so.²⁹ In addition, Roosevelt's new need to win black electoral support was making him more vulnerable to pressure from civil rights groups and the black press than presidents had been in Booker T. Washington's time. Though Bethune's influence and her image were greatly enhanced by her association with first Eleanor and then Franklin Roosevelt, she knew that in order to represent African-Americans she had to cultivate blacks' support and communicate their needs to the administration. For this reason, Bethune combined her relationship to white power with a conceptualization of African-American leadership that was in tune with the idea of the "talented tenth," normally associated with W.E.B. Du Bois. She thought of herself and the other African-American federal advisors as members of the black elite, with an obligation to study and advance the needs of black people. To be sure, determining the needs of the "masses" by assembling a group of the black elite was a somewhat contradictory plan, but it corresponded to her

ideas about the responsibilities of better educated African-Americans. In addition, the idea also mimicked Roosevelt's use of a "brain trust" to outline many of his New Deal programs.

In 1936, Bethune organized a group of approximately forty-five black government employees to form the Federal Council on Negro Affairs, more popularly known as the "Black Cabinet," or "Black Brain Trust." As the eldest and most visible member of the group, she was normally the one to present the group's concerns and requests to Roosevelt. The Council, all male except for Bethune, included prominent African-Americans such as Robert Weaver of the Department of the Interior, Dr. Frank S. Horne of the U.S. Housing Authority, Judge William Hastie, and Charles H. Houston of the Justice Department.³⁰

Though she was the leader of this group, Bethune was also very different from most of its members. She was significantly older than her colleagues and came from a vastly different background. The younger members of the Black Cabinet were college-educated professional men, while Bethune's education consisted of the industrial and teacher training of the Washington era. While they gathered information and made specific policy proposals, she used her more conservative image to gain white confidence. In 1935, Robert Weaver had been moved to the State Department, and he became the Black Cabinet's de facto leader, often holding

informal meetings with the male members of the group to play cards and discuss strategy.³¹ Bethune did not protest being left out of these meetings, in part because it did not interfere with her prestige as the Black Cabinet's organizer nor did it keep her from getting what she wanted from the group. Dorothy Height, then with the YWCA and a protégée of Bethune at the NCNW, described how Bethune would elicit ideas from members of the Black Cabinet and, "after she had worked us until it was oh, at least one or two in the morning, she'd look around and say 'Oh, you all are wonderful, I want to thank you so much.' She said, 'I think I understand now what the Negro wants.'"³² Bethune used the Federal Council on Negro Affairs as a source of information for her speeches and presentations and as a sounding board for her own ideas. As a spokeswoman for her race, she felt that it was her responsibility to know "what the Negro wants."

Soon after her appointment and the organization of the Black Cabinet, Bethune was pressed into service on behalf of Roosevelt's 1936 re-election campaign. From September until after the election in late November Bethune crisscrossed the country by rail, in her words, "interpreting the NYA program to Negroes in such a manner as to gain their confidence and support and . . . interpreting the needs of Negro youth to the officials and citizenry of the white race in various sections of the country."³³ Bethune projected an energetic

sense of optimism about the potential of the New Deal and she communicated that optimism in poetic terms. "Under sincere and competent generalship," she told one interviewer, "our national life has awakened to an alert social consciousness and the first challenging streaks of a new day for the underprivileged masses break across the horizon." ³⁴ During September alone, Bethune visited eleven states, with stops in Chicago, Nashville, Atlantic City, and New York City. In October, she gave a nationally broadcast radio endorsement of Roosevelt on CBS, and November found Bethune and her assistant, Frank Horne, in Petersburg, Virginia, promoting the NYA at the annual meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes.³⁵

After his re-election in 1936, Roosevelt had the undivided attention of the African-American community as they waited to see if he would deliver on his promise that there would be no "forgotten races" in his second administration. Bethune and the Black Cabinet wasted no time organizing representatives from the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the National Negro Congress, along with black educators to draw up a unified set of proposals as to how blacks might be better served by government. With support from Aubrey Williams, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, Bethune opened the first Conference on the Problems of the Negro and Negro Youth on January 6, 1937. Bethune personally presented the

conference findings to the White House in a private meeting with the President, highlighting her importance as a link between African-Americans and the administration. The actual proposals made by the 1937 conference and later conferences were less important than the symbolic recognition of blacks by the President, who was already aware, through Mrs. Roosevelt, Bethune and others, of the issues facing American blacks. Most importantly, though, the conference firmly established to both whites and blacks that Mary McLeod Bethune was the most influential African-American in the nation. As Jessie O. Thomas of the Pittsburgh Courier commented, Bethune "more dramatically centered the attention of Government officials on the Negroes' neglect and need than any other" member of the Black Cabinet.³⁶

The frenzy of activity surrounding her appointment to the NYA, the 1936 election campaign, and her new celebrity after the conference was the high water mark of Bethune's enthusiasm for Roosevelt and the New Deal. Bethune took her place among the white dignitaries at Roosevelt's inauguration, despite an usher's attempt to move her to another section. Her comments reveal that, to her, there was a special, almost millennial, significance to the ceremony:

As I looked into the smiling, beaming face of our President, lighted as with a spiritual torch, and saw his head pointed toward God, I realized that thirteen million Negroes of America were included

in that oath and received great hope for the protection, for the integration, for the participation of my people into the American way of living.³⁷

All around her, she saw signs that the future was brightening for African-Americans. She saw hope in the sixty black NYA boys and girls participating in the inaugural parade; in her meetings with Roosevelt; and in the young women at Vassar who told her, "We should like to have a colored girl here." "Now as never before," she commented, "is Booker T. Washington's preachment justified: 'I shall get ready as some day my chance will come.'" She warned, however, that "that this same door that is now swinging open may swiftly swing back and slam shut" if African-Americans did not take full advantage of the available opportunities.³⁸

While she spent a great deal of time and energy on other issues, Bethune did not neglect the official reason she was in Washington, which was to involve African-American young people in the programs of the NYA. Finding employment or educational opportunities for American young people, black or white, was a daunting task. Roughly one-third of all Americans between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four were out of work by the mid-1930s. NYA officials could not be sure the numbers were not higher, because no one had thought to track the employment rate among this group until the Depression struck. "We do not even know how many young people . . . are actually unemployed," Aubrey Williams noted

in 1938. In its first six years of operation, the NYA involved 2,400,000 young people but only scratched the surface of the problem of unemployed youth.³⁹

Several hurdles stood between black youth and their participation in the NYA. The most basic was the difficulty of finding the African-American youth who needed help and getting them certified to participate in NYA projects. African-Americans in general had a low application rate to New Deal programs, lacked information about the programs, and faced discrimination by local relief committees. At the 1936 Conference of Negro Administrative Assistants, Bethune and her staff were informed that, in the states where projects for African-Americans had been established, the administrative assistants were having trouble finding young people to work in them. Director of Recreation Arthur Williams suggested that before projects were established, "you should get the youth first and then get the project for them."⁴⁰ Unfortunately, that was not a simple task. The NYA used WPA lists to select youth for projects and there were few African-Americans on those lists. State relief officials were responsible for locating and certifying the needy for aid and usually classified African-Americans only for "unskilled" work, owing to the widespread belief that this was the only kind of work appropriate for them. Nearly all NYA projects offered training for "skilled" work.

Aubrey Williams was responsive to Bethune's requests

that another means be found to involve African-Americans in NYA projects, insisting that states hire uncertified black youth if they could benefit from NYA work. Once in the NYA, however, those young people faced other problems. State officials and even Williams himself were bound by the same traditional outlook on what types of work African-Americans should perform. Williams reported to Congress in 1939 that "we have developed certain kinds of projects for them in certain rural areas, like harness mending and horseshoeing, and woodworking and things that they could use practically on the farm."⁴¹ Funding projects for African-Americans was another difficulty. The NYA stipulated that the funds for each work project come partly from the NYA and partly from local sponsors. In rural areas especially, whites were reluctant to sponsor projects in which blacks participated and the black community often lacked the financial resources to back projects large enough to provide useful work or training.⁴²

Compounding these problems, unemployment among African-American youth continued to be especially severe. In 1935, blacks accounted for 12.8 percent of the population between the ages of 15 and 24, but they made up 15.3 percent of the youth on relief, and discrimination surely kept many more off of relief rolls. Since there were proportionally more black youth in need of relief, critics argued, they should be included at similarly higher levels within the NYA. The

NYA, however, steadfastly held to the practice of including African-Americans according to population, not relief statistics. In fact, a 1940 study on African-American participation in the NYA, based on figures provided by the Division of Negro Affairs, concluded that blacks represented only 10.7 percent of the total number of NYA youth, less than their proportion of both the population and of relief recipients.⁴³

There were some integrated NYA projects, few of which were in the South. Even when black and white youths worked on the same NYA project in the South, they usually ate, slept, and played separately. The vast majority of NYA work for African-Americans was on all-black projects. Some of these, such as a landscaping project at the Frederick Douglass Home in Washington, D.C., were specifically designed to serve the African-American community. Most involved manual labor. Yet even these projects had noticeable benefits for the youth involved. Bethune commented that most black NYA workers arrived at the program "broken in morale," but through work, counseling, and health services, they gradually gained self-confidence. Rather than focus her efforts on further integrating existing NYA projects, Bethune fought to end discrimination in relief certification and to increase the percentage of African-American youth participating in the NYA through separate projects. Aware of the unemployment statistics for African-

American youth, and knowing that state and local politics had more to do with who worked on NYA projects than did the NYA's ostensible commitment to integration, Bethune chose the course that she believed would reach the largest number of black youth. ⁴⁴

Bethune faced a different set of problems with the NYA's educational aid program. There was no need to debate the merits of integration over segregation, since the nation's school systems had already settled that issue. The main challenges were to see that money was allocated to both black and white students on a fair basis and more importantly to decide what type of education the money for African-Americans should be spent on. Bethune saw schools as a "force of social reconstruction" in rural areas and was a harsh critic of liberal arts education when she thought it conflicted with the basic needs of black children. It was "pathetic," she thought, that some schools were still "pounding Latin and Ancient History and Algebra into pupils with medieval health habits, barbaric diets, existing in brokendown, uninviting homes."⁴⁵ At the same time, she was a firm believer in the potential of a "talented tenth" and was committed to providing increasing opportunities for black students to go on to college and graduate school. The NYA financial aid program had a great deal of support from the black community at large. When NYA deputy director John Corson polled African-American leaders regarding what types

of youth programs they would like to see enacted, most favored high school and college financial aid programs.⁴⁶

Between the beginning of the educational aid program in 1936 and the height of its funding in 1940, the number of African-American students involved annually increased from 28,097 to 42,600. For elementary and high school students, the increase was constant, while the numbers of college and graduate students remained static and even decreased between 1937 and 1940. However, black youth in the education program consistently outnumbered their counterparts engaged in work projects. Between 1936 and 1937, for example, roughly 15,000 more African-American young people participated in the financial aid program than in work programs. By 1940, the gap had narrowed to roughly 2,000 more black students than black workers. Still, the total student aid figures available for 1939 indicate that the percentage of participants in the program who were black fell short of the proportion of blacks in both the general population and the relief population. African-Americans received only 11.3 percent of the elementary and high school aid, 5.9 percent of the college and graduate aid, and 9.7 percent of the total educational aid, although they represented over twelve percent of the youth population and over fifteen percent of the youth on relief.⁴⁷

Several factors affected the extent to which African-American students were able to secure financial aid through

the NYA. The actual inclusion of black students in federal aid was such a welcome change that few African-American leaders seemed to want to split hairs over whether the standard of participation depended on the number of blacks in the population or the number on relief. The African-Americans who met at Bethune's second conference on African-Americans in the New Deal were satisfied with an NYA requirement that blacks receive NYA aid according to population. Others, including some black academics, were not satisfied and pointed out that the NYA was not meeting its own standards for African-American participation.⁴⁸ Another critic pointed out that "school aid can be of little assistance to those Negroes in more than 230 counties that provide no high school facilities for Negroes."⁴⁹ For that and other reasons, Bethune and the staff of the Division of Negro Affairs also took special care to "keep in mind the question of students who break into white schools where Negroes have not been admitted before."⁵⁰ They wanted to keep some of the education budget aside to support such students, but there is no evidence that they ever had a chance to use it.

For college and graduate students, the process of qualifying for aid was easier, but the federal money more limited. The NYA required that each college and university receiving NYA money make a "fair allocation for Negro students from its regular quota." The program did not at

that time include many traditionally black colleges and universities, therefore very few southern black students received aid during the 1936 - 1937 school year. The next year Bethune, armed with statistics and recommendations gathered from her conferences, from experts, and other sources, convinced Williams to set aside a special fund to be allocated primarily to African-American schools.⁵¹ That fund immediately tripled the number of black college and graduate students in the program, but it also proved to be the last significant increase in that part of the education program, which remained fairly constant throughout the NYA's existence.⁵² The college aid application process also ameliorated the usually discriminatory effects of the NYA's decentralized organization. The college aid money went to black schools, without passing through state NYA offices, leaving it to the institutions to distribute the money through their financial aid programs. The under-representation of African-Americans in the college program, therefore, was the result of the way the NYA office in Washington allocated the money rather than the result of local discrimination.

Perhaps the most significant thing about Bethune's work on behalf of African-American education was that she was able to convince the federal government to commit some of its resources specifically to the advanced training of black men and women at traditionally black colleges. This was in

addition to seeing that African-American elementary, high school, and college students received a portion of the same NYA aid that white students enjoyed. As in the case of the work program, Bethune did not challenge the prevailing pattern of segregation, but rather worked within the existing segregated framework to attain from the NYA additional advantages for African-Americans. Through the educational aid program, she also made another significant contribution to the production of the highly educated black elite to which she had committed herself while she was still in Daytona.

Recognizing that resistance to funding programs for black youth came in part from inside the NYA, Bethune was concerned with expanding the participation of African-Americans in the administration of the NYA. Like Juanita Saddler, Bethune came to understand the limited nature of her authority. She could advise the national director on matters pertaining to African-American participation in the NYA, but she did could not compel anyone, from the national to the local level, to act on her suggestions. For two years, Bethune and her small staff were the only people who recognized that a Division of Negro Affairs even existed within the organization. It was not until Aubrey Williams took over his duties as NYA director full-time in 1938 that Bethune succeeded in gaining official recognition for the Division of Negro Affairs. When the NYA moved from the

Works Progress Administration to the Federal Security Administration the next year, Bethune's office was downgraded again, but she continued to act as though the Division of Negro Affairs were one of the principal administrative units of the NYA, which practically speaking, was what it had become.⁵³

The NYA was a model of the decentralization of relief agencies that characterized Roosevelt's second administration, which made it critical for African-Americans to be involved at every level of the agency if blacks were to benefit from its programs. In addition to the national office in Washington, there were five regional offices, corresponding to the regional network established under the WPA. Each state had its own NYA advisory committee and office, patterned after the national bureau. The states were also divided into districts, and field representatives were assigned to supervise NYA work in those areas. In 1936, Bethune had begun encouraging the states to place African-Americans on their advisory committees and to hire black administrative assistants. Her hope was to establish a network of African-American field workers who could look out for black interests on the state level and provide the Division of Negro Affairs with statistical data and advice.⁵⁴ The only census of NYA state advisory committees, taken in 1940, shows that African-Americans were grossly under-represented. Only 46 African-Americans were serving

on state advisory committees that year, out of a total of 811 committee members on 50 committees.⁵⁵ At Bethune's urging, Williams pressured the states to hire more African-American assistants, but even when blacks were hired they usually faced serious handicaps in carrying out their duties.

Relatively few African-Americans were hired by the NYA when it commenced operation in 1936. The Division of Negro Affairs consisted of Bethune, her deputy, and two "office aides" in 1937. Bethune reported at that time that "in those states where adequately trained and experienced Negro Administrative Assistants were employed for full time . . . the result has been satisfactory integration of Negro youth into the State NYA program." Yet only seventeen states had full-time African-American assistants in 1936.⁵⁶ By 1939, the NYA had a total of thirty-four African-American administrative employees making an average salary of about \$1,900. In comparison, the NYA's 1,094 white administrative employees had salaries of \$2,400 or more and blacks accounted for only three percent of NYA administrative staff.⁵⁷ The African-American state assistants and the Division of Negro Affairs at the national office continually requested that more African-Americans be hired at the state and national levels, as well as in supervisory positions on NYA projects.

The state administrative assistants also requested that

their salaries be equalized with those of the assistant state directors of their various states, on the premise that they shared the same responsibilities for their respective races.⁵⁸ While their titles varied from state to state, even the four highest-paid African-American state assistants received significantly lower salaries than their white counterparts. The salary gap was even more apparent in other states such as Alabama where the black assistant, Venice Spragg, made only forty percent per year of what the deputy state director did.⁵⁹ Neither NYA director Aubrey Williams nor the state NYA directors, however, agreed that the positions held by African-American state workers were comparable to the position of assistant or deputy state director.

In the summer of 1940, Williams, under pressure from state directors, moved to try to rein in black organizing efforts within the NYA. He reminded Bethune that both the Division of Negro Affairs and the black state assistants were to serve only as advisors to the national and state offices. He also reassured the state NYA directors that he had issued an order to that effect.⁶⁰ By undercutting their requests for better pay and more authority, Williams reinforced the second-class status of blacks in the NYA administrative framework.

Even when states hired African-American assistants, they and Bethune had to fight to make their work more than

just symbolic. The state assistants often had to serve as their own secretaries, and many were given only minimal office space in which to work.⁶¹ The disagreement over the relationship of the assistants to the national office created both morale and communications problems. Williams's standing order was that the black assistants were state NYA employees and were to report to their state directors. Few could carry on direct communication with the Division of Negro Affairs without creating tension between themselves and their supervisors. In 1937, Bethune reported to Williams that:

There is a growing feeling of intimidation among Negro assistants against their expression of viewpoint or their making inquiries from our Division concerning things not understood. They now definitely fear being thought disloyal to the administrative heads if they should make such inquiries.⁶²

Bethune faced similar problems in the national office, where her own correspondence was subject to review by either Richard Brown or Aubrey Williams. Bethune regularly complained to Williams that her office was receiving very little statistical information regarding black youth enrolled in NYA projects. Furthermore, she was upset that she could not get first-hand information from black NYA representatives on the state and local levels. This lack of information and her own hunger to know what was going on outside Washington led Bethune and other members of her staff to log tens of thousands of miles of travel time

making public appearances and gathering what one black NYA staffer referred to as "bootlegged" information.⁶³

Bethune did most of this information-gathering as a part of her continuing duty to publicize the participation of African-Americans in the NYA and to educate them about the opportunities offered by the agency. She spent much of 1938 traveling through the North and Midwest speaking on behalf of the NYA to black, white, and racially mixed audiences. If the reactions of her audiences are any indication, the trip was a success. In Buffalo, New York, she held a racially mixed audience of 400 "spellbound" and left Howard A. Wilson, the NYA district supervisor, "with an inordinate pride in the organization of which I am a part."⁶⁴ Ernest F. Witte of the University of Nebraska's School of Social Work marveled at Bethune's ability to "interpret things in such a way to a mixed audience that they get her points without getting any feeling of animosity."⁶⁵ Another white listener suggested that Bethune "should be given every opportunity to appear and to talk more frequently before representatives of white organizations."⁶⁶ Using a talent she had developed as a black educator in Florida, Bethune motivated whites by making them feel good about themselves, while educating them about the injustices facing African-Americans.

In addition to speaking engagements, Bethune also issued press releases and made radio addresses. Her

constant travel and public exposure reinforced her position as a national spokesperson for African-Americans. African-Americans like Dr. David Jones, the president of Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina, wrote to Aubrey Williams to tell him that Bethune's position with the government was "a matter of great enthusiasm among the Negro peoples of America."⁶⁷ The same rhetoric that warmed the hearts of Bethune's white audiences and created enthusiasm among many African-Americans, however, sometimes drew criticism from blacks. Dorothy Height reported that it was sometimes whispered privately that Bethune was an Uncle Tom, willing to concede anything to gain white acceptance for herself and that her own ego drove her more than any concern with African-Americans as a group. Bethune would often respond by simply pressing her critics into service working on a project for the NYA, the NCNW, or some other related organization.⁶⁸ Despite this criticism, much of which was private, Bethune maintained the public support of most prominent African-American figures. She was less interested in debating racial ideology than she was in building consensus and gaining exposure. As long as she kept herself in the public eye, she kept racial issues in the public eye. At the same time, she would not have remained in Washington as long as she did had she been a controversial figure. She was, as one scholar has pointed out, "a supremely confident woman who used diplomacy and her commanding presence to

elicit the desired response from both races," even though in doing so she could sometimes appear too conciliatory.⁶⁹

Bethune also continued her special relationship with the President. She regularly suggested appointments that Roosevelt should make to promote equal opportunity for African-Americans. She suggested he appoint black federal judges; a special assistant on Negro affairs to the Secretary of War; black administrative personnel in the FHA, Home Owners Loan Corporation, Social Security Administration, and Federal Security Agency; along with six other possible appointments.⁷⁰ Her suggestions, however, met with only limited success. Bethune and the Black Cabinet also held a second "Conference on the Problems of the Negro and Negro Youth" in 1939.⁷¹ It is clear, however, that Bethune knew the limits of Roosevelt's popularity with the African-American community and was not willing to risk her own if she did not think it prudent. When Aubrey Williams suggested to Bethune that she sponsor a third conference, she told him to remind Roosevelt that he had not fulfilled the recommendations of the second conference. A new conference, she speculated, might result in a barrage of criticism from the black community, unless the president could find "anything outstanding that can be done now regarding these situations."⁷²

For his part, Roosevelt gained as much or more from his relationship with Bethune than she did. In return for the

opportunity to go to Washington and act on behalf of African-Americans, Bethune gave the President her loyalty and support. The conferences organized by Bethune and the Federal Council of Negro Affairs did as much to popularize Roosevelt among African-Americans as it did to publicize the problems they faced. In speeches and radio addresses heard by black voters across the nation, Bethune had sung the praises of Roosevelt and the New Deal.⁷³ By 1942, Bethune's role as a full-time campaigner for the administration was virtually written into her NYA job description. In addition to all her other duties, she was to "handle special assignments from the White House, the Federal Security Administrator, and governmental agencies for the purpose of assisting in stimulating greater participation of Negroes in the American program."⁷⁴ Bethune communicated her criticisms directly to Roosevelt or the First Lady and rarely made negative public statements directed at the administration. Furthermore, she remained a staunch defender of the President even in instances in which she disagreed with him. Bethune led a delegation of prominent African-Americans to plead with Roosevelt to intervene in the execution of Virginia sharecropper Odell Waller, who had shot and killed his employer, but she refused to denounce the President publicly when he declined to act, despite pressure from the delegation.⁷⁵

In 1937 and 1938, however, Roosevelt proved to be as

serious a liability to the NYA as he was a supporter. The president's Supreme Court packing plan, his failure to handle a resurgence of labor unrest, and the recession of 1937 caused the President heavy political losses. Conservative opposition mounted in Congress and the New Deal ground to a halt as Congress began to cut the budgets of many New Deal programs.⁷⁶ Events outside the United States were also undermining Roosevelt's support. The unprecedented federal authority represented by New Deal programs precipitated comparisons between Roosevelt and fascist leaders in Europe. In 1938, Congressional debate surrounding the president's "reorganization bill" centered on whether or not it could give Roosevelt dictatorial powers. Meanwhile, Representative Martin Dies (D. - Texas) created the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and began searching for communist influences within the Roosevelt administration.⁷⁷

Williams and the NYA National Advisory Committee moved quickly to defend their program, appealing directly to the new hostile mood in Congress and playing on the growing anxiety over fascism and communism. Williams, Bethune, and others renewed their commitment to decentralized administration in the hope that they could convince the Congress that the NYA represented no threat to state and local governmental freedom.⁷⁸ They also began to portray the NYA as a bulwark against foreign ideas, a patriotic

"American solution" which included the institution of a loyalty oath that NYA youth as well as administrators were required to sign.⁷⁹ In 1937, for example, the NYA sponsored a promotional book called A New Deal For Youth, by journalist Ernest Lindley, a member of the national advisory committee, and his wife Betty. The NYA, the Lindleys explained, was "predicated on the maintenance and reinforcement of the family unit," whereas in totalitarian countries "the community and family are subordinated to a regimented nationalism."⁸⁰ Likewise, Bethune assured white Americans that "America need have 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."⁸¹

The campaign to save the NYA worked, and it was one of the only New Deal programs to receive an increased appropriation for 1940.⁸² It had survived the most serious crisis facing the New Deal. But almost immediately the enormous cost of the NYA (just under \$125,000,000 in 1941) and renewed allegations that it had been infiltrated by communist groups brought it, once again, under Congressional scrutiny. The NYA sustained heavy damage to its reputation during Senate hearings led by Senator Kenneth McKellar of Tennessee in 1940. In those hearings, Alfred M. Lilienthal testified that he had left the American Youth Congress (AYC)

in 1939 because it had been taken over by communist-controlled groups. The fact that AYC-affiliated groups were involved with NYA projects left the NYA open to charges that Williams was harboring "fifth-columnists."⁸³ In 1943, Representative Martin Dies accused Bethune herself of being a communist, a charge which he was unable to support after a House Un-American Activities Committee investigation.⁸⁴ Again, the NYA survived, but pressure in Congress was mounting against the agency.

By 1940, the NYA had established a new "resident training" program which placed youth in a summer camp environment offering job training, remedial education, and recreation opportunities. By the end of the year, 470 resident training centers had been established. Of those, 67 were designated for African-Americans, while the remaining 403 served mainly whites. The 3,800 African-Americans in those centers represented 12.6 percent of the roughly 30,000 youth living and working in such centers, which was roughly equal to the proportion of black youth in the general population.⁸⁵ Significantly, the majority of NYA resident centers were located in the South, because southern school systems were the least prepared in the nation to incorporate the increased number of youth who were out of school and unemployed.⁸⁶ Despite the underrepresentation of black youth, experts praised the southern resident centers for providing "an educational

environment and expert guidance from the most enlightened race leadership within the states."⁸⁷

However, not all the evidence gathered regarding these centers was positive. Neither the resident centers, nor the NYA work program in general, offered much for African-American girls. Despite the fact that increasing numbers of both black and white women were entering the workplace during the Depression, NYA officials assumed that "most of them will get married and that they can gain most by learning how to plan and prepare varied meals with the simplest foods."⁸⁸

Moreover, Bethune sent T. Arnold Hill, another of her deputies, to visit southern resident centers, including one at Bethune-Cookman College, where Hill reported that he found no evidence that the black youth there were receiving any useful training. "Much needs to be done," he believed, "for the entire program to bring it up to acceptable standards." Furthermore, he found that Florida's state director had spent so much of his budget on projects for whites that "there is not now available . . . sufficient funds to construct a center for Negroes."⁸⁹

America's entry into World War II in 1941 had significant repercussions for the NYA. The year 1942 saw the beginning of a massive transition in NYA training from previous work programs toward defense-oriented training. Following what was by then a well-established pattern, white

youth were the first to benefit from the new defense programs. NYA surveys showed that minority participation in regular work programs ranged from 14 to 23 percent while minorities represented only 11 to 14 percent of the youth being trained in defense work. According to the NYA, this disparity occurred because "there were relatively few opportunities for employment of Negroes in defense industries at that time." As more young white men entered the military, however, minority participation in the defense programs increased to a high of 24 percent in 1943.⁹⁰

Although the war would eventually do much to alleviate unemployment, African-Americans were among the last to benefit from the wartime industrial boom. Young people were supposed to move through the NYA and out into the working world, but for most African-Americans, as for a good many whites, this was simply not possible. The resistance to hiring young blacks was much stronger than for whites because of prevailing racial attitudes. Williams recalled that "NYA training shops could not get machine shops to hire Negro boys," not because of management, but because factory workers simply would not have it. In one instance, Williams asserted that he withheld 85 NYA workers from a defense plant because the employees there would not accept the first African-American placement, despite the fact that the young man was the most skilled of all the boys. Under pressure from Williams, the plant manager gave in and hired the

African-American over the protests of his workers. Williams did not record how long the black youth kept his job, but he did indicate that it was the difficulty of placing African-American youth that convinced him to support measures like the Fair Employment Practices Commission in 1941.⁹¹

Despite these obstacles, Bethune saw the war as an opportunity for African-Americans to make significant gains in employment. To those who warned that the NYA was training blacks for work in industries that would not hire them, Bethune answered that "I would rather see 1,000 boys and girls standing in the street well prepared, and the doors closed to them than to have the opportunities suddenly open to them and there they stand unprepared."⁹² Williams agreed with her position and responded by setting up "induction centers" in cities with defense plants, which served as temporary hostels for both black and white workers moving long distances to work.⁹³ When the NYA began to plan its Civilian Pilot Training and Airplane Mechanics Programs in 1939, Bethune made sure that black colleges like Tuskegee, Wilberforce, Howard, and Hampton knew to apply for money and equipment. Despite intense opposition to African-Americans having anything to do with defense aviation, Bethune managed to help two black colleges join the 164 white schools participating in the program.⁹⁴

Her position as an advocate for young industrial workers allowed Bethune to join other African-American

leaders who called for an end to discrimination in defense industries and the armed forces. She supported A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement and pressed both Williams and Eleanor Roosevelt to convince the president to ban federal employment discrimination. In 1941, the Black Cabinet, led by Bethune, hosted a conference on the role of African-Americans in national defense, and Bethune delivered the findings to the First Lady at the White House. The National Negro Council and the National Council of Negro Women pressured Secretary of War Henry Stimson to appoint Bethune to the newly formed Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). She was eventually loaned to the WAAC by the NYA for five days in order to assist WAAC director Oveta Culp Hobby in choosing the core of African-American officer candidates who would train and lead black WAAC. Although she was able to bring more black women into the WAAC, Bethune continued throughout the war to protest segregation in the WAAC.⁹⁵

The war, in combination with other factors, ultimately brought an end to the NYA. World War II effectively employed a majority of the youth aided by the agency, either in the Armed Forces or in war production. Conservative New Deal critics used the crisis to dismantle not only the NYA, but many of Roosevelt's other programs as well. The end of the NYA, increasing health problems, and the death of President Roosevelt in April 1945 also marked the decline of

Mary McLeod Bethune's political influence. At the age of seventy, she turned her attention mainly to the work of the National Council of Negro Women. She resigned as the NCNW president in 1949 and died six years later in her home at Bethune-Cookman.

Bethune had always been a complex and cautious woman, torn between her desire for civil rights and a pragmatic outlook on what could be accomplished. In the case of the National Youth Administration, she believed that resistance to integration made a segregated NYA more promising for African-American youth. She also realized that a separate program was not likely to be equal, but that it would offer more hope to young black men and women. As in other Depression-era programs, African-Americans in the NYA received less than their share of the New Deal. However, thanks to Bethune's leadership, the NYA was one of the most successful New Deal agencies serving African-Americans.

At the same time, the NYA began to change Bethune's outlook on race relations. Like many of her younger colleagues, she grew tired of waiting for her rights. Looking back in 1950, Bethune summed up what she thought had changed about the African-American leadership during the second Roosevelt administration:

These were the days when the Negro leadership concluded at long last that what the Negro had to deal with, first and foremost, was not so much his own thinking as the stereotyped, nervous thinking of the world's non-colored minority! And with that conclusion the so-called "Negro Problem"

ceased to drag at our feet.⁹⁶

What had changed about Bethune was that she now saw the "race problem" as primarily a white problem. She still believed that it was the attainment of a certain amount of "culture" and education that qualified a person for full American citizenship. However, it was white America's responsibility to accept this elite group on its merits, and it was the responsibility of black elites to lift their people up with them. "Only in this way," she urged, "can the swelling force among minority racial groups be channeled into creative progress rather than exploded into riots and conflicts, or dissipated in hoodlumism."⁹⁷

Bethune was a vital part of the African-American leadership that emerged from the Depression and the New Deal. She combined a direct and assertive civil rights rhetoric with a policy of voluntary segregation in order to find a place for the African-American critique of America within the political process. This strategy marked a transition, a move toward further black self-empowerment, albeit within the context of a government sponsored program, and Mary McLeod Bethune was central to that movement. Weaving together strands of self-help, protest, and separatism, she pushed the concept of separate but equal as far as it would go within the NYA in order to provide more for black youth than token participation in the New Deal. Bethune lived to see the early legal victories in the mid-

1950s which would lead to the Civil Rights Movement, and her goals of fostering black leadership, black self-esteem , and ultimately integration continued to be central to the black struggle for equality just as self-segregation, as a part of the strategy for achieving those goals, also lived on.

NOTES

1. "Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune Spingarn Medalist for 1935," Philadelphia Tribune, 6 June 1935; and Jack Salzman, David L. Smith, and Cornel West, eds., The Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History, vol. 5 (New York: MacMillan Library Reference U.S.A., 1996), 2545-2546.
2. Mary McLeod Bethune, "Response to the Spingarn Medal," 28 June 1935, 2-5, Mary McLeod Bethune Papers, 1923-1942, microfilm (New Orleans: Amistad Research Center, 1972), Hereafter cited as Bethune Papers.
3. Rackham Holt, Mary McLeod Bethune: A Biography (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), 191-192; and Elaine M. Smith, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Youth Administration," Clio Was a Woman: Studies in the History of American Women, eds. Mabel E. Deutrich and Virginia C. Purdy (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980), 1095.
4. David Levering Lewis, W.E.B. DuBois: A Reader (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 553-571; Francis L. Broderick, W.E.B. DuBois: Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 170-173; and Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 211.
5. Ibid.
6. August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1964), 166.
7. Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 35; Winifred D. Wandersee, "Eleanor Roosevelt and American Youth: Politics and Personality in a Bureaucratic Age," in Joan Hoff-Wilson and Marjorie Lightman, eds., Without Precedent: The Life and Career of Eleanor Roosevelt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 65; and War Manpower Commission, Final Report of the National Youth Administration, Fiscal Years 1936-1943 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944), 83-84.
8. War Manpower Commission, Final Report, 13, 127; and Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 10.

9. Sitkoff, A New Deal For Blacks, 40, 46, 51; Frank Freidel, "The South and the New Deal," in James Cobb and Michael V. Namorato, eds., The New Deal and the South (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), 24.

10. Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 44; Freidel, "The South and the New Deal," 23, 26; Alan Brinkley, "The New Deal and Southern Politics," in Cobb and Namorato, eds., The New Deal and the South, 103. During the 1938 elections, Roosevelt did attempt to help defeat incumbent Virginia Senators Carter Glass and Harry Byrd, but failed. See A. Cash Koeniger, "The New Deal and the States: Roosevelt and the Byrd Organization in Virginia." Journal of American History 68 (March 1982), 876-896.

11. Harvard Sitkoff, "The Impact of the New Deal on Black Southerners," in Cobb and Namorato, eds., The New Deal and the South, 118-119; Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 49; and Brinkley, "The New Deal and Southern Politics," 98-100.

12. Paul E. Mertz, New Deal Policy and Southern Rural Poverty (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 48-51; Sitkoff, "The Impact of the New Deal on Black Southerners," 124-125; Ralph J. Bunche, "A Critique of New Deal Social Planning as It Affects Negroes," Journal of Negro Education 5 (January 1936), 164; and Freidel, "The South and the New Deal," 30-31.

13. The first such advisor was actually a white man, Clark Foreman of the CIC, but an uproar over his appointment among blacks led to the appointment of Robert Weaver as his assistant. The next "negro advisor" was Forrester B. Washington, who quit his post with the FERA after six months because he felt that he was simply "window dressing" for the administration. See John Salmond, A Southern Rebel: The Life and Times of Aubrey Williams, 1890-1965 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 62; and Nancy J. Weiss, Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 74.

14. Sitkoff, "The Impact of the New Deal on Black Southerners," 130.

15. Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 74-76. Eleanor Roosevelt had a special interest in the NYA in part as a way of heading off the growing radicalism of the American Youth Congress. She defended the NYA from critics in her newspaper column "My Day;" she sought to smooth over tension within the NYA; she talked to Roosevelt about NYA problems; and she even communicated with state NYA directors. See Wandersee, "Eleanor Roosevelt and American Youth," 68-72.

16. Ibid., 83-85; Mertz, New Deal Policy, 125; President of the United States, Executive Order 7086 (Washington: June 26, 1935); Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 81-83; and Wandersee, "Eleanor Roosevelt and American Youth," 66-67.
17. Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 3-66.
18. Ibid., 85-96, 121, 135-37; and Sitkoff, New Deal for Blacks, 72-73.
19. Joseph P. Lash, Eleanor and Franklin (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1971), 514; Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 80; Smith, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Youth Administration," 1095; and Linda Gordon, Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 117, 350n.
20. Holt, Mary McLeod Bethune, 1-5, 31-46, 51-73, and 178. For a detailed examination of Bethune's career as an educator, see Audrey Thomas McCluskey, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the Education of Black Girls in the South, 1904-1923" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University 1991).
21. Giddings, When and Where I Enter, 200-202.
22. "Formation of NCNW Criticized as Segregationist," Pittsburgh Courier, 21 December 1935, 8. Waring also suggested, correctly, that it was in part Bethune's costly campaign for a national headquarters which had significantly weakened the NACW just before the Depression struck.
23. Smith, "Mary McLeod Bethune," 1097-98; Weiss, Farewell to the Party of Lincoln, 143; and "Mrs. Bethune Discusses NYA With Roosevelt," Norfolk Journal and Guide, 9 May 1936, 1.
24. "Miss Saddler Gets Federal Post," Pittsburgh Courier, 7 December 1935, 1; Salmond, A Southern Rebel, 127-28; and Smith, "Mary McLeod Bethune," 1098.
25. "Report of the Conference of Negro Administrative Assistants of the National Youth Administration," 2-3 June 1936, 6-7, Records of the National Youth Administration, Division of Negro Affairs, in John Kirby, ed., New Deal Agencies and Black America (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984) microfilm. Hereafter cited as NDDBA.
26. Ibid., 9.
27. Ibid., 9.

28. There is some uncertainty about the exact date of Bethune's appointment and Saddler's resignation. Also uncertain is whether there were any bad feelings between Bethune and Saddler over the event. In "Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Youth Administration: A Case Study of Power Relationships in the Black Cabinet of Franklin D. Roosevelt," The Journal of Negro History 60 (January 1975): 9n, 10-12, B. Joyce Ross argues that Saddler's resignation came before Bethune was chosen to replace her, and that Saddler had been a more outspoken civil rights advocate than Bethune. However, based on Bethune's recollections about her relationship with Franklin Roosevelt in "My Secret Talks with FDR," Ebony 6 (April 1949): 43-51, Elaine Smith argues that the decision to replace Saddler with Bethune was made in April 1936, not July. Saddler was then made Bethune's assistant and Smith argues that Saddler tendered her resignation on July 11, 1936. See Smith, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Youth Administration," 154. An NYA press release and a New York Times article, both dated July 1, 1936, announced Saddler's resignation before July 11. See "Press Release: National Youth Administration," Box 3, Folder 12, Bethune Papers; and "Mary McLeod Bethune to Head Negro Youth Work," New York Times 1 July 1936 2:3.

29. Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 60; Wandersee, "Eleanor Roosevelt and American Youth," 63; and Joanna Schneider Zangrando and Robert L. Zangrando, "Eleanor Roosevelt and Black Civil Rights," in Hoff-Wilson and Lightman, eds., Without Precedent, 92-94.

30. Audrey Thomas McCluskey, "Mary McLeod Bethune and the Education of Black Girls in the South, 1904-1923" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1991), 78-79; William A. Birnie, "Black Brain Trust," The American Magazine (January 1943): 36; Weiss, Farewell, 137; Holt, Mary McLeod Bethune, 196-98; and Ross, "Mary McLeod Bethune," 2.

31. Weiss, Farewell, 137-148.

32. Dorothy I. Height, interview by Polly Cowan, in Ruth Edmonds Hill, ed., The Black Women Oral History Project, vol. 5 (Westport: Meckler, 1991), 70. Height worked with the Federal Council on Negro Affairs primarily as an aide to Bethune, but her presence at Council meetings shows that women were also an influence in the group, though Bethune was the only woman officially listed as belonging to the Council.

33. Mary McLeod Bethune, "WPA Auxiliary Statement - Personal History Statement of Mary McLeod Bethune, Director Division of Negro Affairs," 4 October 1937, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 8, National Youth Administration, 1935-1943, Records of the

National Council of Negro Women. Hereafter cited as NCNW; and James A. Harrell, "Negro Leadership in the Election Year 1936," Journal of Southern History (1968), 554.

34."Mrs. Bethune Says N.C.N.W. Will Place Negro Mothers on Battlefront for Progress," news clipping, n.d., Bethune Papers.

35."Mrs. Bethune Interprets the NYA to Nation," Pittsburgh Courier, 5 September 1936, 9; Weiss, Farewell, 201; and Bethune, "The Plans, Scope, and Accomplishments of the National Youth Administration," Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes, Virginia State College, Petersburg, VA, 12-13 November 1936, 87.

36.The Pittsburgh Courier devoted several full pages to the conference in its January 16 edition. "Scoop," Pittsburgh Courier, 16 January 1937, 10; Sitkoff, New Deal for Blacks, 81-83; Weiss, Farewell, 146; and Jessie O. Thomas, "Mrs. Bethune 'Steals the Show' at Confab," Pittsburgh Courier, 23 January 1937, 8.

37.Mary McLeod Bethune, "Weekly Chats," Pittsburgh Courier, 6 February 1937, 10. Another sign of Bethune's new status in 1937 was that the Courier offered her this regular article, which began as "Weekly Chats" ten days after the first Conference on the Problems of the Negro and Negro Youth and continued for several years as "Day by Day".

38.Bethune, "Weekly Chats," Pittsburgh Courier, 6 February 1937, 10; Ibid., 27 February 1937, 22; Newspaper clipping from The Christian Advocate, 4 February 1937, Bethune Papers; Bethune "From Day to Day," Pittsburgh Courier, 23 October 1937, 15; and ibid., 25 September 1937, 14.

39.Salmond, Rebel, 126-127; Betty and Earnest K. Lindley, A New Deal for Youth: The Story of the National Youth Administration (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 8; "Youth and the Present Economic World, address by Aubrey Williams at Cornell University, December 6, 1938," 5, NDBA; and Congress, House, Subcommittee on Appropriations, Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1940, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 24 May 1939, 95.

40."Report of the Conference of Negro Administrative Assistants of the NYA, June 2-3, 1936," 7, NDBA.

41.Congress, Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1940, 24 May 1939, 104.

42. "Report of the Conference of Negro State Administrative Assistants and Members of the State Advisory Committees, February 11-13, 1937," 11-12, NDBA.
43. Walter G. Daniel and Carroll L. Miller, "The Participation of the Negro in the National Youth Administration Program," Journal of Negro Education 8 (July 1939), 361.
44. Bethune, "From Day to Day," Pittsburgh Courier, 25 December 1938, 12; War Manpower Commission, Final Report, 135, 229; Françoise Bell to Orren H. Lull, 13 October 1938, NDBA; and Bethune, "From Day to Day," Pittsburgh Courier 29 January 1938, 14.
45. Bethune, "From Day to Day," Pittsburgh Courier, 11 September 1937, 11.
46. Salmond, Rebel, 126-127.
47. Figures on African American Youth in the Education Aid Program for 1936, 1937, and 1940 in "Annual Report of the Division of Negro Affairs, June 30, 1937," 8-9; "Notes for Mr. Williams: Facts About Negroes on NYA Program, January 1940;" Total figures for 1939 in Ibid., "Federal Aid to Education: Press Release, speech by Dr. Charles H. Judd, Director of Education, NYA, March 30, 1939," 3, NDBA. Figures on African American Youth in the program for 1939 in Congress, Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1940, 24 May 1939, 103-104.
48. Proceedings, 32; and Daniel and Miller, "Participation," 360-361.
49. Marian T. Wright, "Negro Youth and the Federal Emergency Programs: CCC and NYA," Journal of Negro Education 9 (July 1940): 405.
50. "Report of Staff Meeting," 14 August 1940," 1, NDBA.
51. War Manpower Commission, Final Report, 51-52.
52. Daniel and Miller, "Participation," 360; and Congress, Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1940, 24 May 1939, 98-99.
53. Smith, "Bethune and the National Youth Administration," 155; and War Manpower Commission, Final Report, 25, 32-33.
54. Salmond, Rebel, 85-89, 125; Daniel and Miller, "Participation," 539; Ross, "Mary McLeod Bethune," 8-9; and Weiss, Farewell, 151-152.

55. War Manpower Commission, Final Report, 40.
56. "Annual Report of the Division of Negro Affairs, June 30, 1937," 13-14, NDBA.
57. Congress, Work Relief and Relief, Fiscal Year 1940, 24 May 1939, 131, 161-166.
58. "Report of the Conference of Negro Administrative Assistants of the NYA, June 2-3, 1936," 15-16, NDBA.
59. Spragg's salary was \$1,440 per year compared with Alabama Deputy State Director B. L. Balch's, which was \$3,600 per year, a difference of \$2,160. Congress, Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1940, 24 May 1939, 131, 162.
60. "Notes on Staff Meeting Called by Mr. [D. B.] Lasseter in his office 2 p. m.," 23 July 1940, and "Memo to Mary McLeod Bethune from Joseph H. B. Evans re: Special Conference for State Administrators, 16 August 1940, 1, NDBA.
61. "Report of the Conference of the Negro Administrative Assistants of the National Youth Administration," 2-3 June 1936, 15-16, and "Agenda - State Youth Administrative Meeting: Division of Negro Affairs," 15 June 1940, NDBA.
62. "Annual Report of the Division of Negro Affairs," 30 June 1937, 7, NDBA.
63. Ibid., 7; Holt, Bethune, 213; Weiss, Farewell, 153; Smith, "Bethune and the National Youth Administration," 163; and Frank Horne to Bethune, 5 June 1937, "Correspondence, 1936-38," Series 4, Box 1, Folder 8, NCNW.
64. Howard A. Wilson to Mr. Karl D. Hesley, New York NYA Director, 25 February 1938, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 8, NCNW.
65. Ernest F. Witte to Richard R. Brown, Deputy Director of the NYA, 16 April 1938, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 8, NCNW.
66. Charles K. Keefe, St. Peter Claver Rectory, St. Paul, Minnesota to Richard R. Brown, 10 June 1938, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 8, NCNW.
67. David D. Jones to Aubrey Williams, 18 July 1936, Series 4, Box 1, Folder 8, NCNW.
68. Dorothy Height, Interviews by Polly Cowan, February - November 1974 and February - November 1976, in Hill, ed., Oral History Project, vol. 5, 69; and Marcus H. Boulware, The Oratory of Negro Leaders: 1900-1968 (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 111.

69. McCluskey, "Mary McLeod Bethune," 223-24.
70. Letter from Mary McLeod Bethune to President Roosevelt (1937, exact date unknown), NDBA.
71. Proceedings, 32; Holt, Bethune, 199-200; Sitkoff, New Deal, 81-83; and Weiss, Farewell, 146.
72. Memo from Mary M. Bethune to Aubrey Williams, 17 October 1939, NDBA.
73. Smith, "Bethune and the National Youth Administration," 1099-1101; and Weiss, Farewell, 201.
74. Aubrey Williams to Mary McLeod Bethune, "Revised Organizational Structure," 19 October 1942, Series 5, Box 25, Folder 381, NCNW.
75. Draft of an "Open Letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States," sent to Bethune by Pauli Murray on behalf of A. Phillip Randolph, 3 July 1942; Bethune to Randolph, 9 July 1942, Series 5, Box 29, Folder 434, NCNW. See also Richard B. Sherman, The Case of Odell Waller and Virginia Justice, 1940-1942 (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).
76. William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 250-51, 272.
77. *Ibid.*, 277-82.
78. Congress, Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1940, 24 May 1939, 105.; and "Federal Aid to Education, Press Release of a speech by Dr. Charles H. Judd, Director of Education," 30 March 1939, 10-11, NDBA.
79. War Manpower Commission, Final Report, 53.
80. Lindley and Lindley, A New Deal For Youth, ix.
81. Proceedings, 33.
82. Salmond, Rebel, 143.
83. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, Labor-Federal Security Appropriations Bill for 1941, 76th Cong., 3rd sess., 15 April 1940, 134-136, 217, 305, 366. John Salmond suggests that it would have been difficult for Williams, as director of the NYA, not to have some relationship with the AYC. In fact, the AYC was taken over by a communist leadership, but they were highly

critical of Williams and both he and Eleanor Roosevelt publicly broke with the organization in 1940. See Salmond, Rebel, 153-156, 165-166.

84.Holt, Bethune, 247-49.

85.Figures for African American youth in "Notes for Mr. Williams: Facts About Negroes on NYA Program, January 1940," NDBA. Figures for total resident centers in Congress, Work Relief and Relief for Fiscal Year 1940, 24 May 1939, 139-148.

86.Lindly and Lindley, Youth, 95-96.

87.Daniel and Miller, "Participation," 363.

88."NYA Prepares Youth for Work, Press Release of a speech by Thatcher Winslow, Administrative Assistant," 29 April 1939," 8, NDBA; and Lindley, Youth, 52-53. For information on increasing female work force, see William H. Chafe, The Paradox of Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 68-71.

89."Memo to D. B. Lasseter from Arnold T. Hill re: My Recent Trip to Florida," 11 December 1940, 2, 5, NDBA.

90.War Manpower Commission, Final Report, 111-112.

91.John Salmond, ed., "Aubrey Williams Remembers: A Note on Franklin D. Roosevelt's Attitude Toward Negro Rights," Alabama Review 25 (1972): 70-73; and Salmond, Rebel, 172-173.

92.New York Times 27 October 1942, 23:1.

93.Salmond, Rebel, 141-151; and "Press Release," 24 June 1940, NDBA.

94."Letter to All Land Grant College Presidents and to Howard University, Tuskegee, Wilberforce, and Hampton from Mary McLeod Bethune," 2 June 1939; "Letter to Mr. Glenn S. Callaghan from Garth H. Akridge," 8 August 1939; and "Press Release," 11 September 1939, NDBA.

95.Salmond, "Williams Remembers," 74-75; Lash, Eleanor, 528-529; New York Times 16 May 1942, 15:2; and Holt, Bethune, 230-233, 244; Aubrey Williams to Henry L. Stimson, 13 June 1942, Series 5, Box 36, Folder 513, NNCW.

96.Mary McLeod Bethune, "The Negro in Retrospect and Prospect," Journal of Negro History 35 (January 1938): 10-11.

[Note to page 50]

97. Mary McLeod Bethune, "Certain Unalienable Rights," in Rayford W. Logan, ed., What the Negro Wants (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 256.

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