

The Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial



Highsmith, C. M., photographer. Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

Washington, DC, is filled with monuments and memorials. But until 40 years ago, there wasn't a single monument that honored either a black person or a woman. In 1974, a monument was erected that honored both a black person and a woman. The woman it honors is Mary McLeod Bethune.

The National Council of Negro Women raised the money to build this monument. This was the same organization that Bethune founded 1935.

The monument of Bethune is located in Lincoln Park. Lincoln Park is about 12 blocks east of the United States Capitol Building. Both Congress and the Senate meet each day in the Capitol.

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Bethune's monument faces a monument of Abraham Lincoln, which is on the other side of the park. President Lincoln issued the order to free all the slaves in 1863. This order was called the Emancipation Proclamation. It was written down on a piece of paper. Emancipation means to free someone or something. A proclamation is an announcement. The monument shows Lincoln standing. He is holding the Emancipation Proclamation. Next to him kneels a black man. The man's hands were in chains. But he is holding his hands up to Lincoln to show that his chains have been broken.

The monument of Bethune is made out of brass and shows three figures. The first is of an elderly Mary McLeod Bethune.



In her right hand, Bethune holds the cane that President Roosevelt gave her. In her left hand is a scroll. On the scroll is her legacy. A legacy is a gift that one generation gives to the next. Bethune's legacy is education. She wanted every black child to have an

education. The other two figures are black children: a girl and a boy. Bethune is passing her legacy to these children.

The following is written underneath the monument.

"Mary McLeod Bethune

1875–1955

Let her works praise her."

Originally, the monument was supposed to be unveiled in 1963 on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. However, the artists building the monument were black. In 1963, they were too busy fighting for civil rights to complete the monument. The completed monument was finally unveiled on July 10th, 1974 on what would have been Bethune's 99th birthday. A crowd of more than 18,000 people came to the unveiling.

