

Saint Thomas More Black History Month 2006

African American Achievers Archives

Week 1

Famous African American Scholars and Educators

Edward A. Jones and Mary Jane Patterson First Black College Graduates



Edward A. Jones was the first African American in America to graduate from college. He earned a bachelors of arts degree from Amherst College on August 23, 1826. He earned a Masters Degree in 1829.

He eventually settled in Sierra Leone, Africa and became principal of the Fourah Bay Christian Institution, now Fourah Bay College.

Another man, John Brown Russwurm, is usually considered the first African American college graduate, but Mr. Jones graduated several days earlier.

Mary Jane Patterson was the first African American woman to receive a bachelor's degree, graduating from Oberlin College in 1862.

She was born in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her parents – who were probably escaped slaves – brought her to Oberlin, Ohio when she was very young.

After she graduated, she went to Philadelphia and taught in the "Institute for Colored Youths" for seven years. In 1869, she went to Washington to teach and in 1871 became the first Black principal of the new Preparatory High School for Negroes.



1840 – 1894

Famous African American Scholars and Educators (cont.)

Carter G. Woodson

Established Black History Week

Carter G. Woodson was an important historian and educator who began promoting Negro History Week in 1926. He thought it should be the second week of February, to celebrate the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln, the president who ended slavery, and Frederick Douglass, a former slave who spoke out against slavery. In the 1960s, Black History Week became Black History Month.

Mr. Woodson's family taught him to read. He worked as a coal miner in West Virginia to afford what he needed for high school. He graduated from Berea College in Kentucky in 1903. He taught English in the Philippines, then returned to the U.S. to teach at Dunbar High School in Washington, DC. He worked hard to promote Black education.

In 1912, he earned a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University. He was the second African American to earn a Harvard doctorate. He founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, the Journal of Negro History, the Associated Publishers and Negro History Bulletin.



1875 – 1950



1875 – 1955

Mary McLeod Bethune

Famous Educator, First Black Woman to Head a Federal Agency

Mary Jane McLeod Bethune devoted her life to helping Black Americans become educated and break free from discrimination. Mrs. Bethune believed education would help Black people earn a living in a country that wasn't fair.

Her parents had been slaves. And even though she was their 17th child, they made sure she went to school. After graduation, she taught school for many years. In 1904, she started the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls. This school became Bethune-Cookman College, which is still operating today.

She also worked in politics. She helped the Red Cross become integrated so Black people could do the same things as White people. In 1924, Mrs. Bethune became president of the National Association of Colored Women, which was the highest national office a Black woman could hold. In 1936, she became director of the Division of Negro Affairs, which made her the first Black woman to serve as head of a federal agency.