

Mary Church Terrell

Mary Church Terrell, (Sept. 23, 1863, Memphis, Tennessee—July 24, 1954, Annapolis, Maryland), was an American social activist, early civil rights advocate, educator, author, and public speaker advocating for women's suffrage and the rights for African Americans.

Terrell's activism was sparked in 1892 when an old friend of hers was lynched by whites because his business competed with theirs. Terrell focused on the notion of racial uplift, the belief that blacks would help racial discrimination by advancing themselves through education, work and community activism.



Appointed to the District of Columbia Board of Education in 1895, Terrell was the first black woman to hold such a position.

She was involved for many years in the women's suffrage movement and was the founder of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and its first president from 1896 to 1901. As the president of NACW she worked tirelessly to achieve educational and social reform and end discriminatory practices. She also actively embraced women's suffrage, which she saw as essential to elevating the status of black women, and consequently, the entire race.

In 1909, Terrell was among the founders and charter members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Then in 1910, she co-founded the College Alumnae Club, later renamed the National Association of University Women.

Following the passage of the 19th amendment, Terrell focused on broader civil rights. In 1940, she published her autobiography, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, outlining her experiences with discrimination.

In 1948, Terrell became the first black member of the American Association of University Women, after winning an anti-discrimination lawsuit.

Terrell fought for women's suffrage and civil rights because she realized that she belonged "to the only group in this country that has two such huge obstacles to surmount...both sex and race."

The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "Mary Eliza Church Terrell." Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 22 Jan. 2020, www.britannica.com/biography/Mary-Eliza-Church-Terrell.