

NANNIE HELEN BURROUGHS: The Person, Her Views, Her Legacy

Sow a thought and reap a deed. Sow a deed and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny.

Born: 1879 Orange, Virginia

Died 1961 : Wash, D.C.

American and Kentucky history are strewn with omissions of important women. One invisible woman was Nannie Helen Burroughs, and she is important because she endured oppression, prejudice, and witnessed violence but remained optimistic, deeply religious and hopeful - a hallmark of her life. She became a national religious and civil rights activist, pioneering educator, a powerful force for black women to gain greater recognition and respect in church decision-making, equal voting rights, and solid education and job opportunities. Burroughs was an intense, passionate, highly respected opinion leader among African Americans. Now it is time for Kentucky to recognize her.

Decade in Louisville: Although Burroughs only lived here 10 years, it was here that she got her start. Arrived 1900 to work for Foreign. Mission Bd of National Baptist Convention. In 1900, she gave Speech in Virginia, "How the Sisters Were Hindered from Helping." It catapulted her to national acclaim. When she returned, she helped found Woman's Convention of NBC.

The School: Founded National Training School for Women & Girls in Wash., D.C. in 1909 to give females opportunity to become self-sufficient and highly employable. Motto: *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible.* Believed classical and industrial education were complementary and teaching Black history was a must. "Develop every student in positive character traits, pride and skill in their chosen profession - and prepare them to enter competition in the workplace without fear or apology." Renamed for her; later, closed; today, a National Historic Landmark. In 1975, The Mayor of Washington, D.C. proclaimed May 10h "Nannie Burroughs Day."

The Church: The National Baptist Church was her mainstay and her Christian God guided her through life. In 1906, she founded **Woman's Day** to teach women to be leaders and to raise money for foreign missions. In her 1933 speech, "How White and Colored Women Can Cooperate in Building a Christian Civilization," Burroughs ends: *I pray that the women of the two Races will lead in this high and challenging endeavor. A civilization like this is not built on Race; it is built on Grace. It is not built on White; It is built on Right and Righteousness.*

The Community: Founded **Woman's Industrial Club** (726 W. Walnut St. - site of Greyhound Bus Station) - Day and night school, boarding hall; offered classes in business, clerical skills, domestic science, and millinery. To help cover expenses, women paid ten cents a week. Burroughs managed this effort, while maintaining her active engagement in Baptist church affairs
A founder, **Ky Assoc. of Colored Women's Clubs**

Politics & Suffrage: Formed **National Wage Earners Assoc.** working for legislation aimed at domestic workers. Was critical of both Black people and white people, scolding Blacks to take responsibility for full citizenship (*12 Things the Negro Must Do For Himself*) and demanding whites reject attitudes and policies of white supremacy (*12 Things White People Must Stop Doing to the Negro*). She became president of the National League of Republican Colored Women. Writing in *The Crisis*, 1915, Burroughs said voting would give women political power - that women needed the vote to advance their own interests and support the race overall.

Despite an intense philosophy, she was an eternal optimist - full of hope - for black women, inter-racial cooperation, and a more just and equal society.