

African American History Education based in Annapolis, Maryland

In the below, please see an overview of how I believe Nannie Helen Burroughs' views might apply to the current state of affairs in our country.

West Va. Women's Voice Newspaper

Burroughs'
Wisdom

Fighting Racism and Seeking

Meaning of Cooperation

The Constitution, the Floor of our
Nation

The controversy and actions resulting from the results of the recent election are increasingly dividing our country along political lines. However, I seek challenges to my position that our black leaders have joined, and even stoked, the fires of making everything about race. Our actions seem to be so emotionally driven, the type of emotionalism we find in our churches. I submit that our race needs, more than ever, to embrace Nannie Helen Burroughs' views and vision for our children, race and country. We must bring her rational/critical thinking back into our lives today. The below is how she was viewed.

- Dr. Kelly Miller (Howard University 50-year student, professor and administrator): "...Tracking her was like trying to capture the wind in my hand. She moved at an extraordinary pace, touching down on literally every aspect of Negro life for over fifty years..."
- Nannie Helen Burroughs at the 1920 National Baptist Convention: "We might as well be frank and face the truth...the majority of our religious leaders have preached too much heaven and too little Christian living...Men must welcome women into the affairs of government...Women must organize and educate...There will be protest against politics in the church, but it is better to have politics than ignorance."
- Dr./Reverend Earl Harrison, Pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church and friend gave the eulogy at her funeral: "...She was far above average in quick, intelligent, thinking. She was courageous, charming and dynamic to the point that she was irresistible to the open-minded and contemptible to the jealous and prejudiced."
- Dr. Sondra Washington in her book: The Nannie Helen Burroughs Story: "...her relationship with God was so strong that it overflowed into every aspect of her life and work, making it difficult to draw clear lines between her religious, educational, political and social interests..."

Prologue: Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879-1961), a remarkable black woman, is lost to history. Lacking knowledge of her contributions and achievements deprives our country of the benefits to be derived from applying her teachings to the problems facing us today. Therefore, this website is designed to bring to the people her views about "Opportunity, Responsibility and Challenge" (Afro-American Newspaper article, dated October 23, 1957). She believed, and so do I, that these factors are essential to achieving the full fruits of our democracy.

Throughout her life, Nannie Helen Burroughs spoke openly and decisively about the need for common ground and cooperation across racial and political lines to sensibly identify issues and seek solutions, including the roles of our government (federal, state, and local) and the type government we have and desire. Below, in a 1943 national radio address, she

spoke to the need for both blacks and whites to take responsibility to defeat race discrimination and inequities. Her path to victory was always through the masses electing leaders who could find common ground and look 25, 50, 100 years in the future and make plans to that end.

The contents of this website are the results of the exhaustive work of many women historians and others for whom I have the highest regard and respect. Although I refer in the contents of the website to only a few, I express my sincere appreciation to all for their efforts. The project work started in the Library of Congress with my research into the 110,000 pieces of information, organized primarily under the supervision of Dr. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Harvard Professor and President of ASALH. During my research, I was delighted to find that Miss Burroughs' mentor, Dr. Walter H. Brooks, Pastor of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. from 1882 to 1945, was the grandfather of Dr. Higginbotham. In this church, Nannie Helen Burroughs started the Woman's Auxiliary in 1902 and Woman's Day in 1907. Even in this church, the broad reach of Nannie Helen Burroughs' views and work seems to be lost.

Nannie Helen Burroughs' fight against discrimination included the rights and roles of women in the Home, Church, School, Workplace and Politics. She believed, however, that in spite of circumstances, every right carried an equally heavy burden of an obligation as the path to equal and sustainable equality and justice. She waged this battle within the black community and across racial lines, finding cooperation from among the white women of the Women's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention.

One of her remarkable achievements was being the first woman, in 1934, to give the Tuskegee Institute Commencement Speech, where she challenged the graduates with her teachings: "...I want you to take the struggles, the hardships, and the handicaps of this civilization and turn them into stepping stone. That is what other races have done, black and white...I heard an old woman praying one time. She asked, Lord please don't take me up the rough side of the mountain. I spoke to her afterwards and told her please not to include me in that number, because that was not the side I wanted to go up on. I wanted to go up the rough side because there was some chance I might get to the top. But if I went up the smooth side, I might slide back down..."

Secondly, as mentioned above she remarkably was extended the opportunity to give a national radio address in 1943: "Americans in arms...We salute you ALL - black and white...this war gives to America her first supreme opportunity to prove...that Democracy ideals and principles cannot be defeated...it also gives to the American Negro his FIRST opportunity to let the world know the type and quality of men and women a democracy can produce in seventy-five short years...this nation and the Negro race are face-to-face with the greatest opportunity that have ever come to either. Neither must be weak ANYWHERE...". Unfortunately, in spite of Burroughs being a member of the Advisory Board to the National Broadcasting Company, this audio could not be found in the company's archives.

During my research, I have been unable to find any audio or video of Miss Burroughs. Beyond the scope of work in the congressional archives, the two readings which mostly heavily impacted my initial work were the 2008 Doctoral Dissertation by Dr. Ann Michele Mason of the University of Maryland, Nannie H. Burroughs Rhetorical Leadership During the Inter-war Period and Dr. Bettye Collier-Thomas' best-selling 2010 book, Jesus, Jobs and Justice. I still cherish the copy she personally autographed for me at the 94th ASALH

Convention in Raleigh, NC.

More recently, a 2019 book by Dr. Kelisha B. Graves, [A Documentary Portrait of an Early Civil Rights Pioneer](#), provides the most comprehensive study and analysis of Nannie Helen Burroughs' life and work I have encountered. The endorsements by Dr. Sharon Harley, University of Maryland, Dr. Linda D. Tomlinson, Fayetteville State University, and Dr. Tommy J. Curry, University of Edinburgh truly capitalize the essence of this remarkable piece of work. Dr. Curry's review, "This is a tremendous scholarly reintroduction of Nannie Helen Burroughs as a black thinker, a civil rights activist, and a race woman...", best describes my objective in how I would like to see us apply the teachings of Nannie Helen Burroughs. I note here that the documentary's title only refers to Burroughs as a Civil Rights Pioneer, whereas the book covers the entire range of Burroughs' life's work and views as shown in her 1952 book, [Think On These Things](#).

Beyond writings and excerpts of speeches on the website, I encourage the reader to Google for speeches, writings and books written about her. I have tried my best to do justice in sharing the work of our women historians and others who wrote about her in my efforts to bring her teachings into our lives today. I believe strongly that her views and vision for our country represent the way forward to find the common ground required to achieve a more perfect union.



[Click to Enlarge](#)

The above describes the vocational school established for Negro Women and Girls in 1909, closing as an Elementary School in 2013. Many will argue that this was Miss Burroughs' greatest achievement and contribution to our race and country. Lost in the discussion of this great institution, however, is the dual mission of religious education. She founded a National Christian Educational Retreat on the campus of the school. It was held annually in

the month of July, and offered training to leaders and workers in every department of the church, to include missionary work. Aurelia R. Downey, the third president of the school, addresses the details in her remarkable book, A Tale of Three Women, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Dr. Rebekah J. Calloway and Dr. Aurelia R. Downey. As an indication of Burroughs' world-wide reach, Downey writes that Burroughs purchased and maintained a Retreat for Foreign Missionaries at 1022 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C., which was not maintained by the National Baptist Convention after her death. This seems to confirm the continuation of Burroughs' world-wide religious impact, given her keynote speech at the First Baptist World Alliance Conference in Hyde Park, London in 1905 and the enrollment of Negro girls from foreign countries in her school in 1909.

In the field of education, Lucy Craft Laney was known as the matriarch. Along with Nannie Helen Burroughs, Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Mary McLeod Bethune, these were our "Women Builders" who were affectionately known as "The Fab 4 of Education". However, those who knew Burroughs recognized that her life's work had implications far beyond education, as suggested by Dr. Sondra Washington, in her book The Story of Nannie Helen Burroughs: "...known to kneel in prayer in her school office every day at noon, her relationship with God was so strong that it was difficult to draw clear lines between her thinking on religious, educational, political and social interests.". I suggest the 2018 movie, Green Book, as an interesting vehicle to start a discussion about Nannie Helen Burroughs and the past, present and future of our racially divided country. **"Sow a thought and reap a deed. Sow a deed and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny."** These words - quoted in the 1950/52 volumes of her books, What Do You Think?/Think On These Things, are attributed to various authors, but clearly inspired by Biblical teachings - summed up Nannie Helen Burroughs' life and work, and are the spirit behind this project trying to stimulate an interest in her thoughts, words and deeds.

I once asked of my fraternity brother, Dr. Lawrence Hawkins: "Why did I select this person as the cause to which I would dedicate the rest of my life, given her views are presented in such a direct and uncompromising manner?" Dr. Earl L. Harrison a friend and thirty-one year Pastor of Washington DC's Shiloh Baptist Church describes her as follows in his book, The Dreamer and the Dreamer: "...She was courageous and dynamic to the point that she was irresistible to the open-minded and contemptible to the jealous and prejudice." He responded : "Brother Wyatt, you did not select her. She selected you"

s letter to Mary Alice Dorsett

Mentor to
Dr. King

Mary Alice Dorsett letter tasking

☞The people do not apply my teachings. When I speak, they agree with me, laugh, give me standing ovations and applauds, but that's the end of it. Perhaps when I am dead, if someone will share my teachings with them, they might apply them. If so, they will improve themselves economically, intellectually, politically, and socially, and this will make them first-class citizens. I leave this responsibility to you.☞

The above are the words of Nannie Helen Burroughs as told to her student Mary Alice Dorsett, who attended the National Training School for Women and Girls from 1947-51. Long after graduation, Miss Burroughs was a mentor and friend to Mary Alice, as shown in the above correspondence. In 1990, Mary Alice Dorsett wrote a book entitled Wings. She said Miss Burroughs told her to write a book with that title, because "A race rises on its

own wings, or is held down by its own weight.” Per her wishes in the above letter, I did travel to Tampa and participate in her eighty-fifth birthday celebration, and we maintained contact until her demise. Suffering from the debilitating effects of a stroke, she penned the below communication to me in 2015. Mary Alice Dorsett transitioned in November 2017. I honored her request and traveled to Tampa to participate in her funeral. I am not an historian. I simply found the writings of our women historians to be a valuable lesson in how the past, if rationally faced, can be a guide to how we conduct our lives today. Therefore, since discovering Miss Burroughs in 2008, I have used my personal resources to advance her views and vision for our race and country.

The Last Communication – Dorsett to Wyatt