

# Negro Women In Politics

The Nineteenth Amendment which gave women the right to vote was enacted into law Aug. 26, 1920. Many women remember the controversy which arose over this participation of women in government. Some took the opportunity to say that the proposal came while the great numbers of men were fighting World War I and took advantage of their absence to get the act ratified by Congress, although the war had been over almost two years.

However, this new status given American women did not alter the political scene in the United States as much as the opponents of the bill would have had the country think it would. In fact, the leading suffragettes of that era had to urge those women who now had the right to vote as any other citizen to go to the polls and assert their newly given freedom.

The so-called "dirty politics" was the phrase that kept those feminists who clamored for the right to express their choice at the ballot box away from the things so dearly fought for after the turn of the twentieth century.

Negro women were slow to become interested, even in those state where they were able to vote along with their men folk, and to avail themselves of this coveted right.

The participation of Negro women in the political history of the United States could stand much research, and doubtless would make most interesting reading. But the compilation of data on the interest of those whose participation is cited here will give a few highlights concerning those who have made history in the first fifty years of the present century in America.

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a democratic president, was elected in 1932 the Negro made his power as a voter in the United States felt broadly for the first time. Not long after Mr. Roosevelt's inauguration, and on into the second term as president, his New Deal program included many agencies which were to revitalize

the country and make the participation of the so-called "little man" a responsible part of the New Deal.

One of these agencies was the National Youth Administration (NYA). One of the first Negro women whose leadership caused her to be the spokesman for the Negro as a whole was Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune. It was she who caused numbers of Negro youth to gain a self-respect and an assurance that they were American like every other American for the first time.

Mrs. Bethune was appointed to the position as director, Negro division, National Youth Administration, by President Roosevelt. She became one of the most sought after advisors on all matters pertaining to the Negro the country has known. The many men and women whom she selected to aid her in the NYA movement have been selected for other key positions within government since the dissolution of the National Youth Administration. This development attests to the merit of those whom she chose to aid her and who contributed no little to the success and influence which was hers, and which she has continued to exert through her leadership still in affairs which affect Negro women throughout America today.

Mrs. Bethune's founding of the organization known as the National Council of Negro Women attests to the continued interest she has maintained in promoting the economic, social, and political welfare of women throughout the world.

Dr. Sadie T. M. Alexander, one of two women appointed to the President's Committee on Civil Rights in 1946, was the first Negro woman to earn the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the United States. Her appointment to this committee which has revolutionized the thinking of the country on the status of the Negro as a citizen, gave rise to the civil rights program enunciated by President Truman during the last presidential campaign and has caused more racial controversy than any issue since the Civil War.

Jane Bolin, a Yale graduate in

law, is a judge in the Domestic Relations Court in New York City—an appointee to this position in 1948.

Mrs. Thomasina Johnson Norford, Washington, D. C., one of the outstanding lobbyists in the nation's capital a few years ago, was appointed as consultant in the Department of Labor.

Mrs. Ann Arnold Hedgeman, whose contribution to the success of the Citizens Committee on Civil Rights for Truman during the presidential campaign in 1948 was rewarded by the appointment as assistant to the Federal Security Administration, is considered the top ranking Negro woman from the standpoint of salary in Washington at this time.

Mrs. Christine Davis, former secretary to Congressman William Dawson of Illinois, is now a clerk of a Congressional committee, the House Committee on Executive Expenditures, the first Negro woman to receive such an appointment.

These political appointments have all been under a Democratic Administration, with the exception of Judge Bolin.

The number is by no means exhausted—other state appointments and city elections will find numerous Negro women participating in the political life of the communities in which they live. Among these may be found Mrs. Jean Murrell Capers, former assistant county prosecutor, now Councilwoman in Cleveland, O.; Mrs. Edith Sampson, appointed assistant state's attorney of Cook county, Ill.; Pauli Murray, Deputy Attorney General of California; Mrs. Eunice Hunton Carter, an assistant District Attorney of New York; Miss Francis Williams, a native of St. Louis, Mo., works for Senator Lehman of New York State; Mrs. Marguerite Ingram for Congressman William Dawson of Illinois and Mrs. Elizabeth Davis Pittman, Omaha, Neb., attorney in the law office of Davis & Pittman.

Scratching the surface, as it were, gives an inkling of how we have given the American picture of women in politics during the first 50 years a perspective which Senator Douglas; Kathryn Wallace

may be indicative of how powerful the Negro woman's influence

can be in the political life of our country.

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