

# Anna Julia Cooper



Educator, Writer, Activist  
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Anna Julia (Haywood) Cooper was born in 1858 or 1859 in Raleigh, North Carolina to the slave Hannah S. Haywood on the plantation of George Washington Haywood. Haywood is widely believed to be Anna's biological father.

At the age of nine, Anna received a scholarship to attend Saint Augustine's Normal School and Collegiate Institute, founded by the Episcopal Church for the purpose of training teachers to educate former slaves and their families. In 1876 after completing her studies, Anna was asked to join the faculty. She married a fellow teacher, George Cooper, an ordained minister from Nassau, the Bahamas in 1877, but his death in 1879 left her a widow at the age of 21. Anna remained single for the rest of her life.

Anna returned to school and in 1881 she enrolled at Oberlin College, one of the few colleges that accepted black women. She graduated in 1884 along with Mary Church Terrell and Ida A. Gibbs, the second, third and fourth African American women to receive bachelor's degrees. Anna taught at Wilberforce University for a year and then returned to Saint Augustine's to teach German, Latin and Mathematics. She earned her Master's in 1885 and in 1887 took a position as a teacher at the Washington (DC) "M Street High School," the most prestigious African American high school in the country. She became the principal of the school in 1902 and under her leadership, many graduates of the school would receive scholarships to "Ivy League" institutions.

In Washington, Anna quickly became one of the leaders in the circles of educated, middle-class African American women who were advocating for women's rights in general and black women's rights in particular. Anna was soon in demand as a speaker across the country. She was a principal speaker at the American Conference of Educators in 1890, the International Women's Congress at Chicago in 1893, the National Conference of Colored Women in 1895, the National Federation of Afro-American Women in 1896 and the Pan-African Conference in 1900. Anna was the only woman elected to the "American Negro Academy". She published "A Voice from the South" in 1892, which contained speeches and essays representing many of her political opinions.

In 1906 Anna was demoted from her position as principal, when she criticized plans to institute a less demanding curriculum. Anna taught at Lincoln University in Missouri for the next four years before returning to the "M Street School" as a regular teacher. She received her doctorate degree from the Sorbonne in 1925 at the age of 66 becoming the fourth African American woman to receive a Ph.D.

Anna raised two foster children five great-nieces and great-nephews whom she had adopted in 1915. She became President of Frelinghuysen University in Washington D.C. in 1930, a school for working Blacks, which she operated out of her home.

Anna Julia Cooper passed away in her sleep on February 27, 1964 at the age of 105.

Page 26 & 27 of every new United States passport contains this quote:  
"The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or a class - it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of humanity." - Anna Julia Cooper

Sources:  
Wikipedia, "The Free Encyclopedia"  
Encyclopedia Africana