

Mary Church Terrell

(1863 – 1954)

Civil and Women's Rights Activist



Mary Church Terrell was born Mary Eliza Church on September 23, 1863 in Memphis, Tennessee to parents who were former slaves.

She attended Oberlin College in Ohio where she received a master's degree in education. Oberlin was the first college in the United States to admit women and one of the earliest to admit students of all races.

Mary moved to Washington, D.C. in 1887 and taught at a local high school for black students. In 1891 she married Robert Terrell, who became a lawyer and later the first black municipal judge in Washington. After marrying Robert, Mary became active in the suffrage movement and worked for civil and equal rights for women and African Americans.

In 1896 she helped found the *National Association of Colored Women*, an organization that supported women groups throughout the country. Mary served as the association's president for the first two terms.

In 1909 she was one of the signers of the charter that established the NAACP.

Mary also fought to end segregation in public establishments in Washington, D.C. In 1950 she was refused service in a whites-only restaurant. Mary sued the restaurant. The case went on for three years. In 1953 the courts ruled that segregation in restaurants in Washington, D.C. was unconstitutional.

Mary Church Terrell continued to work and fight for equal rights for women and African Americans. She died in Annapolis, Maryland on July 24, 1954, just two months after the United States Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v Board of Education*.

Her home in Washington, D.C. is a National Historic Landmark.