

Professor Evans, “My Last Will and Testament” A Tribute to Mary McLeod Bethune

Sunday, March 29, 2020



Ten years ago for my 40th birthday, my husband @curtisdyrd commissioned a portrait of Mary McLeod Bethune (by John Ahi, <https://johnahee.com/>). It hangs in my office as a guide. In tribute, in these trying times, I wrote #MyLastWillandTestament | <http://www.professorevans.net/bio.html>.

Today, I feel good. So far as I know, I am healthy. But I started to write my will anyway. The process of learning to write a will made me appreciate, in a new way, the beauty of Dr. Bethune's, “MY LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.” #MyLastWillandTestament
https://www.cookman.edu/about_bcu/history/lastwill_testament.html

The piece begins, "Sometimes as I sit communing in my study I feel that death is not far off...". It was written for *Ebony* magazine, published in August 1955. Dr. Bethune died in May of that year, at age 79. #MyLastWillandTestament

Bethune, #MyLastWillandTestament I LEAVE YOU LOVE. HOPE. THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE IN ONE ANOTHER. A THIRST FOR EDUCATION. RESPECT FOR THE USES OF POWER. FAITH. RACIAL DIGNITY. A DESIRE TO LIVE HARMONIOUSLY WITH YOUR FELLOW MEN. A RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR YOUNG PEOPLE.

Bethune was a leader in education, Black women’s clubs, and national politics. Elaine Smith published an insightful article in [@JAAHistory](#) (1996) about Bethune’s legacy, her “spiritual autobiography,” and her political philosophy. [#MyLastWillandTestament](#)
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/JNHv81n1-4p105>

Bethune was widely respected as an organizational leader in higher education. But she was also red-baited as a communist, derided as non-intellectual, and had several detractors (including Zora Neale Hurston). [#MyLastWillandTestament](#) <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b106-i184>

I just turned 50 and want to live to age 105 like Dr. Anna Julia Cooper. Whether I do or not, I want to leave something to this world. Shout out to [@DrARPreston1913](#) & Dr. Sheila Flemming-Hunter, two Bethune scholars who inspire me. So, here is [#MyLastWillandTestament](#)

[#MyLastWillandTestament](#)

I LEAVE YOU BOOKS.
I LEAVE YOU A HISTORY OF BLACK WOMEN’S IDEAS.
I LEAVE YOU SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION.
I LEAVE YOU MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS.
I LEAVE YOU MEMOIR.
I LEAVE YOU POETRY.
I LEAVE YOU JOY.
I LEAVE YOU RESISTANCE.
I LEAVE YOU INNER PEACE.

[Full text below.]

What do you will to this world?

[#MyLastWillandTestament](#)

*If you want to formalize a will in the state of Georgia, look on the “Publications” page of the GA Department of Human Services, Division of Aging. Click “Details of My Final Arrangements” and “Georgia Advance Directives for Health Care” for details <https://aging.georgia.gov/about-us/publications>

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A Tribute to Mary McLeod Bethune

I LEAVE YOU BOOKS. My books amplify voices of scholar-activists who engage their head, heart, and hands to “build a better world.” Black feminist-womanist scholarship creates a record of thought and action that calls evil by its name and affirms the best of life. [#CiteBlackWomen](#)

I LEAVE YOU A HISTORY OF BLACK WOMEN’S IDEAS. Intellectual history, like philosophy, makes sense of individual motivation and collective action. Consensus is not the goal but Black women’s ideas show it is possible to act on your own behalf in a way that does not diminish others.

I LEAVE YOU SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION. Black women scholar-activists offer a blueprint for a just society. Anna Cooper to Kimberlé Crenshaw, Ella Baker to Barbara Ransby, Barbara Smith to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Angela Davis to Alicia Garza. Generations of critical educators.

I LEAVE YOU MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS. Balancing strength and vulnerability is possible. Self-care and stress management strategies sustain quality of life, regardless of time, place, or circumstance. Networks can affirm your humanity. You can be well, even in an ill world.

I LEAVE YOU MEMOIR. Memoirs are mentors. I have benefited immensely from hundreds of Africana women like Mary Church Terrell, Maya Angelou, Celia Cruz, Jan Willis, Wangari Maathai, Janet Mock, and Stacey Abrams, who wrote their life stories to inform, instruct, and inspire.

I LEAVE YOU POETRY. Sonia Sanchez wrote, “peace is a human right.” Poetry-all art-can be an enduring form of resistance. Deconstruction is essential, especially to deal with structural violence. But it seems to me, that poetry “also too” raises consciousness and moves with power.

I LEAVE YOU RESISTANCE. Bethune resisted the Klan and segregation laws in Florida. In her name, graduating students at Bethune-Cookman University turned their backs on Betsy DeVos and Republican administration in 2017. Resist your way, wherever you are.

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/why-i-turned-my-back-on-betsy-devos-during-graduation/>

I LEAVE YOU JOY. My favorite job before college was as a waitress in a comedy club. Laughter can signify, indict, and enlighten. Joy, like love, is a gift for you *and* others. Give love, intimate or communal, that offers levity. The laugh of friends and lovers can save lives.

I LEAVE YOU INNER PEACE. I’m satisfied with how I lived this life. Neither pleased, nor disappointed. At peace. I am not looking forward to death, but I won’t look away either, especially in this moment of great global loss. I’m grateful to have lived and learned. Peace y’all.