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# African-American Activist Mary Church Terrell and the Brownsville Disturbance

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**Debra Newman Ham**

I will not shrink from undertaking what seems wise and good because I labor under the double handicap of race and sex but striving to preserve a calm mind with a courageous, cheerful spirit, barring bitterness from my heart, I will struggle all the more earnestly to reach the goal.

—Mary Church Terrell

Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954) demonstrated the philosophy of calm courage many times in a long life of activism. In the middle of her life, when three companies of African-American soldiers in Brownsville, Texas, were dismissed without honor and without a hearing in 1906, she readily came to their defense. Their dismissals followed a racial disturbance during which one white man was killed and several others wounded in Brownsville. Terrell, at the urging of some African-American leaders, went to see Secretary of War William Howard Taft to request that the action against the black troops be rescinded until they received a fair hearing. Her request was granted after Taft appealed to President Theodore Roosevelt, and the Constitution League, a civil rights organization, sent in lawyers to hear the soldiers' side of the story.

In her autobiography, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, Terrell details her involvement in Chapter 27, titled “The Secretary of War Suspends Order Dismissing Colored Soldiers at My Request” (pp. 309–318). She begins the chapter in her usual narrative style, saying, “Just as I left the Fall River boat from New York one morning to take the train for Boston,” in November 1906, “I read the glaring headlines of a newspaper which stated that President Theodore Roosevelt had dismissed without honor three companies of colored soldiers who had been accused of shooting up Brownsville, Texas, where they were stationed.” Terrell wrote that if her heart “had been weak, I should have had an attack heart failure right then and there.” The disturbance that led to the headline had taken place the previous summer. In August 1906, three companies of the African-American Twenty-fifth Regiment, B, C, and D Companies, were involved in the Brownsville disturbance. Whites reported that African American soldiers had “shot up the town.”

When Terrell reached Boston, she contacted former abolitionist Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the white Civil War commander of the First South Carolina Volunteers, a black unit. Higginson was also the author a classic historical account of his unit titled, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, originally published in 1869. Terrell reported that when she met with Colonel Higginson, who was “a well known champion of the race,” he stated that he regretted “that such terrible punishment had been inflicted upon the soldiers but was thrilled with the soldiers’ solidarity in the face of adversity. He said that during the Civil War, his troops were often divisive and competitive. He was proud that the Brownsville soldiers could not be forced or bribed to disclose any information about the shootings. She did not indicate that Higginson had any further involvement in the matter. Terrell’s campaign on behalf of the soldiers, though, had just begun.

Born in Memphis, Tennessee, during the Civil War, Mary Church Terrell was the daughter of Robert Reed Church, a very light mulatto who was wealthy. With her family’s financial support, Mary received an excellent education followed by extended travel in Europe. After obtaining her undergraduate degree, her father urged her to settle down for a life of leisure in his home, but Terrell wanted to work for the uplift of African Americans and women, and braved her father’s disapproval to do so. During Mary Church Terrell’s long and notable life, it seemed that

there was very little she did not attempt in order to improve the social, economic, and political conditions of African Americans. Her excellent education and travel abroad helped equip her for a career that began with teaching jobs and continued with leadership positions in the Colored Women's League and later the National Association of Colored Women. Terrell worked vigorously for women's suffrage and women's rights, particularly black women's rights. She was an internationally known speaker and lecturer, a widely published writer, a member of numerous boards and associations, a founding member of a Congregational church in Washington, D.C., an active member of the Republican Party until she joined the 1952 presidential campaign of Adlai Stevenson, a Democrat, and a charter member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Terrell led and won the fight to desegregate Washington, D.C., a struggle that was finally resolved by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1953, just a year before her death. Many of the major players—statesmen, politicians, teachers, and literati—in the century after the Civil War were Terrell's personal friends or acquaintances, including Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary McLeod Bethune, and W. E. B. Du Bois. Many other noted African-American leaders worked alongside Terrell in "racial uplift" endeavors.

After Terrell returned from Boston to her home in Washington, D.C., she received a call from John Milholland of New York City, a member of the Constitution League, who asked her to go to Secretary of War William Howard Taft to urge him to suspend the dismissal order pending an investigation. On November 17, a Saturday, Terrell went to Taft's office and was informed by the receptionist that it would be impossible to see the secretary that day. Asked what she wanted to see him about, she replied, "I want to say a few words to Secretary Taft about the colored soldiers who have just been dismissed." After passing that message along to Secretary Taft, the receptionist again informed Terrell that the secretary was too busy. Terrell, who had already been in the office several hours, said, "I might as well remain longer." She noted that "nothing but desperate illness could have induced me to leave that office, so long as I knew that Mr. Taft was still in it." About an hour later she was invited in. This is how she reports the dialogue:

“What do you want to say to me?” inquired Mr. Taft, as soon as I entered his office. “I have come to see you about the colored soldiers who have been dismissed without honor in Brownsville, Texas,” I said. “What do you want me to do about it?” he inquired. “President Roosevelt has already dismissed them, and he has gone to Panama. There is nothing I can do.”

“All I want you to do, Mr. Secretary,” I said, “is to suspend the order dismissing the soldiers without honor, until an investigation can be made.” “Is that ALL you want me to do?” inquired Mr. Taft with good-natured sarcasm, as he emphasized the word “ALL” and then smiled. “ALL you want me to do,” he continued in the same vein. “is to suspend an order issued by the President of the United States during his absence from the country.” (p. 311)

After further discussion about the pride African Americans had in their soldiers, Terrell left Taft’s office. She reported that “less than half an hour after I had left Secretary Taft he had cabled President Roosevelt that he would withhold the execution of the order to dismiss without honor the three companies of the Twenty-fifth Infantry until he had received further instructions from him. Terrell said that though she was disappointed that the dismissal order was not rescinded outright, she was “grateful to Mr. Taft for the effort he had made in their behalf” by withholding the order for thirty-six hours. During this time another member of the Constitution League, Gilchrist Stewart of New York City, went to Brownsville before the soldiers dispersed so they could tell him their own story. A December 12, 1906, article in the *New York Times* stated that Stewart represented 145 of the 167 soldiers. The soldiers alleged that whites in blackface committed the shootings with the intention of framing the black soldiers. When President Roosevelt returned from Panama, Terrell and Stewart visited him to present the case of the soldiers. “The President simply stated that the evidence in the case would be sent to the War Department and that it would be given due consideration.” Terrell also

said that the soldiers would be allowed to reenlist if they would come forward to furnish evidence sufficient to convince the War Department of their innocence. Later, though, President Roosevelt did not alter the previous decision to dismiss the soldiers. Terrell noted that although a \$10,000 reward was offered to anyone who would come forward with evidence about the Brownsville disturbance, no one ever did.

The Terrell papers at the Library of Congress indicate that even though she reported that only she and Secretary Taft were present in the office on November 17, the next day newspapers all over the country reported the meeting in words very similar to those in Terrell's book. She does not take credit as the author of the articles, which were obviously syndicated—probably by the *Washington Post*—but she did periodically write for the Post and other newspapers and magazines. The Post article on November 18 was titled, "Appeal for Black Troops," and subtitled, "Mrs. Mary Church Terrell Asks Suspension of Order. Secretary Taft, at Her Request Cables President for Authority to Stop Soldiers Dismissal." The New York Times article was headlined, "Taft Acts for Negro Troops. Intimates That He May Communicate with the President." The article begins this way: "Mrs. Mary Church Terrell, one of the leading colored educators of the country, a member of the District of Columbia School Board, a graduate of Oberlin College and a member of the Constitutional League of New York called upon Secretary Taft..." Within a day or two after her meeting, similar articles had appeared in a number of newspapers, including the *Washington Star*, *New York Sun*, *Atlanta Journal*, and *New York Press*. Terrell used a professional clipping service in New York, Henry Romeike, Inc., to provide her with published articles that she wrote or mentioned her. She was so active in African-American women's clubs, giving speeches and attending conferences and meetings to advocate for African-American rights and women's suffrage, that her name was often in the press.

Her response to the Brownsville disturbance provides some insight into her strategy of genteel confrontation. She and her husband, Harvard University-trained Judge Robert Terrell, were politically astute. For example, they cultivated the friendship of both kingmaker/breaker Booker T. Washington and Niagara Movement leader W. E. B. Du Bois. Mary Terrell used her wealth and status in the Washington community to gain an entree to Secretary Taft. She then apparently wrote articles about

the meeting or agreed to be interviewed to focus public opinion on the dispute. When she hit a dead end with this tactic—because the soldiers still would or could not provide needed information—she wrote a series of human-interest stories about the lives of some of the soldiers. She wrote one article, later published in various papers, about Mingo Sanders, “late 1st Sergeant Co. B of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry. He was dismissed without honor, after serving continuously and faithfully for over twenty-six years.” In this 1907 article, she details Sgt. Saunders’s service record in Cuba and the Philippines during the Spanish-American War era. She particularly emphasized the role that Saunders’s unit and other African- American troops played in aiding Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders at the Battle of San Juan Hill. Terrell’s own articles and others that she saved followed the Brownsville case as it was argued in Congress. Although Terrell has no byline, an article relating to Mingo Sanders in the February 12, 1907, issue of the *Washington Post* uses some of the exact words that are in a draft article about the sergeant that is in her papers at the Library of Congress. In the article Saunders says that the soldiers wanted to get their weapons, but that the gun case was locked. Saunders insisted that the attack came from the outside—Brownsville citizens attacking the fort—rather than the soldiers attacking the city. The *Post* reported:

His story of the incidents of the night of August 13 was not interesting until he told of his experiences in trying to get to the barracks after being awakened by the shooting. He said he started on a run to B Company’s quarters, and just after he left his house the firing was renewed. It came from the town, he said, and bullets were flying thick and fast, over his head.

In this article and many others, Terrell used her contacts and her writing skills to try to sway public opinion in favor of the Brownsville soldiers. She persisted in her efforts from the fall of 1906 at least into the spring of 1907 but found little satisfaction in the results. Yet nothing ever seemed to cool her ardor for racial and gender justice—except success.

Terrell had an exceptional childhood and education for a person of color in the nineteenth century. She was born Mary Eliza Church in Memphis on September 23, 1863. She was the eldest child of Louisa (Ayers) Church and Robert Reed Church, both former slaves. The couple later had one son, Thomas Ayres Church. Mary was a light mulatto

with long, dark, curly hair. During her life, many observers thought that she was white. From time to time Terrell made practical use of her light skin color. She explained herself this way:

I have sometimes taken advantage of my ability to get certain necessities and comforts and I have occasionally availed myself of opportunities to which I was entitled by outwitting those who are obsessed with race prejudice and would have withheld them from me, if they had been perfectly sure of my racial status. But never once in my life have I even been tempted to “cross the color line” and deny my racial identity. (p. 471)

Terrell’s father was the son of his master, Capt. Charles B. Church, who treated Robert decently but never gave him his freedom. After Robert Church’s mother passed away, his father allowed him to work on his riverboat as a dishwasher, where the young man’s industry eventually earned him the position of procurement steward for the vessel. After Emancipation, Robert Church opened a saloon in Memphis that proved reasonably successful. During the Memphis race riots of 1866, when “Mollie” Church, as young Mary was commonly known, was about three, Robert Church was shot in the head at his saloon and left for dead. Although the bullet hole remained in his skull, he survived the attack and was able to open another business. He suffered from recurring headaches for the rest of his life.

Church was a shrewd businessman, but it was his wife Louisa Church’s hair salon—patronized by many of the well-to-do white women of Memphis—that enabled the young family to buy their first fashionable home. Life between Terrell’s parents was not peaceful, however, and they divorced while Mollie was very young. Custody of her and her brother, Thomas, was awarded to Louisa Church, but Robert Church continued generous support to his children throughout their lives. After Mary went away to school in Ohio when she was six, she spent very little time with either parent.

During the yellow fever epidemic in Memphis in 1878–79, many people fled the city and were willing to sell their property at bargain prices. By that time, Robert Church’s business was flourishing, and he was eager

to buy as much abandoned real estate as he could afford. Observers felt that Church was imprudent to believe the city Memphis would recover after the epidemic. They were wrong, and Robert became an extremely wealthy real estate owner who was able to support his daughter in a manner only a handful African Americans of the period enjoyed.

Terrell began her education in Memphis, but the segregated schools there were so inadequate that her parents sent her to the Antioch College Model School in Yellow Springs, Ohio, when she was about six. There she was often the only child of color among her classmates. She boarded with a kind black family, the Hunsters, and when she was older, divided her summers between her parents' homes. While she was away at school, her mother and younger brother moved to New York City, so she often traveled by train up and down the Eastern Seaboard to visit her parents. Although Terrell's mother sent her boxes of clothes and gifts at various times during the school year, she rarely visited her daughter.

Even as a youth, Terrell seemed conscious of the special opportunities that were afforded her and did not complain too much about being separated from her loved ones. She had a well-balanced and gregarious disposition that made it easy for her to adapt to new situations. Although Terrell was so light-skinned that she was sometimes mistaken for white, she was sometimes subjected to racial indignities. While Terrell was in elementary school, one incident between her and some white classmates who derided her race prompted Terrell to decide she would show everyone that a black student could be academically superior. In her autobiography, Terrell indicates she was determined not to let mistreatment deter her from her goal of racial uplift. She thoroughly enjoyed school, rarely had problems with fellow students, and consistently demonstrated an excellent grasp of her assignments, often winning the distinction of being first in her class. Throughout her life she managed to maintain a sense of humor, a love for romance, a sense of daring and adventure, and a determination to be her own person no matter what her circumstances were. After two years at the Model School, Mary attended public school in Yellow Springs, then enrolled in the public high school in Oberlin, Ohio, graduating in 1879.

Terrell was one of several black students at Oberlin College, which was founded by abolitionists. At the time one of the few integrated

institutions of higher learning in the United States, it had first opened its doors to African Americans in 1835. Most women at Oberlin chose the two-year ladies' curriculum, but Terrell decided to pursue the "gentleman's course," which meant four years of classical studies. She performed well in her classes and was active in many campus activities, including Bible studies, the church choir, literary societies, and various recreational activities such as dancing. Many years after her 1884 graduation, Terrell wrote in her autobiography that she felt the sting of racial discrimination only a few times at Oberlin. Terrell probably protected herself to a degree by refusing to thrust herself into white student social circles or date white male students. Nevertheless, she found to her surprise that she was popular with her fellow students and respected by her instructors and was often invited to participate in school and outside social activities. In 1929, Terrell was named among the one hundred most successful graduates of Oberlin.

After his daughter's graduation, Terrell's father wanted her to return to Memphis to live the life of a lady of education and refinement. College women who tried to pursue a profession were generally discouraged from doing so during the nineteenth century, and Church had no desire for his daughter to be counted among that group. Terrell was one of the few black women in the United States—most of whom had been free from slavery for only two decades—who had ever received a bachelor's degree. By the time that Terrell returned home, Church was so wealthy that he was considered a millionaire and the wealthiest black man in the South. At school, while traveling, and at home with her father, Terrell had the opportunity to meet many nationally prominent black Americans, such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Senator Blanche Kelso Bruce and his wife, Josephine. Terrell especially admired Douglass, whom she met in Washington, D.C., while she was at Oberlin and maintained a friendship with until his death in 1895.

Terrell agreed for a time to be her father's hostess, but her heart's desire was to be a professional woman, a race woman dedicated to helping African Americans. She was soon impatient with her leisurely inactivity, especially after her father married a second time. The new wife was an old family friend, Anna Wright, who naturally assumed the role of mistress of the home. Terrell secretly began sending inquiries about teaching

positions with the hope she would be able to share her knowledge with willing pupils.

When she accepted a job in Ohio at Wilberforce College in 1885, her father was incensed and refused to speak to her for almost a year. Although pained by the rift, Terrell nevertheless pursued her goal, teaching five different courses and acting as the college secretary. College-educated African Americans who wanted to pursue professional careers usually found opportunities only at segregated colleges, schools, and businesses. After her first year at Wilberforce, Terrell visited her mother in New York and then decided to go to Memphis to try to reconcile with her father. On the way to Tennessee, she cabled him informing him of the time of her arrival. She was relieved to find him waiting for her at the station and willing to forgive their differences. From then on, he gave up all efforts to block her career plans.

Terrell returned to Wilberforce for another year, then accepted a position in the Latin department of the Colored High School in Washington, D.C. There she worked under the direction of Robert Heberton Terrell, a very light mulatto born in Orange, Virginia, in 1857 who had graduated with honors from Harvard College in 1884. While she was teaching in the District of Columbia, she took courses at Oberlin and completed the master's degree in 1888. She enjoyed working with Robert Terrell but did not allow him or the job to keep her from accepting her father's offer to send her on a European tour. She spent two years—from 1888 to 1890—traveling and studying in France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and England. During her time in Europe, on separate occasions, her mother and brother or her father and his new family visited and traveled with her. She relished the cultural opportunities open to her in Europe, which was relatively free of racial tensions. She frequently attended plays and concerts and regularly practiced her language skills with nationals. She kept diaries in French and German detailing her activities and describing her friends and acquaintances. She resisted several opportunities to marry European men, feeling that such a marriage would cause her to relinquish her African-American identity.

After she returned to the United States, Robert Terrell soon persuaded her to marry him. His students teased him, saying that he was always going to "Church." He had earned his law degree at Howard

University while she was away. She was tempted to postpone the wedding because she received an offer to work as the registrar at Oberlin College, a position of responsibility that she believed no other black person had ever held at any predominantly white institution of higher education. Love trumped ambition that time, and the wedding went ahead as scheduled in October 1891. Her father gave her an elaborate ceremony in Memphis that received favorable coverage in white- and black-owned newspapers. They enjoyed a companionable marriage.

Her husband taught at M Street High School in Washington, D.C., from 1884 to 1889, then served as its principal until 1901. In 1883, he was admitted to the bar and opened a law firm with John Roy Lynch, a black man from Mississippi who had served in the United States House of Representatives during Reconstruction. In 1889, Terrell was appointed division chief in the Office of the Fourth Auditor of the Treasury Department. From 1911 until 1925, Terrell was an instructor in law at Howard University. His most outstanding accomplishment, however, was his appointment in 1902 as judge of the District of Columbia Municipal Court, a position to which he was named consecutively by four presidents—Democratic and Republican—until his death in 1925. Booker T. Washington, a political kingmaker in the African-American community, was his advocate for these appointments.

Because married women were legally barred from teaching, Terrell decided to dedicate herself to managing her household. During the early years of her marriage, she was depressed by three miscarriages that she attributed to the poor medical facilities available to African Americans. She finally traveled to New York to be with her mother when she gave birth in 1898 to a healthy baby girl, Phyllis (named after Phillis Wheatley, the renowned eighteenth-century black poet). Later, in 1905, the Terrells adopted her brother Thomas's daughter, Mary Louisa.

The primary event that drove Terrell back into the political and professional arena was the 1892 lynching of a lifelong friend from Memphis, Tom Moss, who was murdered by whites jealous of the success of his grocery store. Never had such blatant injustice struck Terrell so personally. She and Frederick Douglass were able to make an appointment with President Benjamin Harrison to urge him to speak out forcibly about such racial violence. Although the president gave them a sympathetic hearing, he made no public statement.

In the same year, 1892, Terrell assumed the leadership of a new group formed in the District of Columbia, the Colored Women's League. Three years later, black women in Boston under the leadership of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin formed the Federation of Afro-American Women. Margaret Murray Washington, the wife of Booker T. Washington, was elected president of the organization. In 1896 the two groups, along with other black women's organizations, merged to become the National Association of Colored Women and elected Terrell as the first president. Thus began one of the endeavors for which Terrell would become most well known—the fight for equal rights for women in general and black women in particular. She was later elected to a second and a third term and then named honorary president for life. One of the women's early endeavors was to establish kindergartens and day nurseries for black working mothers. The organization's members were also concerned about equal rights for African Americans, work opportunities for black women, female suffrage, and the criminal justice system. During her many years of work with the association, Terrell came into contact with most of the black women leaders.

Because of her leadership in the association, Terrell was given many opportunities for service, including meeting with and speaking before white women's suffrage groups. In 1898, she delivered a speech before the National American Women's Suffrage Association titled, "The Progress of Colored Women," and in 1900 gave a thirty-minute presentation before the same group titled, "Justice of Women Suffrage." Her most celebrated engagements came in 1904, 1919, and 1937. In 1904, she spoke at the Berlin International Congress of Women, at which she was the only representative of the darker races of the world. Terrell, determined to make a good impression for her race, detected the German women's impatience with the English-speaking women who made no attempt to speak to their audiences in German. She decided only several days before her presentation that she could deliver her speech in her hosts' tongue. After she translated her remarks, she engaged a German to check the grammar and sentence structure. Terrell created a sensation among the delegates by not only delivering her remarks in German but also in French and English. After this meeting, Terrell had the opportunity to travel to several countries in Europe to meet old friends and see places she had frequented during her

first European tour. Terrell thoroughly enjoyed showing what a woman with African heritage could accomplish.

Terrell had two additional opportunities to make presentations before international groups in Europe. In 1919, she addressed the delegates of the International League for Peace and Freedom in Zurich and, in 1937, represented black American women at the World Fellowship of Faiths held in London. Meeting with women's groups at home and abroad, Terrell had the opportunity to become acquainted with many of the leaders of suffrage organizations, including Susan B. Anthony, Alice Paul, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Jane Addams. In the years leading up to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, Terrell and her daughter marched with suffrage groups, picketed in front of the White House, and pointed out to some of their white counterparts the inconsistency of their lukewarm stance about suffrage for black women. She and her daughter were sometimes mistreated by the white suffragists or made to march in the back of the picket lines. This treatment did not deter Terrell.

In addition to Terrell's ongoing work with both black and white women's organizations, she was recruited in the 1890s by the Slayton Lyceum Bureau (also called the Eastern Lyceum) to be a professional lecturer. Her poise, graciousness, and gifted speaking ability led to a highly successful career as a public speaker that lasted about thirty years. She composed speeches on a number of subjects, such as black women's progress since Emancipation, racial injustice, lynching, female suffrage, economics, crime, and various aspects of black history and culture. She wrote her speeches and memorized them so that she would not have to use notes. While preparing and practicing her addresses, Terrell became interested in publishing articles on a wide variety of social issues. Early in her career, she wrote under the pen name Euphemia Kirk, but soon abandoned it and used her own name. She tirelessly published articles in newspapers, magazines, and journals, both domestic and foreign. Copies of many of her publications are among the Mary Church Terrell papers in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

In 1895, Terrell was appointed to the District of Columbia School Board, served until 1901, was reappointed in 1906, and served five more years until 1911. One of the first black women in the country to serve on a school board, she was careful to work for equal treatment of African-

American students and faculty members in Washington's segregated system. Terrell and her husband were also pioneers in church work. They were among the founders of the Lincoln Temple Congregational Church in northeast Washington, a church attended by many members of the city's black elite. She was also the first black woman to be elected to the presidency of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association in Washington, serving the 1892–93 term, and was one of the early members of the Association for the Study of Negro (later Afro-American) Life and History, which was organized in 1915. Terrell joined Delta Sigma Theta sorority and authored the Delta pledge.

Nevertheless, it was clear that the protest efforts of the African-American intelligentsia and their white allies were scattered and ineffective. Thus, several years later, in 1909, when the NAACP was organized with guidance from the leaders of the Niagara Movement, Terrell was willing to become a charter member of the organization at the invitation of W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington's intellectual rival, and cooperate with Du Bois's more militant political tactics. As Terrell grew older, she became bolder in her expressions of social and political dissent.

In 1911, Terrell became very involved in organizing a birthday centenary celebration in memory of abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A few years later, after the United States entered World War I, Terrell worked at the War Risk Insurance Bureau, where she soon became involved in a protest about the treatment of black women. Soon after the Armistice, Terrell worked for a short time with the War Camp Community Service as the director of work among African-American women and girls. In this capacity, she traveled to various cities to discuss with community leaders the means of providing better community services to black females. In performing both of these jobs, Terrell met with a great deal of resistance from whites who did not want to provide equal treatment to people of color. In 1920, she was asked by the Republican National Committee to supervise the party's work among black women in the East. Her assignment was to talk with women's groups about exercising their newly acquired right to vote by supporting the Republican Party platform. Terrell continued to work with the Republican Party, campaigning in 1929 for Ruth Hannah McCormick, who ran unsuccessfully for United States senator from Illinois. In 1932,

Terrell served as an advisor to the Republican National Committee during the Hoover campaign. During the intervening years she was active with the party, helping in whatever way she could. She remained a Republican until 1952, when she decided to support Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson.

In 1940, the culmination of Terrell's writing career involved the publication of her autobiography, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, with a preface by H. G. Wells. She traced her life from early childhood, emphasizing her experiences growing up and living in white-dominated America. She dedicated much of the book to the discussion of the community activism she had been involved in for much of her life. She could not find a publisher willing to undertake her autobiography, so with customary aplomb, she published it herself. Unfortunately, it did not sell well. Little did she anticipate that in the future her book would be reissued over and over again and that there would be other publications and much historical discussion about her life and work.

Perhaps Terrell's biography was published a bit too soon. Her work was not over. One of the most important chapters of her life began after its publication. At seventy-seven years of age, she was still not ready to leave the civil rights arena. After a long court battle to renew her membership with the Washington branch of the American Association of University Women, Terrell was backed by the national organization, which insisted in 1949 that Terrell be reinstated as a member of the D.C. branch (she had been a member earlier but had allowed her membership to lapse). Most of the D.C. branch members refused to associate with her, resigned, and formed a new organization. In the same year, 1949, Terrell was elected chair of the Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of District of Columbia Anti-Discrimination Laws. These laws, prohibiting discrimination in the District of Columbia's public accommodations, had been passed in 1872 and 1873 and never repealed. Still, segregated public facilities had become the cultural norm in the nation's capital, and African Americans who attempted to integrate them were fined or jailed. The coordinating committee, under Terrell's direction, decided to test the laws both in practice and in court. Terrell joined a small demonstration in the city targeting Thompson's Restaurant, which refused to serve the group. The group sued and the case went all the way to the Supreme Court,

where Terrell had the opportunity to testify in behalf of the cause of equal accommodations. The committee won the case in 1953, and the desegregation of the capital was set in motion.

One of Terrell's last major crusades was on behalf of Rosa Ingram, an African-American sharecropper from Georgia who was sentenced to death, along with her two sons, for killing a white man who had assaulted them. Terrell agreed to head the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family. She led a delegation to the United Nations, where she spoke on the Ingrams' behalf, then traveled to Georgia in an unsuccessful attempt to win a pardon from the state's governor. After a decade-long campaign, the Ingrams were finally freed in 1959, five years after Terrell's death.

Terrell died on July 24, 1954, a scant two months after the Supreme Court ruled segregation unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Her funeral was held on Thursday, July 29, at one o'clock in the afternoon at the Lincoln Temple Congregational Church, where she was a founding member. She was buried in Lincoln Memorial Cemetery.

Terrell had been honored many times during her long life for her accomplishments and had received honorary doctorates from Howard University, Wilberforce and Oberlin Colleges, and numerous citations and plaques from the organizations she had worked with or supported. A Washington, D.C., school was named in her honor. A U.S. postage stamp and many black women's clubs are named in her memory. Although she has been characterized as a women's rights activist, and indeed she was, she was much more than that. Terrell was a race woman who spent her entire life promoting the welfare of her country, using her "influence toward the enactment of laws for the protection of the unfortunate and weak and for the repeal of those depriving human beings of their privileges and rights." During her lifetime she was an astute observer as her race "came of age." She stated that she would never "belittle my race" (p. 470). She remained true to her word.