



# **A Forgotten Sisterhood: Pioneering Black Women Educators and Activists in the Jim Crow South**

*Audrey Thomas McCluskey*

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Emerging from the darkness of the slave era and Reconstruction, black activist women Lucy Craft Laney, Mary McLeod Bethune, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and Nannie Helen Burroughs founded schools aimed at liberating African-American youth from disadvantaged futures in the segregated and decidedly unequal South. From the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, these individuals fought discrimination as members of a larger movement of black women who uplifted future generations through a focus on education, social service, and cultural transformation. Born free, but with the shadow of the slave past still implanted in their consciousness, Laney, Bethune, Brown, and Burroughs built off each other's successes and learned from each other's struggles as administrators, lecturers, and suffragists. Drawing from the women's own letters and writings about educational methods and from remembrances of surviving students, Audrey Thomas McCluskey reveals the pivotal significance of this sisterhood's legacy for later generations and for the institution of education itself.

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