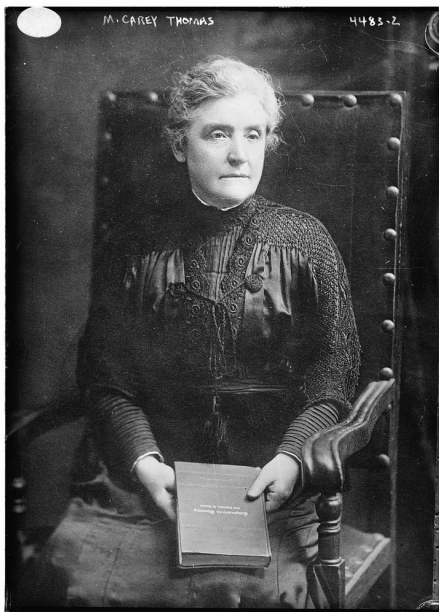




July 2019 Her Story ENewsletter College Presidents

Women's contributions to education which include everything from endowing the schools to running them have occurred at every level from pre-school through graduate school. In this month's ENewsletter we profile two women who served as college presidents, where they improved higher education with their groundbreaking accomplishments.



M. Carey Thomas

The second president of Bryn Mawr College, M. Carey Thomas, was raised in a Quaker family and overcame her father's objections to attend college. She graduated from Cornell University in 1877 and then pursued graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Leipzig. Denied a degree at the University of Leipzig due to her gender, she was able to earn her Ph.D. from the University of Zurich instead. After a year of postgraduate work at the Sorbonne in Paris, France, she returned to the U.S. When she applied to be the inaugural president of Bryn Mawr, she was rejected due to her perceived youth and lack of experience. She was hired, however, in 1884 as the dean of the college and chair of the English department when Bryn Mawr opened its doors.

With her accumulated administrative experience and her exposure to what other colleges around the U.S. were doing, she was named president in 1894. She served as president until 1922 and as dean until 1908. Thomas was intent in ensuring that the admission standards were high and that academic rigor was maintained in the courses offered. During her tenure as president, several buildings were constructed on campus which brought collegiate Gothic architecture to the U.S. Thomas was an active suffragist and a proponent of the Equal Rights Amendment.



Dr. Johnnetta Cole

Over one hundred years after Thomas was selected, in 1987, Johnnetta B. Cole became the first African-American female president of Spelman College, a historically black college for women. An anthropologist who studied at Fisk University, Oberlin College and Northwestern University (where she earned her masters and Ph.D. degrees), Cole pursued an academic career. At Washington State University, she co-founded a black studies program, one of the first established in the U.S. She helped establish the W.E.B. Du Bois Department of African-American Studies while at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She later held a faculty position at Hunter College.

As President of Spelman College from 1987-1997, Cole increased the ranking of the school, raised money to boost the endowment and also increased enrollment. During her time at Spelman, she became the first woman elected to serve on the board of Coca-Cola. In 2004, Cole became the first African American to chair the board of United Way of America. She has also served on the boards of Home Depot and Merck. The recipient of more than 50 honorary degrees, Cole served as the Director of the Museum of African Art, part of the Smithsonian Institution, from 2009-2017.

M. Carey Thomas and Johnnetta B. Cole are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

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