

The Clerk's Black History Series

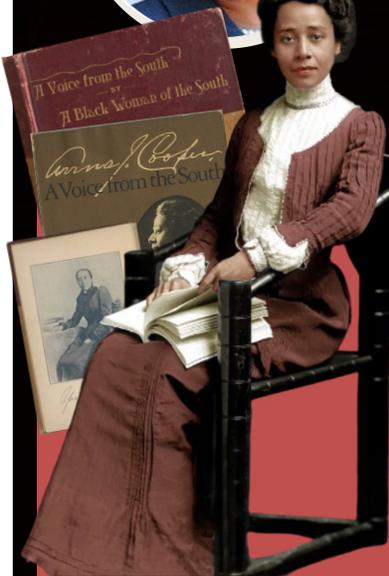
Debra DeBerry

Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County

Anna Julia Haywood Cooper

(August 10, 1858 – February 27, 1964)

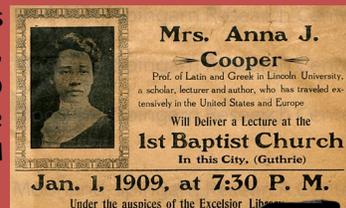
“The Mother of Black Feminism”



Anna Julia Haywood Cooper was born on August 10, 1858, in Raleigh, NC, to her enslaved mother, Hannah Stanley Haywood, and a white father. After emancipation, when Anna was 9 years old, she attended Saint Augustine's Normal School and Collegiate Institute, on scholarship. She spent 14 years there, excelling in languages (Latin, French, Greek), English literature, and analytical disciplines such as mathematics and science. Although the school had a special track reserved for women, Anna insisted on her right to take higher-level courses typically reserved for men. After completing her studies, she remained at the institution as an instructor. She married George C. Cooper, who she met at the school. Just two years later, George died and Anna left to pursue higher education at Oberlin College in Ohio. Due to her accomplished education, she entered college as a sophomore and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1884 and a master's degree in mathematics in 1887.

Later that same year, Anna started as a teacher at the M Street Washington High School in Washington, D.C. - the only Black college-preparatory high school. The school was later renamed for the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. While in D.C., Anna became more involved with racial politics and social activism.

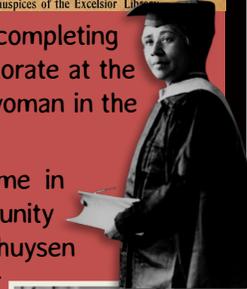
In 1892, Anna published her first book, “A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South”. The book was a series of essays, calling for equal education for women and asserted that educating black women was necessary for uplifting the entire black race. The same year, Anna established and co-founded several organizations to promote black civil rights causes. She helped found the Colored Women’s League in 1892. Her book gained national attention, and Anna traveled the country lecturing and speaking to equal rights advocates. She traveled to Nassau and throughout Europe and spoke at the Pan-African Conference in London in 1900, where she was a member of the Executive Committee. A year later, she co-founded the Colored Settlement House in D.C., the first social service agency for African Americans in the city. Anna returned to M Street School as the principal. She advocated for Black students to have opportunities for college education as M Street offered a curriculum with academic, scientific, technical, and business tracks. The school board disagreed with her assertion and Anna was forced to resign her position in 1906, despite community support for her to stay. Anna moved to teach at the Jefferson Institute in Missouri for a brief period while pursuing legal action for a return to her position at M Street and back pay. Her commitment to equal education litigation predated Brown v. Board of Education.



In 1912, Anna went to Paris to finish her translation of the French text, *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*. After completing preliminary work for her thesis at Columbia in the summers from 1915-1917, Anna left again to complete her Doctorate at the Sorbonne in Paris. In the spring of 1925, she successfully defended her doctoral thesis, becoming the fourth Black woman in the United States to earn a PhD.

Anna served as president of Frelinghuysen University, a school for black adults, in her own home in Washington, D.C., in 1929. She named a school within the University, the “Hannah Stanley Opportunity School,” after her mother. She served as the school’s registrar after it was reorganized into the Frelinghuysen Group of Schools for Colored People. Anna remained president until it closed in 1950. Dr. Anna Cooper died on February 27, 1964, in Washington, D.C. She was 105 years old. She is buried beside her husband in Raleigh, North Carolina.

In 2007, the U.S. Passport was redesigned to include new images and quotes as part of the “American Icon” series. A quote from Anna Julia Cooper, “The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or a class – it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of humanity”, is included on the back cover. In 2009, the US Postal Service issued a Black Heritage stamp in her honor. The same year, the private tuition-free Anna Julia Cooper Episcopal School was founded in historic Church Hill area in Richmond, VA.



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~Anna Julia Cooper

The Anna Julia Cooper Center at Wake Forest University is an interdisciplinary center established to advance research, teaching, and public engagement on issues of gender, race, and politics in the South.

