

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Nannie Helen Burroughs

educator, innovator, activist

“Education and justice are democracy's only life insurance.”

Page | 1



Background Information

Born May 2, 1879; Died May 20, 1961.

Burroughs was born in Orange, Virginia. Her parents, John and Jennie Burroughs, were both former slaves. They had skills that allowed them to gain freedom after the war. Her father died when she was young. After his death, she moved with her mother to D.C. for better opportunities for school and jobs.

Burroughs graduated from M Street High School in D.C. From there, she tried to get a job as a public-school teacher. No one would hire her because her skin was “too dark”. The frustration of this led her to start a training school for women and girls.¹

Burroughs’ Resistance

Burroughs was treated unfairly because she was a Black woman. She faced racism because she was Black and sexism because she was a woman. Burroughs realized many Black girls and women had to deal with these issues. She wanted to help them succeed despite the challenges, so she opened the National Training School for Women and Girls in 1908.

In 1928, Burroughs also opened Trades Hall, another location for educating Black women and girls. These schools taught a variety of skills and trades. She also taught students to be proud of their Black cultural heritage. This was a big deal because during that time most Black girls and women were only allowed to work as servants and cooks, and they were not accepted into universities. The school became very popular and she trained Black women from all over the world.

Achievements

Ultimately, Burroughs created opportunities for herself and thousands of others despite being told she was not good enough. She used her talents to make the world a better place. Burroughs’ National Training School for Women and Girls was renamed the Nannie Helen Burroughs School in her honor after her death, and later it became a co-ed elementary school. Trades Hall is now a National Historic Landmark and houses the Progressive National Baptist Convention.²

¹ Hine, Darlene Clark (1993). Black women in America : an historical encyclopedia. Carlson Pub. p. 1530. ISBN 0926019619. Retrieved December 7, 2016.

² Nannie Helen Burroughs (U.S. National Park Service). (n.d.). Retrieved November 11, 2019, from <https://www.nps.gov/people/nannie-helen-burroughs.html>

Essential Questions

1. Why was the National Training School for Women and Girls important?
 - a. How was it different than ordinary schools?

2. Why do you think Burroughs taught the women at her school to be proud of their race?

3. Burroughs didn't listen to negative voices and stood up for what was right. When have you stood up for what is right despite what others said?

4. ***“Education and justice are democracy's only life insurance.”***
 - a. What do you think she means by this quote?