

Mary Church Terrell Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



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Prepared by Allan Teichroew

Collection Summary

Title: Mary Church Terrell Papers

Span Dates: 1851-1962

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1886-1954)

ID No.: MSS42549

Creator: Terrell, Mary Church, 1863-1964

Extent: 13,000 items ; 51 containers plus 1 oversize ; 22.5 linear feet ; 34 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English, with French and German

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Summary: African-American civil rights leader, lecturer, and educator. Correspondence, diaries, printed material, clippings, speeches and writings, and other papers focusing primarily on Terrell's career as an advocate of women's rights and equal treatment for African Americans.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People

Addams, Jane, 1860-1935--Correspondence.

Bethune, Mary McLeod, 1875-1955--Correspondence.

Brawley, Benjamin Griffith, 1882-1939--Correspondence.

Burroughs, Nannie Helen, 1879-1961--Correspondence.

Catt, Carrie Chapman, 1859-1947--Correspondence.

Coolidge, Calvin, 1872-1933.

De Priest, Oscar, 1871-1951--Correspondence.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963--Correspondence.

Fleetwood, Christian A. (Christian Abraham), 1840-1914--Correspondence.

Garrison, Francis Jackson, 1848-1916.

Handy, W. C. (William Christopher), 1873-1958--Correspondence.

Harding, Warren G. (Warren Gamaliel), 1865-1923.

Harper, Ida Husted, 1851-1931--Correspondence.

Hoover, Herbert, 1874-1964.

Hunton, Addie W., 1866--Correspondence.

Katz, Maude White--Correspondence.

Meyer, Eugene, 1875-1959--Correspondence.

Patterson, William L. (William Lorenzo), 1891--Correspondence.

Randolph, A. Philip (Asa Philip), 1889-1979--Correspondence.

Rankin, Jeannette, 1880-1973--Correspondence.

Simms, Ruth Hanna McCormick, 1880-1944.

Stein, Annie--Correspondence.

Stokes, Anson Phelps, 1874-1958--Correspondence.

Terrell family.

Terrell, Mary Church, 1863-1954.

Terrell, Mary Church, 1863-1954. *Colored Woman in a White World*. 1940.

Trotter, William Monroe, 1872-1934--Correspondence.

Villard, Oswald Garrison, 1872-1949--Correspondence.

Washington, Booker T., 1856-1915--Correspondence.

Washington, Margaret James Murray, 1861?-1925--Correspondence.

Wells, H. G. (Herbert George), 1866-1946--Correspondence.

Woodson, Carter Godwin, 1875-1950--Correspondence.

Organizations

Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of the D.C. Anti-Discrimination Laws.

International Purity Conference.
National American Woman Suffrage Association.
National Association of Colored Women (U.S.)
National Purity Conference.
National Woman's Party.
War Camp Community Service (U.S.)
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.
Young Women's Christian Association.

Subjects

African Americans--Civil rights.
African Americans--Education.
African Americans--Societies, etc.
Civil rights.
Constitutional amendments--United States.
Elections--Illinois.
Equal rights amendments--United States.
Lynching--United States.
Peonage--United States.
Presidents--United States--Election--1920.
Presidents--United States--Election--1924.
Presidents--United States--Election--1928.
Progressivism (United States politics)
Race relations.
Segregation--Washington (D.C.)
Women's rights.
Women--Societies and clubs.
Women--Suffrage.

Places

Illinois--Politics and government--1865-1950.
United States--Politics and government--1865-1900.
United States--Politics and government--1901-1953.

Occupations

Authors.
Civil rights leaders.
Educators.
Lecturers.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Mary Church Terrell, educator, lecturer, author, feminist, and civil rights advocate, were given to the Library of Congress by her daughter, Phyllis Terrell Langston, 1955-1975.

Processing History

The papers of Mary Church Terrell were processed in 1976. The finding aid was revised in 2009.

Transfers

Photographs have been transferred to the Library's Prints and Photograph's Division where they are identified as part of these papers.

Related Material

Related collections in the Manuscript Division include the papers of Terrell's husband, Robert H. Terrell.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Mary Church Terrell in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Mary Church Terrell are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of these papers is available on thirty-four reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1863, Sept. 23	Born, Memphis, Tenn.
circa 1869	Attended "Model School" for children, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio
1884	A.B., Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio
1885-1887	Taught at Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, Ohio
1887-1888	Taught at High School for Colored Youth, Washington, D.C.
1888	A.M., Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio
1888-1890	Studied and traveled in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy
1890-1891	Resumed teaching, High School for Colored Youth, Washington, D.C.
1891	Married Robert H. Terrell (died 1925)
1895-1901	Appointed to District of Columbia School Board
1896	Organized and became first president of the National Association of Colored Women
1898-1920	Active in woman's suffrage movement
1904	Addressed International Congress of Women, Berlin, Germany
1906-1911	Reappointed to District of Columbia School Board

1909	Charter member, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
1918-1919	Served in War Camp Community Service
1919	Addressed Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Zurich, Switzerland
1920	Appointed supervisor, Committee for Eastern District Work among Colored Women, Republican National Committee
1929-1930	Campaigned for Ruth Hanna McCormick, Republican candidate for U.S. Senate from Illinois
1932	Served as adviser to the Republican National Committee, Herbert Hoover presidential campaign
1937	Represented American black women at World Fellowship of Faiths, London, England
1940	Published autobiography, <i>A Colored Woman in a White World</i> . Washington, D.C.: Ransdell
1949	Admitted to membership in the American Association of University Women after being rejected by the Washington, D.C., branch Elected chairman, Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of the D.C. Anti-Discrimination Laws
1954, July 24	Died, Annapolis, Md.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954) span the years 1851 to 1962, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1886-1954. Consisting primarily of diaries, correspondence, printed matter, clippings, and speeches and writings, the collection focuses on Terrell's career as an advocate of women's rights and equal treatment for African Americans. Born to a prosperous Memphis family in 1863, the year of the Emancipation Proclamation, she witnessed the transition from the systematic dismantling of black rights following Reconstruction to the early successes of the civil rights movement after World War II. Her own life chartered a course that extended from organizing the self-help programs promulgated by leaders such as Booker T. Washington to directing sit-down strikes and boycotts in defiance of Jim Crow discrimination. She died in 1954, several months after the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision, having herself waged several successful court battles in the fight against segregation in Washington, D.C.

The Terrell Papers reflect all phases of her public career. They show her as lecturer, as club woman, as writer, and as political campaigner. Among the issues she addressed were lynching and peonage conditions in the South, women's suffrage, the Equal Rights Amendment, the franchise for African Americans, and the need for educational programs for blacks. She spoke and wrote frequently on these matters, and the texts of most of her statements, whether brief introductory messages or extended essays, are in the [Speeches and Writings](#) file. Examples of the range of her writings include several reminiscences of Frederick Douglass, a dramatization of the life of Phillis Wheatley, and numerous articles on African-American scientists, artists, and soldiers. Also in the collection are copies of a feature column, "Up to Date," which she wrote for the *Chicago Defender*, 1927-1929.

Terrell was an active proponent of unity among black women, a key example of which was her instrumental role in forming the National Association of Colored Women in 1896 and serving as its first president. Among the groups featured in the Correspondence series in the papers are the National American Women Suffrage Association, the National Woman's Party, and the International League for Peace and Freedom. Her Progressive Era involvement with moral and educational issues is illustrated in records from the National and International Purity Conferences she attended and in correspondence concerning her participation in programs on behalf of the YWCA and the War Camp Community Service in World War I.. Documented in correspondence and clippings files are her two terms on the District of Columbia School Board. As the first

black woman on the board, she was the recipient of revealing letters from school officials and others on the problems of an urban, segregated school system.

The [Subject File](#) in the Terrell Papers is comprised mainly of printed matter. Exceptions include holograph reports and drafts relating to the formative years of the National Association of Colored Women and the interview and travel notes she kept while touring the South in 1919 in the employ of the War Camp Community Service. Significant in her biographical and testimonial files are the materials Terrell retained from the Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of the D.C. Anti-Discrimination Laws, the committee which successfully assaulted the color line in Washington, D.C., movie houses and restaurants.

In her political philosophy, Terrell pursued a middle course between the gradualist approach expressed by Booker T. Washington and the more aggressive stance of W. E. B. DuBois. "If we stay out of every good thing because some narrow, mean, nasty people belong to them," she wrote her husband, Robert H. Terrell, in 1909, in reaction to critics who attacked her readiness to work within regular political channels, "we shall develop into specimens as contemptible as these people are and do no good besides." She subsequently accepted supervisory positions in the presidential campaigns of Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover, and in 1929-1930 was invited by Ruth Hanna McCormick to direct her senatorial efforts among black voters in Illinois. Evident in the papers also, however, is her outspoken criticism of racial segregation and her willingness, ultimately, to picket businesses and established institutions in Washington when she thought it necessary to achieve her goal.

Terrell's personal affairs and family relations form a relatively small part of the collection, but [correspondence with immediate family members](#) is introspective and revealing, particularly letters exchanged with her husband, a federally appointed judge whose papers are also in the Library of Congress. Her letters to Robert give insight into the attitudes and private thoughts of a public figure who was a wife and mother as well as a professional. Except for a diary or journal written in French and German documenting her European tour of 1888-1890, Terrell kept [diaries](#) sporadically. A fuller autobiographical source is the draft material to her published life story, *A Colored Woman in a White World*.

Prominent correspondents include Jane Addams, Mary McLeod Bethune, Benjamin Griffith Brawley, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Carrie Chapman Catt, Oscar DePriest, W. E. B. DuBois, Christian A. Fleetwood, Francis Jackson Garrison, W. C. Handy, Ida Husted Harper, Addie W. Hunton, Maude White Katz, Eugene Meyer, William L. Patterson, A. Phillip Randolph, Jeannette Rankin, Haile Selassie, Annie Stein, Anson Phelps Stokes, William Monroe Trotter, Oswald Garrison Villard, Booker T. Washington and Margaret James Murray Washington, H. G. Wells, and Carter Godwin Woodson.

Terrell occasionally wrote drafts of articles on the reverse sides of correspondence, and these letters are in the [Speeches and Writings](#) file. In selected instances, such letters have been copied and placed in the [Correspondence](#) file.

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in eight series:

- [Diaries, 1888-1951](#)
- [Appointment Calenders and Address Book, 1904-1954](#)
- [Family Correspondence, 1890-1955](#)
- [Correspondence, 1886-1954](#)
- [Subject File, 1884-1962](#)
- [Speeches and Writings, 1866-1953](#)
- [Miscellany, 1851-1954](#)
- [Oversize, 1906](#)

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-2 REEL 1-2	<u>Diaries, 1888-1951</u> Diaries written in French and German during Terrell's stay in Europe, 1888-1890, and later kept in English. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 2 REEL 2	<u>Appointment Calenders and Address Book, 1904-1954</u> Arranged by type of material and therein chronologically.
BOX 3 REEL 2-3	<u>Family Correspondence, 1890-1955</u> Correspondence with family members. Arranged alphabetically by first name of family member.
BOX 4-19 REEL 3-13	<u>Correspondence, 1886-1954</u> Letters received, including numerous attachments, with some drafts or copies of letters sent. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 20-27 REEL 13-20	<u>Subject File, 1884-1962</u> Minutes, reports, notes, pamphlets, financial statements, news releases, and miscellaneous printed and near-print material. Arranged alphabetically by name of organization or subject.
BOX 27-38 REEL 20-28	<u>Speeches and Writings, 1866-1953</u> Holograph and typescript copies of essays, speeches, articles, poems, and short stories. Arranged chronologically when dated and otherwise alphabetically by type or title of material. Includes drafts of her autobiography, <i>A Colored Woman in a White World</i> , and printed copies of some of her writings arranged chronologically.
BOX 39-51 REEL 28-34	<u>Miscellany, 1851-1954</u> Calling cards, greeting cards, programs, bound volumes, clippings, and other printed matter. Arranged by type of material.
BOX OV 1 REEL 31	<u>Oversize, 1906</u> Oversize clipping. Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which it was removed. Filmed in its original location.

Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 16,926

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-2 REEL 1-2	Diaries, 1888-1951 Diaries written in French and German during Terrell's stay in Europe, 1888-1890, and later kept in English. Arranged chronologically.
BOX 1 REEL 1	1888-1890, tour of Europe (3 vols.) 1905 1908 1909 1915 1920 (loose pages) 1927
BOX 2 REEL 2	1929 (loose pages) 1935 1936 1951
BOX 2 REEL 2	Appointment Calenders and Address Book, 1904-1954 Arranged by type of material and therein chronologically.
BOX 2 REEL 2	Appointment calendars, 1904, 1951, 1954 Address book
BOX 3 REEL 2-3	Family Correspondence, 1890-1955 Correspondence with family members. Arranged alphabetically by first name of family member.
BOX 3 REEL 2-3	Anna Wright Church (stepmother), 1913-1927 Annette Church (stepsister), 1915-1953 Billie Goines (son-in-law), 1918-1925 Dorothy Church (cousin), 1941-1954, undated Laura Terrell Jones (sister-in-law), 1904-1941 Leon C. Tansil (son-in-law), 1923-1938, undated Mary Terrell Tancil Geaudreau (daughter), 1914-1953, undated Phyllis Terrell Goines Parks Langston (daughter), 1913-1952, undated (2 folders)

Family Correspondence, 1890-1955

Container

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BOX 3 REEL 2-3	Robert H. Terrell (husband), 1900-1922, undated Thomas A. Church (brother), 1890-1935, undated Thomas A. Church (nephew), 1935-1952, undated Others, 1897-1955, undated
BOX 4-19 REEL 3-13	Correspondence, 1886-1954 Letters received, including numerous attachments, with some drafts or copies of letters sent. Arranged chronologically.
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BOX 6 REEL 5	1920-1923 (13 folders)
BOX 7 REEL 5-6	1924-1927 (10 folders)
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BOX 9 REEL 7	1931, Oct.-1933 (14 folders)
BOX 10 REEL 7-8	1934-1936 (13 folders)
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BOX 12 REEL 8-9	1940-1941 (14 folders)
BOX 13 REEL 9	1942-1946 (15 folders)
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Correspondence, 1886-1954

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
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BOX 18 REEL 12	1953 (13 folders)
BOX 19 REEL 12-13	1954 (5 folders) Undated, A-Y (23 folders) Unidentified Fragments
BOX 20-27 REEL 13-20	Subject File, 1884-1962 Minutes, reports, notes, pamphlets, financial statements, news releases, and miscellaneous printed and near-print material. Arranged alphabetically by name of organization or subject.
BOX 20 REEL 13-14	Amenia Conference, Amenia, N.Y., 1916 American Association of University Women, 1946-1953 Americans for Democratic Action, 1947-1954 Anthony, Susan B., ceremonies in honor of, 1940-1941 Bethel Literary and Historical Association, Washington, D.C., 1895-1896 Civil liberties, 1948-1953 Colored Woman's League, annual reports, 1887-1898 Commission on Interracial Relations, minutes, Washington, D.C., 1953 Committee on Race Relations of the Washington Federation of Churches, Washington, D.C., minutes and reports, 1930-1935 Conference on the Participation of Negro Women and Children in Federal Welfare Programs, Washington, D.C., 1938 Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of the D.C. Anti-Discrimination Laws, Washington, D.C., 1949-1954 Minutes, 1950-1954 Miscellaneous, 1949-1954
BOX 21 REEL 14	Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, 1927-1943 Disabled soldiers, 1918-1919 District of Columbia School Board, 1894-1895, 1906, undated Douglass (Frederick) Memorial and Historical Association, 1922-1950 Financial papers, including receipts, vouchers, and miscellany, 1917-1953 Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association, 1922-1950 <i>See same container, Douglass</i> Highland Beach, Md., Board of Commissioners, 1928-1941, undated International Congress of Women, Washington, D.C., 1919 International Council of the Darker Races of the World International Council of Women, 6th Quinquennial Convention, Washington, D.C., 1925

Subject File, 1884-1962

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BOX 22 REEL 15-16	International Slavery and Colonialism, 1888-1947, undated (2 folders) Inter-Racial Committee of the District of Columbia, Washington, D.C., 1930-1941 Joint Committee for Civil Rights in D.C., Washington, D.C., financial records, 1937 Joint Committee on Delinquency and Crime, Washington, D.C., notes on meeting, 1927 Joint Committee on National Recovery, Washington, D.C., financial statement, 1933-1934 Joint Committee on Race Relations of the Interracial Committee, Washington, D.C., minutes and reports, 1932 League of Women Voters, D. C., Washington, D.C., newsletter, 1948-1954 Lincoln Congregational Temple, Washington, D.C., 1951 Lynching, 1922, undated McCormick, Ruth Hanna, Illinois senatorial campaign, 1929-1930 National American Woman Suffrage Association, proceedings and reports, 1884, 1893-1905 (2 folders)
BOX 23 REEL 16-17	National and International Purity Congresses, 1905-1907, 1913, 1927, undated National Association of College Women, 1942, 1950-1951 National Association of Colored Women, 1897-1962 Holograph of program and constitution, 1897 Holograph report 1897 convention 1899 convention 1897 or 1899 conventions Holograph reports and resolutions, 1900-1926, undated Programs 1897-1952 1962 Minutes, 1897, 1918-1939 (2 folders) Miscellaneous 1900-1929 1930-1936 1940-1947 1949-1954 Undated National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, 1950-1952 National Committee to Free the Ingram Family, 1948-1954 National Congress of Colored Women, minutes, Nashville, Tenn., 1897 National Council of Negro Women, 1940-1953 National Council of Women, 1895-1901 National League of Women Shoppers, circa 1944-1947 National Memorial Association to Honor Negro Soldiers and Sailors, 1924, 1928, 1939 National Woman's Party, 1933-1953 (2 folders)
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BOX 25	New York State Woman Suffrage Association, annual report, 1897

Subject File, 1884-1962

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Open Forum Speakers Bureau, 1916-1920
Opportunity House Board of Directors, minutes, 1925 [?]
Philadelphia Association for the Protection of Colored Women, Philadelphia, Pa., 1912-1920
Phillis Wheatley Pageant, 1932-1933
Republican Party
 Campaign of 1920
 Campaign of 1928
 Campaign of 1932
 Miscellaneous, 1924-1940
Reviews of *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 1940-1944
Roundtable Conference on Building a Better Race Relations, Washington, D.C., 1945
Second Mothers' Conference, minutes, Pinebluff, Ark., 1894
Second National Conference on Problems of the Negro and Negro youth, Washington, D.C., 1939
Southern Conference for Human Welfare, Washington Committee, 1947-1948
Southwest Community House, Washington, D.C., 1948-1951
Terrell, Mary Church, biographical and testimonial file

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Woman's Centennial Congress, New York, N.Y., 1940
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1919-1921, undated

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REEL 20

Women's Joint Legislative Committee for Equal Rights, minutes, 1946-1947
World Fellowship of Faiths and World Fellowship, Inc., 1933-1938
Miscellaneous
(2 folders)

BOX 27-38

REEL 20-28

Speeches and Writings, 1866-1953

Holograph and typescript copies of essays, speeches, articles, poems, and short stories.
Arranged chronologically when dated and otherwise alphabetically by type or title of material.
Includes drafts of her autobiography, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, and printed copies of some of her writings arranged chronologically.

BOX 27

REEL 20

circa 1876

circa 1880-1884

(2 folders)

BOX 28

REEL 20-21

(2 folders)

Speeches and Writings, 1866-1953

Container

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BOX 38 REEL 27-28	Printed writings 1888-1904 (2 folders) 1905-1953, undated (7 folders) Speeches by others, 1901-1952
BOX 39-51 REEL 28-34	Miscellany, 1851-1954 Calling cards, greeting cards, programs, bound volumes, clippings, and other printed matter. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 39 REEL 28	Printed matter Book lists, 1941-1946, undated Battle Creek Sanitarium, Battle Creek, Mich., menus, 1942 Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1911-1913 Calling cards and membership cards, 1900-1953, undated

Miscellany, 1851-1954

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	Crimes of whites, 1905-1906
	Lynching, 1906
	McCormick, Ruth Hanna, campaign for Senate from Illinois, 1929-1930
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	Negro history and achievement, 1900-1954

Miscellany, 1851-1954

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	Terrell, Robert H., 1914-1950
	Trip to Berlin, Germany, 1904
	Washington, D.C., Board of Education, 1906-1907
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	Passport, identity book, and honorary doctorate, 1919, 1948
	Certificates and awards, 1891-1954
BOX OV 1	Oversize, 1906
REEL 31	
	Oversize clipping.
	Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which it was removed. Filmed in its original location.
BOX OV 1	Speeches and writings
REEL 31	
	Clippings
	Brownsville, Tex., incident, 1906 (Container 46, Reel 31)