

# Black Cabinet

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The **Black Cabinet** was first known as the Federal Council of Negro Affairs, an informal group of African-American public policy advisors to United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was supported by the first lady Eleanor Roosevelt. By mid-1935, there were 45 African Americans working in federal executive departments and New Deal agencies.

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President and Mrs. Roosevelt on Inauguration Day, 1933.

## The need for representatives

Roosevelt's administration wanted to tend to the increasing needs of African Americans which, in practical terms, had not been met since Reconstruction. African Americans wanted better representation in government, especially as most had been disfranchised across the South at the turn of the 19th to 20th century and essentially could not vote there. The administration selected prominent individuals from the African American community to represent the needs of African Americans and appointed them to official positions throughout the government.

Through these efforts, blacks were appointed to positions of responsibility within numerous governmental agencies, the 'Black Cabinet' or 'Black Brain Trust' - a vocal and eloquent group of highly trained and politically astute African American intellectuals who spearheaded the struggle for civil rights during the 1930s.<sup>[1]</sup>

insight into the needs of African Americans. In the past, there had never been so many blacks chosen at one time to work together for the African-American community. The 45 primarily comprised an advisory group to the administration.<sup>[2]</sup> The First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was said to encourage the formation of the Black Cabinet to help shape New Deal programs.<sup>[3]</sup>

## The members

Most members were not politicians but community leaders, scholars and activists, with strong ties to the African American community. Prominent members included Dr. Robert C. Weaver, a young economics expert from Harvard University and a race relations adviser. He worked with the White House to provide more opportunities for African Americans. In 1966 he became the first black cabinet member, appointed by Lyndon B. Johnson as Secretary of the newly created Department of Housing and Urban Development.<sup>[4]</sup> During the 1970s, Weaver served as the national director of the Municipal Assistance Corporation, which was formed during New York City's financial crisis. Another prominent member of Roosevelt's Black Cabinet was Eugene K. Jones, the Executive Secretary of the National Urban League, a major civil rights organization.

One of the most well-known members and only woman among the young, ambitious men was Ms. Mary Jane McLeod Bethune. "Ms. Bethune was a Republican who changed her party allegiance because of Franklin Roosevelt."<sup>[5]</sup> Ms. Bethune was very closely tied to the community and believed she knew what the African Americans really wanted. She was looked upon very highly by other members of the cabinet, and the younger men called her "Ma Bethune." Ms. Bethune was a personal friend of Mrs. Roosevelt and, uniquely among the cabinet, had access to the White House. Their friendship began during a luncheon when Mrs. Roosevelt sat Ms. Bethune to the right of the president, considered the seat of honor. Franklin Roosevelt was so impressed by one of Bethune's speeches that he appointed her to the Division of Negro Affairs in the newly created National Youth Administration.

Members of this group in 1938 included the following:

- Dr. Ambrose Caliver, Department of the Interior
- Dr. Roscoe C. Brown, Public Health Service
- Dr. Robert C. Weaver, Federal Housing Authority
- Joseph H. Evans, Farm Security Administration
- Mary McLeod Bethune, National Youth Administration
- Lawrence A. Oxley, Department of Labor
- Dr. William J. Thomkins, Recorder of Deeds
- Charles E. Hall, Department of Commerce
- William J. Houston, Department of Justice
- Ralph E. Mizelle, US Postal Service
- Dewey R. Jones, Department of the Interior;
- Edgar Brown (tennis star), Civilian Conservation Corps
- J. Parker Prescott, Housing Authority

- Edward H. Lawson, Jr., Works Projects Administration
- Arthur Weiseger, Department of Labor
- Alfred Edgar Smith, Works Projects;
- Henry A. Hunt, Farm Credit Administration
- John W. Whitten, Works Projects
- Joseph R. Houchins, Department of Commerce

At various times, others included:

- William H. Hastie attorney, Department of the Interior
- Eugene Kinckle Jones, Department of Commerce
- William J. Trent, Federal Works Agency

## See also

- United States Cabinet

## References

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- ↑ Google Books ([http://books.google.com/books?id=BHIA\\_9CXdHAC&pg=PA263&dq=The+black+cabinet&ie=ISO-8859-1&sig=IVT\\_KxcbqbQvxYk3IDNWsf1LGa0#PPA263,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=BHIA_9CXdHAC&pg=PA263&dq=The+black+cabinet&ie=ISO-8859-1&sig=IVT_KxcbqbQvxYk3IDNWsf1LGa0#PPA263,M1)) Invisible Politics (page 263)
- ↑ "African American History" ([http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761595158\\_7/African\\_American\\_History.html#p258](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761595158_7/African_American_History.html#p258)) , *Encyclopedia Encarta*, accessed 31 October 2009
- ↑ [1] (<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F00EED6163BF93AA25754C0A961958260>) New York Times-Robert C. Weaver
- ↑ Nancy Joan Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black politics in the age of FDR* ([http://books.google.com/books?id=P\\_TBRYqLTDwC&pg=PA142&dq=The+black+cabinet&ie=ISO-8859-1&sig=JeEoCw8dsP-J\\_GOZEs8CAhHUgBk#PPA142,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=P_TBRYqLTDwC&pg=PA142&dq=The+black+cabinet&ie=ISO-8859-1&sig=JeEoCw8dsP-J_GOZEs8CAhHUgBk#PPA142,M1)) , Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983, p. 142

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## Further reading

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- wilkins, Theresa B., "Ambrose Caliver: Distinguished Civil Servant", *Journal of Negro Education*, 1962

## External links

- "Mary Jane McLeod Bethune" (<http://www.anb.org/articles/06/06-00042-article.html>) , *American National Biography Online*

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