

Juno Frankie Pierce - Overview

One of many suffrage leaders centered in Tennessee, Juno Frankie Pierce grew up to become a fierce advocate for women's suffrage, believing it was the gateway to offering a multitude of opportunities for Black women to receive government recognition. Pierce worked hard to ensure that more and more people realized the capabilities of African American women and made sure to shed light on things that would've gone ignored without her efforts. From being a powerful speaker to a strong leader, Juno Frankie Pierce worked hard to push for change in her home state of Tennessee.

Who was she?

- Juno Frankie Pierce was born around the time of the Civil War (between 1862-1865) to Frank Seay and Nellie Allen Seay in Tennessee. Frank Seay was a freed man while Nellie was a home slave to a Smith County woman known as Mrs. Robinson. Fortunately for Pierce, by the time she was born, Tennessee had just amended its constitution, allowing Pierce to grow up as a free Black woman and go to school.
- Pierce went to school at the McKee School, a private school in Nashville for African Americans, and also attended Roger Williams University. After receiving her education, she taught at Nashville's Bellview School for a short period of time before marrying her husband, Clement J. Pierce. They moved to Paris, Texas and settled until her husband died in 1912 causing her to return to Nashville. Upon her return, Pierce immediately became active in a variety of African American organizations that dedicated themselves to improving opportunities for the African American population. Pierce was a prominent leader in such organizations including the Negro Women's Reconstruction League and the Nashville Federation of Colored Women.
- When Pierce realized that delinquent African American girls were prohibited from being admitted to white juvenile institutions and schools

in Tennessee and instead were held in local jails for long periods of time, she became the driving force in a campaign that worked to start an institution for these African American girls. It was at this time that she caught the eyes of Catherine Talty Kenny and other white suffragists who then formed a political alliance with Pierce.

- Suffrage leader Catherine Kenny invited Pierce to speak at the May 1920 state suffrage convention that was held in the House chamber of the Tennessee capitol. Here she posed a question to a predominantly white audience: “What will the Negro women do with the vote?”
- She answered in a distinguished way ensuring that African American women would stand alongside the white women, fighting for the same, equal right of women’s suffrage. From there, African American women could later receive recognition in all forms of government, receive a state vocational school, a child welfare department of the state as well as receive more room in state schools.
- A year after the ratification of the 19th Amendment, the Tennessee General Assembly passed legislation to create the vocational school for African American girls that Pierce and many other reformers fought for. The school opened in 1923 and made Pierce its very first superintendent. She remained in this position for the next sixteen years.
- Until her death in 1954, Juno Frankie Pierce continued to be active in public affairs. She served as the chairman of the Building Campaign for the Negro division. Here she raised funds for the building of the Blue Triangle Branch of the YWCA in 1952. At her funeral at the First Baptist Church Capitol Hill, the very place her parents had met, more than ten speakers paid tribute to Pierce and her work. After the service, she was buried in the Greenwood Cemetery in Nashville, Tennessee.

For Further Reading

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2019/11/13/frankie-pierce-park-nashville-suffrage-leader-honored/2534066001/>

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/2020/08/12/frankie-pierce-tennessee-woman-suffrage-monument/3345722001/>

<https://www.cfmt.org/frankiepiercepark/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/17/opinion/tennessee-19th-amendment.html>

Sources Used

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<https://lwnashville.org/black-suffrage-leaders/>

<https://now.org/sisters-of-suffrage/>

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