

Following the end of the Civil War, many Americans considered how best to educate formerly enslaved people. Before the Civil War, it was illegal to teach slaves how to read and write. Slave owners feared this education would encourage resistance. When the war ended, about four million people were suddenly free, but most were illiterate, or couldn't read and write. Colleges and universities were founded to meet the need of educating former slaves at the college level.

### Early Years

In the 1870s, two teachers from New England toured the South during their summer break. Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles were concerned about newly freed African American women. Packard and Giles decided to establish a training school in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1881 the two women began what is now known as Spelman College in the basement of Friendship Baptist Church. They began with 11 young women. Within a year, they had 150 students. It was named the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary. (At that time, the word 'seminary' described what was essentially a high school to train teachers. Two more teachers joined the faculty in 1883.



Spelman College aimed to teach women more than domestic skills, as is shown here in this drawing.

In 1884 the two founders met John D. Rockefeller, who had made a fortune in the oil business. Rockefeller pledged financial support to the school. By the next year, the college had five buildings. It moved its location to a plot of nine acres that had once served as barracks, or housing, for the Union Army.

In 1887 the first graduates received high school diplomas. In 1894 a college division began, and the first college degrees were awarded in 1901. Spelman College remained both a high school and a college until the high school division closed in 1930. Spelman also became the first college to train African American nurses. Spelman received its current name in 1924 to honor Laura Spelman Rockefeller and her abolitionist family.

### **Activism and Accomplishment**

By the late 1860s, slavery had ended, and an amendment to the constitution that was supposed to guarantee the right to vote to all male citizens had been passed. Despite these actions, African Americans continued to experience discrimination. This was especially true in the South, where Spelman College is located. Spelman students became actively involved in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

During the 1960s, many activists used a variety of nonviolent protest strategies to bring attention to the fact that African Americans were not treated equally. One example of a nonviolent protest technique is called a sit-in. Sit-ins took place in restaurants and stores where African Americans were not welcomed or served. In 1960, Spelman students were arrested for taking part in one of these protests in downtown Atlanta. Spelman students continued to be active in social equality movements for many years.

Continuing in their long tradition of social activism, students at Spelman in 2001 began working with Habitat for Humanity. This organization builds homes for people who cannot afford them. Students at Spelman are also involved with advocacy programs that promote health, education, and ending homelessness.

### **Famous Graduates**

Currently, more than 2,200 women attend Spelman College. The campus has expanded to nearly 40 acres near downtown Atlanta. Many Spelman graduates have become well known for their accomplishments.

Pulitzer Prize–winning author Alice Walker attended Spelman. Audrey Manley, also a Spelman graduate, served as the acting U.S. Surgeon General from 1995 to 1997. Other Spelman graduates have become notable physicians, attorneys, business leaders, and artists.

Marian Wright Edelman has used her Spelman education to make a difference in the world. She founded the Children’s Defense Fund in 1973 to protect the youngest members of society. Edelman also went to law school and became the first African American woman allowed to practice law in Mississippi.

### **Supporting Spelman College**

Spelman has won wide recognition for its significant contributions to education. In 1987 Bill Cosby and his wife donated \$20 million to the college. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the National Science Foundation honored Spelman for excellence in teaching math and science. NASA also awarded Spelman a grant in 2003 to strengthen the college’s Women in Science and Engineering program. Two years later, Spelman competed in the

International RoboCup. Spelman was the first all-female African-American robotics team from an undergraduate school to compete. Spelman is also ranked among the top liberal arts colleges in the nation. The school's English, philosophy, and foreign language programs are just as well known as its math and science programs.

Spelman College has also hosted many important female guests. The first woman to lead an African nation, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, gave the 2007 graduation speech at Spelman. Also in 2007, Spelman hosted descendants of two famous 20th-century women. Eleanor Roosevelt was the first lady from 1932 to 1945, when her husband, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was president. She became friends with Mary McLeod Bethune, an African American educator, during a time when interracial friendships were rare. Mazie Ferguson, Bethune's great-grandniece, and Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, Roosevelt's granddaughter, came to Spelman to speak at a Leadership and Women of Color conference. In 2011 Spelman's graduation speaker was First Lady Michelle Obama.



Children's activist and author Marian Wright Edelman holding a book sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, an organization that she founded.

Spelman began as a school for African American women, but has grown to become a school for women of all races and backgrounds. For more than a century, Spelman College has been preparing young women to make significant contributions in the United States and around the world. It has a history of activism to promote social equality in the United States. Its history of women's education and promoting social equality is what makes Spelman College a fascinating place.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

1. What text structure did the writer use to organize information in the first section, Early Years?
  - A. cause/effect
  - B. chronological order
  - C. comparison/contrast
  - D. most to least important
  
2. Why was it important to train young African Americans after the Civil War?
  - A. Most had never learned to read or write.
  - B. There was a critical shortage of teachers.
  - C. They were returning to Africa to teach others.
  - D. The government required them to be educated.
  
3. Which of the following demonstrates Spelman's role in training women for professions?
  - A. Spelman students volunteered for Habitat for Humanity.
  - B. John D. Rockefeller and Bill Cosby donated to the college.
  - C. Eleanor Roosevelt's granddaughter visited and spoke there.
  - D. Spelman offered the first nurses' training for African American women.
  
4. In what ways have Spelman College graduates made an impact on United States history? Provide at least two examples, with details and evidence from the passage to support your answer.