

# DID YOU KNOW...

## The Callie House Political Movement: Giving a Voice to the Poor

**Callie House** was born into slavery in Rutherford County, near Nashville, Tennessee, in 1861. As was the case with many slaves, her birth was not officially recorded.

House, a “washerwoman” and seamstress by profession, was widowed with five children when she began her political movement. She came to prominence at a time when women could not vote, and emancipated slaves had no political voice or support from the government.

### **The National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief Bounty and Pension Association (MRB&PA)**

In 1896, Callie House and Mr. Isaiah Dickerson, a Rutherford County African American teacher and minister, founded the MRB&PA which became the hub of the pension and reparations movement for African Americans.

Ex-slaves had been promised 40 acres and a mule which was never delivered to them. Therefore, one of the main goals of MRB&PA was to secure pensions for ex-slaves from the federal government as compensation and reparation for their unpaid labor and suffering during slavery. Another goal of the organization was to provide food and pay for the medical and burial expenses of ex-slaves who could not afford it. MRB&PA united ex-slaves into one organization and encouraged them to use their voice to stand up for their constitutional rights.

The MRB&PA organization strengthened in numbers as chapters and local affiliations formed in states such as North Carolina, Missouri, and Louisiana. Members were required to pay dues via mail. In addition to using dues to support families, the organization hired a lawyer to lobby the government and help champion their cause of getting pensions for ex-slaves. The organization grew and its push for a louder political voice to address the needs to African

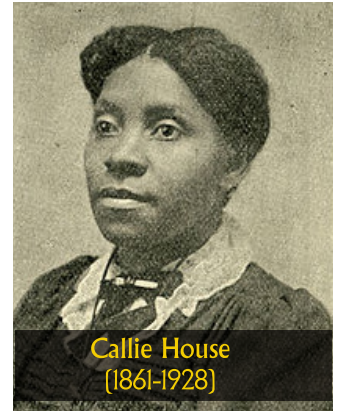
American ex-slaves strengthened. As a result of this growth, the government was intimidated and began to harass Callie House and other members of the organization.

The federal government accused Callie House of mail fraud and she was found guilty by an all-white, male jury. In September 1917, she was sentenced to one year in jail after a three-day trial. House was released from prison and returned to her home in Nashville, Tennessee in August 1918. By then the organization’s political momentum had been decimated. The first, national grassroots African American movement had all but fallen apart. However, House’s efforts did not go in vain. The chapters became a part of the Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) movement and the impetus for the creation of other future movements that fought for reparations.

On June 6, 1928, Callie House died at age 67 from uterine cancer. She has been so long forgotten that her grave, unfortunately, cannot be found until this day.

Callie House was a courageous woman, pioneer, activist and a forerunner to men like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.

— Ruby Joseph, Assistant In Research, FCIC



**Callie House**  
(1861-1928)

Berry, M. (2005). *My Face Is Black Is True: Callie House and the struggle for ex-slave reparation*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

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