Beginning in the late nineteenth century, black clubwomen began naming organizations after formerly enslaved women like Phillis Wheatley to keep their public memory alive. In doing so, they created a culture of recognition that acknowledged the organizational namesake as well as the contributions of members. Named memorialization celebrated the very best of African American women and continued to expand as Jim Crow laws encroached on black citizenship. Catalyzed by African American women while also supported by black journalists and local bureaucracies, named memorialization was the primary public history medium used to honor the legacies of African American women in the early twentieth century. In the 1960s, the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Studies Movements ushered in the golden age of new traditional public history memorials centered around black women. The Mary McLeod Bethune statue and historic site in the National Park Service signaled a significant shift in how African American women’s legacies could be memorialized. Innovative and persistent, African Americans and organizations like the National Council of Negro Women and the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Historical Foundation collaborated with national, state, and local governments to create historic sites, house museums, statues, and historic markers. African American memorializers and public memory crafters have been integral to the process of erecting, saving, and maintaining memorials to black women. In the twenty-first century, new technologies and social media have transformed public commemorations while traditional public history
memorials continue to flourish and have expanded to celebrate new aspects of African American women’s history.