



**Farewell, Dr. Dorothy Height, "godmother of the women's movement" and YWCA leader
March 24, 1912-April 20, 2010**

Dorothy Irene Height, long-time civil rights activist, chair and president emerita of the National Council of Negro Women, and prominent figure in YWCA leadership for decades, died of natural causes at 3:41 am. Tuesday, April 20, 2010 at Howard University Hospital, nearly a month after her 98th birthday.

Height was born in Richmond, Va., and moved to the Pittsburgh area when she was four. She earned bachelor's and master's degrees from New York University, having been turned away by Barnard College because it already had its "quota of two black women." She did postgraduate work at Columbia University and the New York School of Social Work.

In 1933, Height was an organizer and served as Vice President of the United Christian Youth Movement of North America in the New Deal era. It was during this period that her career as a civil rights advocate began to unfold, as she worked to prevent lynching, desegregate the armed forces, reform the criminal justice system and for free access to public accommodations. She was chosen as one of ten American youth delegates to the World Conference on Life and Work of the Churches in Oxford, England.

She joined the YWCA in 1937, serving as Assistant Executive Director at the Harlem YWCA. Her advocacy for better working conditions for black domestic workers began to gain the attention of other prominent and likeminded women.

Height met famed educator Mary McLeod Bethune, the founder of the National Council of Negro Women, and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who had come to speak at a meeting of Bethune's organization. Mrs. Bethune invited Height to join NCNW in her quest for women's rights to full and equal employment, pay, and education.

Height served a dual role as YWCA staff member and NCNW volunteer, integrating her training as a social worker and her commitment to rise above the limitations of race and sex. She rose quickly through the ranks of the YWCA, from the Emma Ransom House in Harlem to Executive Director of the Phyllis Wheatley Association in Washington, DC, and then to the staff of the National Board of the YWCA of the USA.

For thirty-three years (1944-1977), Height held several leadership positions in Public Affairs and Leadership Training and as Director of the National YWCA School for Professional Workers. In 1952, Height served as visiting professor at the University of Delhi, India, in the Delhi School of Social Work, which was founded by the YWCAs of India, Burma and Ceylon. She became known for her internationalism and

humanitarianism, and conducted international studies and travel to expand the work of the YWCA.

She influenced the YWCA to be involved in civil rights beginning in the 1960s, and worked within the YWCA to desegregate all levels of the organization. In 1965, she was inaugurated and became Director of the Center for Racial Justice, a position she held until her retirement. One of Height's favorite sayings was, "If the time is not ripe, we have to ripen the time." She liked to quote 19th century abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who said that the three effective ways to fight for justice are to "agitate, agitate, agitate."

Height became president of the National Council of Negro Women in 1957 and held the post until 1997, when she was 85. She remained chairman of the group. "I hope not to work this hard all the rest of my life," she said at the time. "But whether it is the Council, whether it is somewhere else, for the rest of my life, I will be working for equality, for justice, to eliminate racism, to build a better life for our families and our children."

Among her countless awards and citations are the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded to her by President Bill Clinton, and the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian and most distinguished award presented by the United States Congress, presented to her on her 92nd birthday in 2004 by President George W. Bush. Over the course of her lifetime, she received 36 honorary doctorate degrees from universities and colleges such as Tuskegee University, Spelman College, Pace University, Bennett College, Lincoln University, Harvard University, Howard University, Princeton University, New York University, Morehouse College, Meharry Medical College, and Columbia University.

Today, the Dorothy I. Height Award is the YWCA's highest honor. This award is presented to an individual whose efforts and contributions have been significant in the field of racial justice and have also had a national impact in the United States.