

## ***Dorothy Irene Height***

For over half a century, Dorothy Irene Height has given leadership to the struggle for equality and human rights for all people. Dorothy I. Height was born in Richmond, Virginia, March 24, 1912, and educated in the public schools in Rankin, Pennsylvania, a small town near Pittsburgh. Dorothy Irene Height established herself early as a dedicated student with exceptional oratorical skills.



Employed in many capacities by both government and social service associations, she is known primarily by her leadership role with the YWCA, Delta Sigma Theta and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). While working as a case worker for the New York Welfare Department, she was the first Black named to the Personnel Division following the Harlem Riots of 1935 and became one of the young leaders of the United Christian Youth Movement of North America of the New Deal Era. It was during this period that Height's 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 fought for access to public accommodations. But it was on November 7, 1937, that was the turning point in the life of Dorothy I. Height, who still remembers the day that changed her life.

Mary McLeod Bethune, founder and president of the NCNW, met the assistant director of the Harlem YWCA as she was escorting Eleanor Roosevelt into an NCNW meeting. Height answered Mrs. Bethune's call for help and joined Bethune in her quest for women's rights to full and equal employment, pay and education. This was the beginning of her dual role as YWCA staff and NCNW volunteer. Height quickly rose through the ranks of the YWCA. By 1944 and until 1977, Height was a staff member of the National Board of the YWCA of the USA where she held several leadership positions, in 1965, she inaugurated and became Director of the Center for Racial Justice, a position she held until 1977 when she retired from the National YWCA of the USA.

Height was elected national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority in 1947 and carried the sorority to a new level of organizational development throughout her term, which ended in 1956. Height was elected president of the NCNW in 1956 and served until February 2, 1998. She serves now as the Chair and has been designated President Emerita.

Under Height's visionary leadership, NCNW secured 633 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW -midway between the Capitol and the White House - as the national site of honor for African American women. It is more than just another historic landmark. The building is alive with accomplishment and purpose, possessing a spirit of social and civic activism. After completing the purchase of the building it was named the "*Dorothy I. Height Building*" - in honor of her lifetime of tireless service on behalf of the nation and the world.

On March 24, 2004, Dr. Dorothy I. Height was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.