



### **SSWLHC MOURNS DEATH OF INSPIRING LEADER AND SOCIAL WORKER, DR. DOROTHY IRENE HEIGHT**

The Society for Social Work Leadership in Health Care mourns the death of Dr. Dorothy Irene Height last week at the age of 98. Dr. Height was a leader in the civil rights and women's rights movements. In the 1930's, she marched against lynchings and was selected by Eleanor Roosevelt to be a representative to a global youth conference. Through this relationship, she had the opportunity to meet Mary McLeod Bethune, which led to her over forty-year leadership role with the National Council of Negro Women. Dr. Height was the only woman close to the center of this country's Civil Rights Movement. Although she did not often receive the recognition, she was side by side with the leaders of the movement. During the 1963 March in Washington, she sat just a few feet from Reverend King as he delivered the 'I Have a Dream' speech.

Dr. Height was the recipient of our nation's two greatest civilian honors. In 1994, President Bill Clinton presented her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom and in 2004, President Bush awarded her the Congressional Gold Medal. She was also honored to have a special seat at President Obama's inauguration.

Dr. Height was also a proud Social Worker. It was in recognition of this that NASW created the "Dorothy I. Height and Whitney M. Young, Jr. Social Work Reinvestment Act."

As a part of a documentary film being made about Dr. Height's life, I recently had the opportunity to meet with her in her office on Pennsylvania Avenue. This was truly one of the highlights of my professional career.

In addition to being in awe of what this amazing woman accomplished during her life facing unbelievable odds against her, the lesson I take from her life is that she always kept her eye on the prize – most often social justice, and at the same time maintained her humanity and dignity. In spite of every degradation that was hurled at her, she responded with pride and dignity. This was true every day of her life.

For more information on this amazing life you can read her autobiography, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*, which was published in 2005.

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