



HR1207

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

2           WHEREAS, State Representative Monique D. Davis and the  
3 Illinois House of Representatives are saddened to learn of the  
4 death of Dorothy Irene Height, who passed away on April 20,  
5 2010; and

6           WHEREAS, Dorothy Height was born in Richmond, Virginia, on  
7 March 24, 1912; she grew up in Rankin, Pennsylvania, where she  
8 attended racially integrated schools but felt the lash of  
9 racial bigotry early in her life; during elementary school, a  
10 music teacher in the mostly white school appointed her student  
11 director of the school chorus, but a new principal forbade her  
12 to take that position; at the next school assembly, the chorus  
13 refused to stand and sing until Ms. Height was reinstated as  
14 leader and the principal relented; and

15           WHEREAS, As a high school senior and her school's  
16 valedictorian, Dorothy Height won a national oratorical  
17 contest and a \$1,000 college scholarship; when the college of  
18 her choice, Barnard in New York, informed her that the college  
19 already admitted its quota of black students, she instead went  
20 to New York University, where she graduated in 3 years and  
21 received a master's degree in educational psychology in her 4th  
22 year; and

1           WHEREAS, Dorothy Height began her professional career as a  
2 caseworker for the New York City Welfare Department; around  
3 this time, she got her start as a civil rights activist through  
4 Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Sr., pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist  
5 Church in Harlem, and the pastor's son, Rev. Adam Clayton  
6 Powell Jr., who later represented Harlem in the U.S. House of  
7 Representatives; and

8           WHEREAS, After attending an international church youth  
9 conference in London in the summer of 1937, Dorothy Height  
10 returned to New York with the conviction that she needed to  
11 operate from a broader base than that of a welfare caseworker;  
12 that November, after a visit by Eleanor Roosevelt at the Harlem  
13 branch of the YWCA, she quit her job as a welfare caseworker  
14 and joined the staff of the Harlem YWCA; she remained a  
15 full-time YWCA staffer until 1975; during her time at the YWCA,  
16 she was instrumental in bringing about an interracial charter  
17 for YWCAs in 1946; and

18           WHEREAS, In the 1940s, Dorothy Height went to Washington to  
19 serve as chief of the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA branch; she joined  
20 the staff of the national YWCA board in 1944 and, until 1975,  
21 remained on that staff with a variety of responsibilities,  
22 including leadership training and interracial and ecumenical  
23 education; in 1965, she organized and became the director of  
24 the YWCA's Center for Racial Justice, remaining in that

1 position until her retirement from the YWCA board in 1975; she  
2 also served as a visiting professor at the Delhi School of  
3 Social Work in India and directed studies around the world on  
4 issues involving human rights; and

5 WHEREAS, Dorothy Height was renowned throughout the world  
6 for her work in the civil rights movement; in the 1930s, she  
7 participated in protests in Harlem; in the 1940s, she lobbied  
8 First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt on behalf of civil rights causes;  
9 in the 1950s, she prodded President Dwight D. Eisenhower to  
10 move more aggressively on school desegregation issues; in the  
11 turmoil of the civil rights struggles in the 1960s, she helped  
12 orchestrate strategy with various leaders of the civil rights  
13 movement, including the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Roy  
14 Wilkins, A. Philip Randolph, Whitney Young, James Farmer,  
15 Bayard Rustin, and John Lewis; in August of 1963, she was on  
16 the platform with Martin Luther King Jr. when he delivered his  
17 "I Have A Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington,  
18 D.C.; when President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act  
19 in 1963, she was among those invited to the White House to  
20 witness the ceremony; she returned to the White House in 1998  
21 for a ceremony marking the 35th anniversary of the Equal Pay  
22 Act to hear President Clinton urge the passage of additional  
23 laws aimed at equalizing pay for men and women; she was also  
24 among the few women to speak at the Million Man March on the  
25 Mall in 1995; and

1           WHEREAS, Dorothy Height served as president of the National  
2 Council of Negro Women for 40 years until she relinquished the  
3 title in 1997; under her leadership, the National Council of  
4 Negro Women sponsored voter registration drives and organized  
5 an education foundation for student activists who interrupted  
6 their education to do civil rights work; the organization  
7 operated a program called Wednesdays in Mississippi, which  
8 consisted of weekly trips to Mississippi by interracial groups  
9 of women to assist at Freedom Schools and voter registration  
10 campaigns at great risk to their lives; in the 1970s and 1980s,  
11 the council helped organize and operate development projects in  
12 African countries and ran a "pig bank" project in rural  
13 Mississippi that gave pigs to poor, hungry families so they  
14 could raise them and give 2 pigs from subsequent litters back  
15 into the bank for another family; and

16           WHEREAS, Dorothy Height became national president of the  
17 Delta Sigma Theta sorority in 1947; she held that position  
18 until 1957; she also served on the advisory council of the  
19 White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and  
20 Universities and the National Advisory Council on Aging; and

21           WHEREAS, In 1980, Dorothy Height was chosen to receive  
22 Barnard's Medal of Distinction, the highest honor the college  
23 can give; in 1994, President Bill Clinton awarded her the

1 Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian  
2 honor; on March 24, 2004, she received the Congressional Gold  
3 Medal, the highest decoration that Congress can bestow; she was  
4 also given 36 honorary doctorates from many colleges and  
5 universities, including Harvard University and Princeton  
6 University; and

7 WHEREAS, Dorothy Height is survived by her sister,  
8 Anthanette Height Aldridge; and

9 WHEREAS, Dorothy Height will be remembered fondly by her  
10 family, friends, and the many people she helped for her  
11 incredible courage and her tireless attitude to obtaining  
12 equality for every man and woman in our nation and throughout  
13 the world; therefore, be it

14 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE  
15 NINETY-SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we  
16 mourn, along with her family and friends, the passing of  
17 Dorothy Irene Height; and be it further

18 RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be  
19 presented to the family of Dorothy Height as an expression of  
20 our sympathy.