

A TRIBUTE TO LYNN WALKER HUNTLEY

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Lynn Walker Huntley was one of America's great champions of civil rights. Her accomplishments will continue to make ours a better world for decades—assuredly outliving her short life, which ended on August 30, 2015.

Her paper credentials must not be glossed over, even though Lynn was much more than the summation of her curriculum vitae.

Lynn entered college at Fisk University and later earned her A.B. degree in sociology with honors from Barnard College. She was the first African American woman editor of the *Columbia Law Review*, and she graduated cum laude from Columbia Law School in 1970. After law school, she would clerk for Judge Constance Baker Motley in the Southern District of New York, also a leading figure in the civil rights movement. As a young lawyer at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), she represented prisoners in the Attica uprising and helped pen the winning Supreme Court brief that declared the death penalty to be cruel and unusual punishment. After the LDF, she was tapped to be the first African American woman section chief at the U.S. Department of Justice and was subsequently promoted to serve as deputy assistant attorney general.

Lynn's work reflected her ideals about equality and fairness. Central themes throughout her career were civil rights, racial justice, employment discrimination, and criminal-justice reform. She championed prisoners' rights, successfully litigating cases to require proper medical and psychiatric care for inmates, end segregated living and dining facilities, and protect prisoners' constitutional rights.

Lynn joined the Ford Foundation in 1982 to serve as program officer for civil rights under the leadership of Franklin A. Thomas. She would come to Ford with decades of experience working on civil rights and social justice at a critical juncture in the history of civil rights—when the “Reagan revolution” was threatening to unravel years of progress toward racial justice and equality. Following several promotions, she would ultimately serve as the Foundation's director of the Rights and Social Justice Program. After leaving Ford, she joined the Southern Education Foundation to direct the Comparative Human Relations Initiative, a study of race, poverty, and inequality in Brazil, South Africa, and the United States. She would subsequently serve as the president of the Southern Education Foundation from 2002 to 2010, the South's only African American-directed public charity, which focused on improving education for low income students.

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Lynn's legacy, however, is much greater than the chronicling of her many accomplishments and accolades. Lynn was a woman with a towering intellect, which she assiduously deployed to make the world a better place. She started groundbreaking programs that continue to make a difference in civil and human rights to this day.

At the Ford Foundation, Lynn created the African American Church Initiative, realizing from the career of her beloved father, Reverend Laurence Neal Jones, that the African American church was a bulwark of strength and resilience within the African American community worthy of private philanthropic support. She launched an initiative on minorities and the media, which would endeavor to address distorted views of how racial and ethnic minorities were portrayed by the media and their underrepresentation in media professions. Lynn would provide vital support to minority elected and appointed officials, so that they could better discharge their duties vis-à-vis their constituents. She would create a Hispanic leadership program at Ford and deepen the Foundation's engagement on immigrants' rights at a moment of severe xenophobic backlash against immigrants. She helped launch "Eyes on the Prize," the seminal documentary on the U.S. civil rights movement.

To help her with these initiatives, Lynn recruited an army of some of the most talented professionals to grace Ford's halls. With a keen ability to discern talent among yet-untested professionals, she brought to Ford a cohort of professionals who would amplify her vision and give it greater impact. She hired a young Emmett Carson, who subsequently would go on to head the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the Minneapolis Foundation. She tapped Mary McClymont, who now heads the Public Welfare Foundation, to scale up the Foundation's work on immigrants' rights. She found an emerging leader in Mora McLean, who would subsequently head up the Africa-American Institute working on U.S.-Africa relations. She hired Marcia Smith, who would later serve as vice president of Atlantic Philanthropies and help produce award-winning documentaries. Reverend Robert Franklin accepted the call to work for Lynn, long before he would be tapped to head Morehouse College. She hired me two years out of law school to serve as program officer for civil rights.

Those of us who answered the call to work for Lynn knew the standards would be high and the expectations great. We were hired by her to serve a cause, to make a difference, to throw open the doors of opportunity to the "least among us." She would lead us with clarity, resilience, doggedness, intelligence, and elegance. She would irrigate and fertilize our souls and spirits with unflinching support, love, and the best of humor. We would learn to laugh at ourselves and learn from our failings. We would revel in her always-ready jokes. Following the belly laughter, we would once again put our shoulders against the boulders of injustice that stood in the way of those who demanded our help.

Lynn Walker Huntley took the words “and justice for all” to heart. Her life was distinguished by creativity, vision, idealism, and good humor—all in the pursuit of justice.