

# The Clerk's Black History Series



**Debra DeBerry**  
Clerk of Superior Court  
DeKalb County

**Dr. Patricia E. Bath**

(November 4, 1942 – May 30, 2019)



“First African-American Woman Doctor to Receive Patent for Medical Invention – Laserphaco Probe”

“First African-American to Complete a Residency in Ophthalmology”



**Patricia Era Bath** was born on November 4, 1942 in Harlem, New York to Rupert and Gladys Bath. Her mother was a homemaker and her father was an immigrant from Trinidad who worked for the city. Patricia excelled at math and science, and won a National Science Foundation Scholarship while in high school. At the age of 16, she completed a research project at Yeshiva University and Harlem Hospital Center where she found connections between cancer, nutrition, and stress. That year, the head of the research program published her findings in a scientific paper.

Patricia graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from Manhattan's Hunter College in 1964 and relocated to Washington, D.C. to attend Howard University College of Medicine. In her freshman year, she co-founded the Student National Medical Association and became its first woman president in 1965.



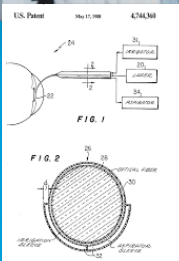
Her college years coincided with the Civil Rights Movement and Patricia became an active member of several organizations that fought for equality, especially in health care. After the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Patricia became involved the Poor Peoples Campaign, organizing Howard University medical students to provide volunteer healthcare services in Resurrection City. She graduated and returned home to intern at Harlem Hospital Center. There she observed large percentages of blind patients at Harlem Hospital in comparison to patients at the Columbia University Eye Clinic. She noted that Harlem Hospital had no ophthalmologists on staff and soon persuaded doctors from Columbia to operate on blind patients at the Harlem Hospital Center, for free. She participated with the Columbia team that performed the first eye surgery at Harlem Hospital, November 1969. From 1970 to 1973, Patricia Bath became the first African-American to serve her residency in ophthalmology at New York University.



Two years later, she became the first female faculty member in the Department of Ophthalmology at UCLA's Jules Stein Eye Institute. In 1976, she co-founded the American Institute for the Prevention of Blindness, which established that "eyesight was a basic human right." In 1981, her interest, experience, and research on cataracts lead to the



invention of a new device and method to remove cataracts: the Laserphaco Probe. She patented the device in 1988, becoming the first African-American female doctor to receive a medical patent.



In 1993, Dr. Patricia Bath retired from her position at the UCLA Medical Center and subsequently became the first woman on its honorary medical staff. That same year, she was named a "Howard University Pioneer in Academic Medicine." Among her many roles in the medical field, she was a strong advocate of telemedicine, which uses technology to provide medical services in remote areas. She continued receiving patents up until 2003. She held five medical patents altogether. Dr. Patricia Bath died of cancer on May 30, 2019, in San Francisco, California at the age of 76.

