

The Clerk's Black History Series



Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Dorothy Pitman Hughes

(October 2, 1938 –)

Civil Rights & Women's Rights Activist and Icon



Dorothy Pitman Hughes was born on October 2, 1938 in Lumpkin, Georgia. At the age of ten, Dorothy saw her father beaten and left for dead on the front porch of the family home, a victim of a brutal Ku Klux Klan attack. Determined to make a difference in racial equality, Dorothy finished high school in 1957 and moved to New York City, initially pursuing a career in music and entertainment. In 1964, Dorothy produced the "Ballad of the Winter Soldiers," a performance at the Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center. The performance starred notable black entertainers and civil rights activists such as, Sidney Poitier, Diahann Carroll, Dick Gregory, Ruby Dee, and Ossie Davis. The production benefited The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Soon she began raising bail money for civil rights protesters and working beside Martin Luther King, Jr, Malcom X and A. Philip Randolph. She also worked as a leader in African Americans Against the Vietnam War. Dorothy recognized the link between racial injustices and fighting classism and sexism and organized the first battered women's shelter in New York. She noticed that women were being forced to leave their children at home alone, while working to feed their families and co-founded the New York City

Agency for Child Development, a pioneering child-care facility. That same year, Hughes co-founded Ms. Magazine with Gloria Steinem along with the Women's Action Alliance, a pioneering national information center that specialized in non-sexist, multiracial, children's education. From their partnership also came the iconic black and white photo of Steinem and Hughes raising their fist, in a salute first popularized by members of the Black Power movement, in a show of feminist and racial solidarity. The two women toured together speaking about race, class and gender throughout the 1970's. Dorothy continued appearances as a guest lecturer throughout the 1980's and in 1992 co-founded the Charles Junction Historic Preservation Society in Jacksonville, Florida, combating poverty through community gardening.

In 1997, Dorothy became the first African-American woman to own an office supply/copy center - the Harlem Office Supply, Inc., and offered \$1.00 stock shares to individuals, corporations, and non-profit organizations that focused on African-American children. She wrote about her experiences in *Wake Up and Smell the Dollars!* advocating African-American small business ownership as a form of empowerment. Writing became another form of activism for Dorothy and her next book came from the gentrification of Harlem. In 1994, Dorothy was involved with the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ), a federal program designed for the economic development of Harlem, as part of the research team that created Business Resource and Investment Service Center (BRISC). Their goal was creating more small business owners, but instead, the program ultimately brought large "big box stores" into Harlem creating more competition for locally owned businesses. Dorothy knew that without African-American business ownership, there was no local empowerment. Dorothy protested the distribution of funding resources in her book *Just Saying... It Looks Like Ethnic Cleansing (The Gentrification of Harlem)* to provide advice to African-American business owners wanting to utilize similar government programs.

Dorothy Pitman Hughes currently operates two gardens in the Northside community of Jacksonville with the Episcopal Children's Services to combat poverty, with continued support from friend and co-activist Gloria Steinem. Ms. Dorothy Pitman Hughes celebrates her 80th birthday this year.

