

She Can Bring Us Home: Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, Civil Rights Pioneer

Diane Kiesel

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Long before it became the slogan of the presidential campaign for Barack Obama, Dorothy Ferebee (1898 1980) lived by the motto YES, WE CAN. An African American obstetrician and civil rights activist from Washington DC, she was descended from lawyers, journalists, politicians, and a judge. At a time when African Americans faced Jim Crow segregation, desperate poverty, and lynch mobs, she advised presidents on civil rights and assisted foreign governments on public health issues. Though articulate, visionary, talented, and skillful at managing her publicity, she was also tragically flawed.

Ferebee was president of the Alpha Kappa Alpha black service sorority and later became the president of the powerful National Council of Negro Women in the nascent civil rights era. She stood up to gun-toting plantation owners to bring health care to sharecroppers through her Mississippi Health Project during the Great Depression.

A household name in black America for forty years, Ferebee was also the media darling of the thriving black press. Ironically, her fame and relevance faded as African Americans achieved the political power for which she had fought. In She Can Bring Us Home, Diane Kiesel tells Ferebee's extraordinary story of struggle and personal sacrifice to a new generation.



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