

# Notable Black American Women

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Illinois Youth Commission, concentrating on the then newly developing field of community organization, which focused on means of eliminating negative influences in community setting. Focusing on adolescents, Duster was a juvenile delinquency prevention coordinator assigned to the Southside Community Committee, one of the affiliates of the Chicago Area Project. For ten years she also administered the girls program at Camp Illini, a resident camp for the underprivileged, until she resigned in 1965. Subsequently, she worked part-time for the Woodlawn Community Service Agency and the Catalyst for Youth program—a talent search project that recruited and counseled high school students prior to entering college.

Throughout these years, Duster continued her volunteer activities. She remained active in the PTA and also became involved in the Citizens' School Committee—a group formed to keep the school system free from political influence. Additionally, Duster was a member of the University of Chicago Women's Board and Steering Committee, the cabinet of the University of Chicago Alumni Association, the United Methodist Church Women, and the Ida B. Wells Club of the National Association of Colored Women—an organization that her mother helped establish.

Her dedication to both the community and her children—all five of whom earned graduate degrees and are outstanding professionals—earned Duster many awards. She won mother of the year awards from the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, the State Street Council, and the Harriet M. Harris YWCA. Other awards include the University of Chicago Alumni Association's citation for public service and the Opportunity Center's Bootstrap Award in Chicago. In 1970, after almost forty years of effort to edit and find a publisher for her mother's autobiography, *Crusade for Justice* was issued by the University of Chicago Press, for which she received a National Council of Negro Women Award for Literary Excellence and Outstanding Humanitarian Contributions.

On April 2, 1983, Duster died of a cerebral hemorrhage in Chicago. She was seventy-nine years old.

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Paula Giddings

## Eva B. Dykes

(1893-1986)

Educator, writer

One of the first three black American women to earn a Ph.D. in 1921, Eva Dykes displayed an unswerving commitment to education and excellence throughout her life and career. She was honored in 1976 as a pioneer in the full intellectual development of black women by the National Association of Black Professional Women in Higher Education.

Eva Beatrice Dykes was born in Washington, D.C., on August 13, 1893, the second daughter of James Stanley Dykes and Martha Ann (Howard) Dykes. There was an older sister, Florence "Flossie," and a younger, Anita. Her maternal grandparents were slaves on a plantation in Howard County, Maryland. In her background was a strong family tie to Howard University in Washington. Her father, two uncles, and one of her sisters were graduates of the university, and the other sister graduated from its training school. Her mother attended Howard's preparatory school but had to leave because of poor health. James Dykes and his wife were divorced when the children were young, but Martha Dykes managed to keep the family together with the assistance of her brother, James C. Howard, a physician who became a prominent Seventh Day Adventist. Florence Dykes graduated from Howard and taught in its commercial college until her death after a brief illness on October 5, 1917. Anita Dykes married, and it is through Anita Dykes Simms that the closest living relatives of Eva Dykes descend.

Eva Beatrice Dykes studied at Howard University Training School for grades one through four and completed her primary education at the Lucretia Mott Elementary School. She then attended the M Street High School before entering Howard University, from which she graduated summa cum laude in 1914. After her graduation she taught English and Latin for a year at Walden University in Nashville, Tennessee. (The school no longer exists.) She then undertook further study at Radcliffe College, which did not accept the validity of her undergraduate degree and enrolled her as an unclassified student. In 1917 Radcliffe awarded her the A.B. degree in English magna cum laude, with honors in English, and she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. The following year she received the A.M. According to the *Howard University Record*, she had a grade of A in eighteen of the twenty-three courses she took at Radcliffe and a B in the others (467). She completed the requirements for the Ph.D. on March 21, 1921, when she defended her dissertation on "Pope and His Influence in America from 1715 to 1850." She was one of the first three black American women to earn a Ph.D., all of



whom were awarded their degrees that year, and she was the first to complete the requirements, although her commencement on June 22 was the latest. The other two to earn their degrees that year are Sadie T. Mossell Alexander, economics at the University of Pennsylvania, and Georgianna R. Simpson, German at the University of Chicago.

Eva B. Dykes's commitment to learning and teaching is clear; equally important was her commitment to her church. In December 1920 she joined the Seventh Day Adventist Church. She undertook this engagement with the utmost seriousness; she spoke to friends of a marriage offer from a physician, which she turned down regretfully because the man did not share her faith (Reynolds, 17). An accomplished pianist, Dykes also had a strong avocation in music that she placed at the service of her church work. She was not ashamed to perform on a portable organ in the streets with evangelizing groups. She also gave Bible lessons and worked for the conversion of others. The most famous example of her devotion to her church is the warning she made to the dean of Howard University that she could not give service to the university between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday because of her allegiance. It is to President Mordecai Johnson's credit that he recognized that this devotion to her church was a positive reason to hire her.

It was in 1929 that Eva B. Dykes joined the faculty of Howard University; previously she had taught for nine years at the former M Street High School, which had become the Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. She taught until 1944 at Howard, where the faculty of the College of Liberal Arts honored her by naming her the best all-around teacher in the university in 1930. The university honored her with the Alumni Award for Distinguished Postgraduate Achievement in 1945. In addition to her teaching, committee work, and service as associate editor of the *Howard University Record*, she also engaged in scholarly work and other writing. She was coeditor, with Otelia Cromwell and Lorenzo Dow Turner, of *Readings From Negro Authors for Schools and Colleges* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931), and she wrote *The Negro in English Romantic Thought* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1942), and articles for learned journals, as well as many articles for church publications. In 1934 she began a column for *Message Magazine* and continued it for fifty years.

In 1944 Eva B. Dykes accepted the invitation of James Lewis Moran to go to Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama. This Adventist school had begun as an industrial school in 1896 and was currently a junior college; Moran's ambition was to create a four-year school. Dykes was the first Ph.D. to join the faculty—the only one for more than ten years—and was immediately made head of the department of English. There is some question whether her salary was forty-two dollars a week, equal to that of the president, or forty-one, because the board of trustees insisted that the president be paid at least one dollar more. The remainder of her life was to be in service to the school as a teacher and leader. She retired in 1968 but was called back in 1970 for

three more years until she asked for a reduced load in 1973, leaving the classroom for good in 1975.

Louis B. Reynolds remembers her leadership abilities when Oakwood was seeking the accreditation it gained in 1958 and Eva B. Dykes headed the faculty accreditation committee:

When she talked of money for much-needed facilities at Oakwood, it seemed to her the board members were dragging their feet. At the time of the annual meeting she invited three or four of us whom she knew well to breakfast, and while we ate, she lectured us from prepared notes on the need for immediate action and she outlined in one-two-three order what she felt we ought to do (17).

Mrs. C. B. Rock, a former student and wife of one of Oakwood's presidents, remembers her as a "caring, yet disciplined teacher: Every 't' had to be crossed and every 'i' dotted and, if not, an 'F'. . . . And if you answered (a question in class), and she didn't hear, 'F'" (Hollon, A-6). She would often end her class with the words "audibility" and "minimum standards" (Swann, 16). She also insisted on eight or nine textbooks for her courses—including works like *Five Thousand Words You Should Know*—even though she was amused when freshmen students borrowed children's wagons one day to haul their books to class (Hollon, A-6). At the same time, she was generous to students in her private help. Her outstanding contributions to the college were recognized when the library was named the Eva B. Dykes Library on April 22, 1973.

### Black Adventist Conferences Established

There was further service to the college in her direction of the Oakwood College Church Choir, of the Oakwood College Choir, and of the Faculty Women's Chorus, as well as her sponsorship of other college groups. In addition to the offices she filled in her church, she extended her musical work to direct camp meeting choirs for the various conferences. According to Carlos Medley, she was also a leader in the movement to establish "colored" conferences in the denomination. Churches both in the North and in the South had been basically segregated since 1909. In the face of continuing discrimination, she joined the movement that resulted in the formation of the seven "colored" conferences of the Adventists in 1941 (5).

A small woman, Eva B. Dykes was also humble. She often said "I am so very ordinary" (Warren, 13). Louis B. Reynolds tell us:

There are about her no put-on or professional airs. Dignity, she raised us to understand, had nothing to do with one's social station: character, conduct, were everything. Attitudes of class superiority she considers not only in excess of her credentials but distasteful in themselves. She tells her students the doctorate is purely an



academic title and it is not necessary for people to call her doctor (17).

He also tells us that one of her most decided traits was a dislike of having people fail to live up to their promises. "Failing to fulfill a promise was to her a kind of falling from grace. She never put herself in the position of being disappointed a second time" (17).

It is fitting that she was able to attend the charter meeting of the National Association of Black Professional Women in Higher Education in Racine, Wisconsin, on April 5, 1976—Georgianna R. Simpson had died and Sadie T. Mossell Alexander was unable to be present. There Geraldine Rickman said:

We have in our midst a pioneer. Pioneers are special people. "Firsts" are always difficult. We don't know that things can be done, that dreams can be fulfilled, that great accomplishments can be realized, until somebody takes that first step and shows the way. Black women had never realized the full intellectual development and potential until this pioneer, Dr. Eva. B. Dykes, 55 years ago dared to take the first step and show the way (Williams, 12).

Eva B. Dykes died on October 29, 1986, at the age of ninety-three. Her funeral was held on Sunday, November 2, 1986, in the Oakwood College Campus Church.

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#### Collections

Papers and memorabilia are in the Eva B. Dykes Library, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama, and in the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. An interview with Eva B. Dykes is in the Radcliffe College Black Oral History Collection.

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