

# DOROTHY KUYA ARCHIVE BLOG: International Women's Day

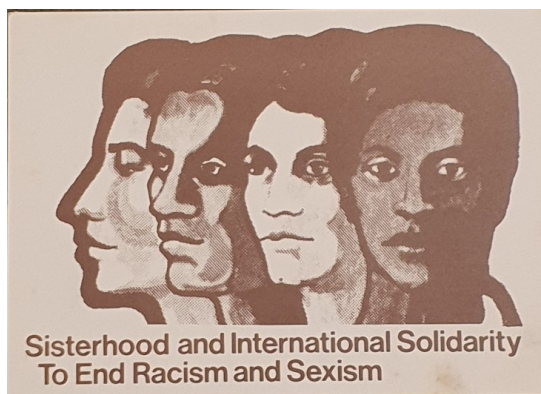
By Janaya Pickett



Since November, our project team and participants have been fascinated by the archive of Liverpool-born anti-racist campaigner and communist, Dorothy Kuya. The Dorothy Kuya creative heritage project aims to reveal and share the knowledge of this important figure in Black British history to as wide an audience as possible. On Wednesday 8th March, we'll be collaborating with National Museums Liverpool and the International Slavery Museum for a special International Women's Day event:

## 'Celebrating Dorothy.'

It would have been Dorothy's 90th birthday on 13th March, so we wanted to take this serendipitous opportunity to celebrate and explore Dorothy's long connection to the IWD holiday, as well as how her experience as a black woman was central to her feminism.



*National Assembly of Women Postcard*

This year's International Women's Day theme is #embraceequity which, although a seemingly contemporary phrase, was at the root of all of Dorothy's activism. Equity is the realisation of individual circumstances and ensuring that the correct resources and opportunities are tailored to all individuals in order to reach an equal outcome.

Although IWD's popularity has seen a massive increase in the last 10-15 years, bringing with it images of panel discussions and coffee mornings, the holiday itself is over 100 years old, with roots in the socialist feminist movements of the early 20th century. Dorothy grew up in a political household, inspired heavily by the Pan-Africanist movement, where she was "positively encouraged" to read left wing newspapers by her parents, and use her teenage secretarial skills for assisting local black anti-racist organisations such as the New International Society and the Colonial Peoples Defense Association.

After attending a Young Communist League meeting with a family friend in 1946, Dorothy found an outlet for the frustration and anger she felt- over the discrimination and inequality she lived and saw all around her. She would need to wait until aged 14 before receiving a YCL membership card but had already started leafleting and selling copies of the Daily Worker on street corners.

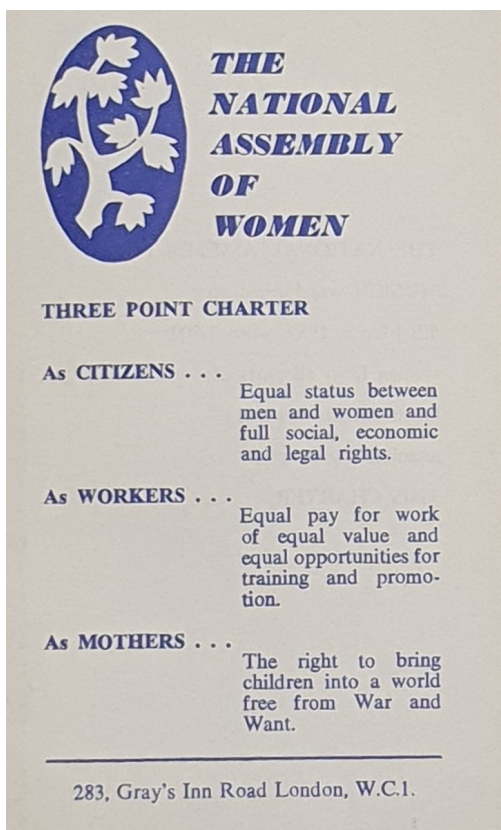


*Dorothy Kuya - 1970's*

Through this connection with the CPGB and the labor movement, Dorothy's appetite for learning was ignited, attending night schools, lectures on political theory and colonialism, as well as conferences and rallies up and down the country.

The National Assembly of Women, an affiliation of the Women's International Democratic Federation, was established in the aftermath of women's involvement in WWII, with its inaugural meeting taking place in St Pancras, London in 1952. Their initial concerns were with equal pay and employment rights for women, but the women also demonstrated against British colonialism, the cost of living, children's welfare and development, and the increase of women in parliament, among other things. Through her connection to the YCL, CPDA and NIS, Dorothy became an early member of the National Assembly of Women. In the booklet *Staying Power: Black Experience in Liverpool*, that accompanied the 1991 exhibition of the same name, there is a picture of an 18/19 year-old Dorothy, among a group of mostly white women, demonstrating against the Korean War at the National Labour Party Conference of 1952. The sign she holds reads:

**WE WANT POWs [PRISONERS  
OF WAR] HOME NOW!**



*National Assembly of Women, Three Point Charter.*

By 1983, Dorothy had become general secretary of the National Assembly of Women and by 1987 she was vice chair. It's on becoming vice chair that she challenged the organisation for its lack of diversity in its membership, and encouraged local women, such as film producer Bea Freeman and activist Linda Loy, to swell its ranks.

This is just a snippet of Dorothy's contribution to society, and unfortunately we don't have enough blog space to enthrall you with the many many examples of how Dorothy Kuya impacted the world around her.

**'CELEBRATING DOROTHY' WILL  
TAKE PLACE ON WEDNESDAY  
8TH MARCH, 5.30-8.00PM AT  
THE INTERNATIONAL SLAVERY  
MUSEUM**

**ABOUT THE EVENT**

Dorothy's archive holds over 600 books, as well as countless other publications, a selection of which will be available to browse at Celebrating Dorothy's popup feminist library.

We will also be opening the Dorothy Kuya Living Library, where guest speakers take the form of 'books' that attendees can 'read'/have a conversation with for a limited time. This library will cover topics relevant to Dorothy's archive, as well as the IWD theme of embracing equity, by featuring women of colour in various fields pertaining to social justice.

As well as all this, there is a zine making workshop on offer with artist Saleena Laverne Daye and a mini exhibition of material from Dorothy's archive, relating to her key involvement in what would later become the International Slavery Museum.

This will be a free event, but tickets are limited. You can find out more and get yourself a ticket by following the link below.

[https://writingonthewall.org.uk/myevents/  
international-womens-day/](https://writingonthewall.org.uk/myevents/international-womens-day/)