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Speeches & Public Remarks

Campus Messages

Dr. Joseph Warren

03.30.10

It is always a tragedy when the University loses a path-breaking academic; or a dedicated staff member; or a towering community leader. This weekend, with the passing of Joe Warren, we have lost all three.

Dr. Warren was born April 2, 1938, in New York City's Harlem neighborhood, son of Geroldine (McDaniel) and Harold H. Warren. He attended North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, where he received a Bachelor of Science in Economics and played football. While in college, he marched and organized his fellow students as a leader in the civil rights movement. He earned his graduate degrees from Brandeis University: a master's in social research in 1973 and a doctorate in 1983.

He began working at Northeastern in 1978, first as associate professor of African-American Studies and then as urban assistant to then-President Kenneth Ryder. In 1982, he was named director of the Office of Community Affairs. In 1983, he founded the Northeastern University Academy, now called Balfour Academy, a program that provides inner-city youth with rigorous college preparation. In addition, he directed Gear-Up, a program designed to help at-risk youth.

Most recently, Dr. Warren was special assistant to the vice president for government relations, founding and overseeing the Youth Development Initiative Project (YDIP), an intensive tutoring program for at-risk youth and their families from neighborhoods surrounding Northeastern. He also continued to teach in the Department of African-American Studies, and for years took a solo part in the Boston production of "Black Nativity."

Dr. Warren was a gifted scholar and leader who dedicated his life to enhancing the lives of others at Northeastern, in Massachusetts, and around the nation. His belief in the power of education and the ideals of democracy were palpable. He inspired countless generations of students and many colleagues. Because he donated his papers to our library, subsequent scholars may learn from his life.

Dr. Warren's commitment to improving the lives of inner-city youth was long-standing and unwavering. Prior to joining Northeastern, he served as the executive director of Upward Bound at Brandeis, a program for inner-city high school students, a VISTA training coordinator in New York City, a community organizer in Washington, D.C., and assistant supervisor for the New York City Youth Board. He was also a founding member of Boston's 1000 Black Men, an organization dedicated to assisting at-risk African-American males.

Dr. Warren believed profoundly in the political process and was an active member of the Democratic Party. In 1979, he organized the "Warren Commission," a political advocacy group that worked to improve the social and economic circumstances of minority communities in Massachusetts and the nation. He served as assistant secretary for educational affairs during Gov. Michael Dukakis' first term, as an aide to Dukakis from 1982 to 1986, and as a senior adviser during the 1988 presidential campaign. He sat on Dukakis' Community Development Coordinating Council, working on urban renewal along Boston's Southwest Corridor, and on matters related to minority hiring.

Dr. Warren served in the Air Force during the Korean War. After many years serving in the U.S. Naval Reserve, he retired as a commander in 1994.

I know you join me in offering sincere condolences to his wife, Martha Warren, his son, Setti Warren and his spouse Tassy; his daughter, Makeda Warren Keegan and her spouse, Jesse; his stepdaughter Lea Walker Ruggiero and her spouse, Allelon; his stepson, Keir Walker; and his granddaughter, Abigail Warren.