



Grace Lee Boggs

June 27, 1915 - October 5, 2015

Detroit, Michigan

Grace Lee Boggs, the philosopher who spent seven decades insisting that ordinary people could rebuild their own neighborhoods, died in her sleep at her home on Detroit's east side on October 5, 2015. She was one hundred years old.

She was born Grace Chin Lee on June 27, 1915, in Providence, Rhode Island, in the apartment above her father's Chinese restaurant, and grew up in Jackson Heights, Queens. She graduated from Barnard College and in 1940 earned a doctorate in philosophy from Bryn Mawr. No university would hire a Chinese American woman to teach, so she took a job in the University of Chicago's philosophy library for ten dollars a week and lived in a rat-infested basement. Tenants on the South Side were organizing against those same conditions, and she joined them. That was the beginning.

In the 1940s and 1950s she worked with the Trinidadian thinker C.L.R. James, translating Karl Marx's early writings and arguing about what revolution would mean in America. In 1953 she moved to Detroit and married James Boggs, an auto worker at Chrysler and a writer in his own right. Their partnership lasted forty years, through the Black Power era, the 1967 uprising and the long decline of the factory city.

As Detroit emptied, the Boggses stopped waiting for factories to return. They promoted community gardens on vacant lots, neighborhood patrols and small local enterprises. In 1992 they founded Detroit Summer, a youth program that put teenagers to work painting murals and planting gardens. After James died in 1993, friends created the Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership in their honor. Her 2011 book, *The Next American Revolution*, written when she was in her nineties, argued that change starts with how people treat one another on their own block.

Visitors crowded the small house on Field Street until the end. Notice Nearby remembers a Detroiter by choice who believed the future would be grown, not handed down.

Services

Died at her home in Detroit, Michigan, October 5, 2015. Philosopher, author and activist; co-founder of Detroit Summer and the Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership. Portrait: photograph by Kyle McDonald, February 2012, CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons (cropped), hosted by Notice Nearby.

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