

# BIOGRAPHY



#### NAME

Whitney Young Jr.

#### BIRTH DATE

July 31, 1921

#### DEATH DATE

March 11, 1971

#### EDUCATION

University of  
Minnesota,  
School of Social  
Work, Kentucky  
State Industrial  
College,  
Massachusetts  
Institute of  
Technology,  
Harvard  
University,  
Lincoln Institute

#### PLACE OF BIRTH

Lincoln Ridge,  
Kentucky

#### PLACE OF DEATH

Lagos, Nigeria

#### AKA

Whitney M.  
Young Jr.  
Whitney Moore  
Young  
Whitney M.  
Young  
Whitney Young Jr.  
Whitney Young

#### FULL NAME

Whitney Moore  
Young Jr.

## Whitney Young Jr.

Biography  
(1921–1971)

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Civil rights leader Whitney Young Jr., head of the National Urban League, was at the forefront of racial integration and African American economic empowerment.

### Who Was Whitney Young Jr.?

Whitney Young Jr. worked with and ran local branches before becoming head of the National Urban League in 1961. He was responsible for greatly expanding the size of the organization while overseeing the racial integration of corporate workplaces. Young, who faced critiqued over his methods, is believed to have died from drowning on March 11, 1971.

### Early Life

Whitney M. Young Jr. was born on July 31, 1921, in Lincoln Ridge, Kentucky, a middle child with two sisters. His mother was a teacher and his father the principal of the Lincoln Institute, an African American preparatory school. He attended Kentucky State Industrial College before working as a teacher himself and then serving in World War II overseas, where he acted as a bridge between Black and white servicemen.

Young wed his college sweetheart, Margaret Buckner, in 1944, and the couple went on to have two children.

### National Urban League

Upon his return to the states, Young earned his social work master's from the University of Minnesota. He went on to work for a few years with the Urban League of St. Paul, with the organization making strides in placing African Americans in previously whites-only employee positions.

He became executive secretary of the League's Omaha branch in 1950 and thus was at the forefront of racial integration in the region. Then in the mid-1950s Young took a position as dean of Atlanta University's School of Social Work, remaining actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement and heading the state branch of the NAACP.

Young was appointed executive director of the National Urban League in 1961. With a flair for enlisting the support of prominent white businessmen, he was instrumental in saving the league from financial ruin as well as handling major overhauls of the organization's structure, grandly increasing its budget and staff size.

## Presidential Adviser

Politically shrewd and aware, Young had access to the U.S. presidential office and was a close adviser to [Lyndon B. Johnson](#). Young became known for his Domestic Marshall Plan, which was thought to have helped shape the president's policies, and also received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1968.

After visiting troops in the Vietnam War, which he eventually publicly opposed, Young established a veteran affairs department for the League. He was also a writer, having penned the books *To Be Equal* (1964) and *Beyond Racism: Building an Open Society* (1969) as well as a popular syndicated newspaper column. His wife was also an author, writing books for children.

With the advent of the Black Power movement, Young was often seen as too conservative and conciliatory in his views by more militant factions. Yet he did adopt the New Thrust program in the late 1960s, which focused on the direct economic empowerment and actualization of urban communities.

## Death and Legacy

Young died on March 11, 1971, at the age of 49, while attending a conference in Lagos, Nigeria. He is believed to have drowned while swimming at a beach. (There was some initial conflict about the cause of death, with the Nigerian coroner's office stating Young had suffered a brain hemorrhage.)

Biographies on the leader's life include *Whitney M. Young Jr. and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (1989) by Nancy Weiss, and *Militant Mediator* (1998) by Dennis C. Dickerson. And in 2013, PBS aired the documentary *The Powerbroker: Whitney Young's Fight for Civil Rights*.

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