

RODRIGUEZ-TRIAS, HELEN (1929–2001)

“When we lose the possibilities of participating in social change, we fall into a trap – the trap of a hollow life.” G. Bonilla Santiago. *Breaking Ground and Barriers: Hispanic Women Developing Effective Leadership*.

Born and educated in Puerto Rico, Rodríguez Trias came to live in New York at the age of ten. When her mother sent her back to the island to complete her education, she became a student activist and independence supporter. Her passion for justice shaped her career. She helped unionize Puerto Rican steelworkers in Lorain, Ohio, and returned to Puerto Rico to study medicine specializing in pediatrics. Rodríguez recognized the relationship between health issues and politics. She founded the first clinic for newborns in the island and became concerned about the unequal access poor and wealthy women had to safe abortions. She headed the pediatrics department at Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx; led community campaigns against lead paint, and worked with the Young Lords to bring about change. Appointed to the faculties of several well-known schools of medicine, Rodríguez founded programs for women with HIV and HIV-affected families. She was a founding member of the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse, the Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse, and the Pacific Institute for Women’s Health. She developed health programs in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. In 2001 she received the Presidential Citizen’s Medal for her many accomplishments.