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Chapt. 8
SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF MAGISTRATE

MYLES A. PAIGE

Magistrate Myles A. Paige, first Negro magistrate in the history of New York City, was born at Montgomery, Alabama, July 18, 1898. His parents were Myles A. Paige, a government employee, and the former Laura E. Coleman, a schoolteacher. Of the house in which he was born, Judge Paige says that it was as comfortable, spacious and elegant as any in that locality.

"I was one of six children," he remarked in an interview, "and there was plenty of room in that house for all of us."

The elder Paige died when young Myles was only 2 years old. This left his mother with 6 small children, the oldest of whom was only 10. Myles was the next to the oldest, and he early felt the necessity of working after school to help his mother. His mother never married again, and reared her family alone.

As a child Myles worked after school hours, on Saturdays, and in the summer vacations. He finally got work as an elevator operator in one of the leading department stores in Montgomery. Here he rose to window-dresser and salesman, and graduated from the public elementary school.

In 1917 he graduated from the high school depart-

ment of St. Joseph's College, now known as the State Normal Training School for Teachers. Although it was a struggle all the way, the future magistrate did not stop here. With commendable ambition, he entered Fisk University, at Nashville, Tennessee, the same year.

Paige stayed at Fisk only land 1/2 years. Then there occurred a student strike, in which he participated. As a result, he left Fisk, and went to Howard University at Washington, D.C. Here he played on Howard's champion football team of 1920, and the following year received his B.A. degree from the same school.

It was in his senior year at college that Paige definitely decided to study law. He had always wanted to be a lawyer, he says, but his mother had opposed the idea, partly because of lawyers' traditional reputation for dishonesty.

"Out of deference to her opinion," he reminisced, "I had given up the idea. Then, out of a clear sky, she wrote me giving her consent. So I decided to study law."

In the fall of 1921 Paige entered Columbia University, and graduated from its law school in June, 1924. While attending Columbia, he held a position as Assistant Law Librarian. This he obtained as a result of a competitive examination, and thus helped to defray his expenses. Dean Harlan Stone, now a Supreme Court

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Justice, was partly instrumental in inducing him to take an extra year at Columbia.

At the completion of his law course Paige was offered many positions in downtown law firms. But he decided to join the firm of Dyatt, Hall & Patterson, of which he became a partner. He continued his practice in Harlem until 1929, when he was appointed Deputy Attorney General in charge of prosecution of violations of Workmen's Compensation and other labor laws.

As Deputy Attorney General, Paige conducted many outstanding test cases, which were taken to the highest courts in many instances. He continued in this position 3 years, after which he returned to private practice. Then, in 1936, he was appointed a City Magistrate by Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia, this being the first time that a Negro had been thus honored in New York.

As a City Magistrate Mr. Paige shares with Commissioner Hubert T. Delaney the distinction of being the highest paid Negro office-holder in New York. The usual salary for both these offices is \$12,000 per year, but both have been temporarily reduced. However, Magistrate Paige's position is higher in rank, since, once appointed, he may not be removed by the mayor, as may Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Paige has long been active in community, civic

and political affairs. He organized the Joint Committee Against Discriminatory Practices. He is a former president of the Harlem Lawyers' Association and Chairman of the North Harlem Community Council. He is a member of the following organizations: Harlem Housing Committee, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, New York County Lawyers' Association, 4th Degree Knights of Columbus, Executive Committee of the Welfare Council, and the Federal Bar Association:

Paige is now married and the father of 2 children. He is tall and powerfully built, but mild and genial in manner. Tennis and bridge are his favorite recreations.

He makes a profound impression in court by his handling of the cases which come before him. He seems to take a personal interest in each prisoner, and tries to help him.

"We're not here to punish you," he frequently tells the prisoners, "we're here to help you."

Alternately, Judge Paige lectures, scolds and interrogates. But always he leaves all who observe him, including the prisoners, with the impression that he desires only to help the offenders against the law.

Amy MacKenzie, in a magazine article, has commented on the complete lack of resentment against Paige as a Negro which characterizes the court over which he pre-

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sides. Rarely does a Negro appear as a prisoner in the downtown Third District. But Paige "knows and applies the principle of the brotherhood of man," and "his judicial attitude does not vary with respect to race."

Humor, patience, understanding and charity are characteristics of Magistrate Myles A. Paige. He has lived keenly in a wide field of experience, and he considers his present position one of strategic importance in the proper administration of justice.

"I place great importance on the proper administration of the lower courts," he told one interviewer.

And his record bears out this statement.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

MAGISTRATE MYLES A. PAIGE, 35 Mount Morris Park, New York City
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Myles A. Paige

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! The first Negro city magistrate was appointed September 2, 1936 by his honor the Mayor Fiorella H. La Guardia. Myles Anderson Paige became the first member of his race to sit in Magistrate's Court in the Empire City. He succeeded Nathan D. Perlman who was elevated to the Court of Special Sessions.

This man the son of Myles A. Paige, a government employee and Laura E. Coleman a school teacher was born in Montgomery Alabama in 1898. He was one of a family of six children, and destined to have no bed of roses. His father died when he was quite young and the burden of rearing a family singlehanded fell to the lot of his mother.

Paige attended the public school and high school of Montgomery, and graduated from the State Normal in 1917. (Some records say that he graduated from St. Joseph's College at this time.) This same year he entered Fisk University and stayed for one and a half years. Before his departure from this institute of learning he participated in a student's strike which in a large measure hastened his leaving. Howard University from 1919 to 1921 was the next stop on Paige's scholastic journey. In 1920 he starred as end on the football team of this well known school, and his sport activities did not prevent him from A.B. graduate work.

He became a Bachelor of Law and a Master of Law as the results of his studies at Columbia University.

As the results of a competitive examination Myles Paige was the Assistant Law Librarian while at Columbia. Dean Harlan Stone now a Supreme Court Justice was greatly instrumental in inducing Paige to undergo another year of study. In 1924 he was admitted to the bar and then became a member of the firm of Dyatt, Hall and Patterson. He practised at his profession in Harlem until 1929.

From 1929 until 1931 Mr. Paige was the Assistant Attorney General of New

York State assigned to the Labor Bureau. This position placed him in charge of prosecution of violations of Workmen's Compensation and Labor Laws. He continued in this capacity for three years and then returned to private practise.

His appointment as City Magistrate in 1936 brought an annual salary of \$10,000. His position then was considered higher than that of Hubert Delaney Commissioner of Taxes. Because once placed in the position, Paige could not be removed, even by the Mayor himself. The term was until April 30, 1945

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At the Omega Conclave on December 27th, his Honor the Mayor announced that Myles A. Paige the City's first Negro Magistrate would be elevated to the court of Special Sessions. Although Paige is an Alpha man the Omega brethren were glad to hear the tidings that at last a Negro would sit in any part of the Special Session Court. His salary for his new duties will increase to \$12,000 a year.

In this instance Paige succeeded Judge A.B. Vorhees who retired after thirty-nine years of service. This position carries an employment lease for ten years. Although Magistrate Paige is the first Negro to sit on the Special Sessions Bench he is not the first to work in this court. Eunice Carter Assistant District Attorney to Thomas E. Dewey is assigned to prosecutions in this court.

Paige's private life is said to be ideal. He married Dorothy Boyd daughter of Samuel H. Boyd, and as a result of this union they are the proud parents of two daughters Barbara and Betty. He is fond of Bridge and tennis but is very active organizationally. He is a member of the Catholic Church and formed the Joint Committee Against Discriminatory Practise.

At present he is a member of the New York County Lawyer's Association; Lawyers Conference; Secretary Citizens Welfare Council of New York; Secretary of Citizen's Forum; Secretary of Howard University Alumni Association of New York; Vice President of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity; Past Commander of the American Legion, Colonel Young Post; Fisk Club of New York; Southern Beneficial League; Clubmen's Beneficial League; 66 Non Pariel Americans; Knights of Columbus Laymen's Union of New York; Manhattan Welfare Association; Intercollegiate Association; President of the interfraternity Council Holy Name Society, Elks Imperial Lodge #127

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New York Times Sept. 9, 1936

Chief Magistrate Gould Schurman Jr. said, "Your appointment to this high office gives notice to the world that New York's administration of justice does not bar any race, creed or color".

New York Post September 2, 1936

Mayor La Guardia told the new magistrate that "his responsibilities would be greater than that of the ordinary lawyer appointed to the bench. He said he had picked Mr. Paige from a long list of able lawyers on the basis of his professional standing and knowledge of conditions. If you make good credit is all yours, if you don't the fault is all mine for appointing you".

New York Post Sept. 4, 1936

(Ruth McKenney)

During his first hours on the bench (Harlem Court 121st St. and Sylvan Place) Magistrate Paige dispensed an even and very popular brand of justice.

New York Times Sept. 3, 1936

Myles A. Paige. "We've got a serious problem as in all other underprivileged sections, not only here but all over the world. Basically its economic-----Harlem has been libeled by newspapers. I hope the papers will soon realize the harm they are doing to the majority of the race when they put the Negro in the headlines of a crime story. When a good deed is done by a Negro you seldom see it except in small type at the end of the article.

Amsterdam News Sept. 5, 1936

The appointment of a Negro Magistrate is one step in the right direction, and we hope the mayor plans to go further.

Pittsburg Courier March 25, 1933

(Address over Station WJLB New York City on the interracial hour by Myles Paige)

"The municipal Court is the civil court of first and last resort for the greater partion of the Negro population because of their inability to appeal from unfavorable decisions. This is truly the "Poor Man" Court and his last hope for justice in landlord and tenant proceedings and actions involving less than one thousand dollars.

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Even where no such unpleasant memory exists, the average white juror has the general feeling that damage to a Negro is not deserving of the same compensation as damages to other persons".

N.Y. World's Telegram March 31, 1938

Supreme Court Justice Aaron J. Levy today denied a motion to set aside a verdict that Magistrate Myles A. Paige must pay Mrs. Margaret Nagel \$12,500 for injuries received when an automobile in which she was riding collided with his car. (January 1934)

Magistrate Paige sought to have the award set aside because the Negro race was not represented on the jury.

New York Times Sept. 3, 1936

A large Negro community in New York City has every right to share in the administration of justice by the city judiciary and in naming for the first time a member of the race as magistrate the mayor brings to mind the thought that some predecessor should have recognized this fact long ago. The appointment of Mr. Paige is not only proper and socially progressive; it is typical of Mayor La Guardia's intelligent interest in and concern for the city's masses under his watch and ward. New York City with its conglomerate population is fortunate in having at its head a citizen who is without racial, religious or social prejudice.

Ibid Sept. 4, 1936

Magistrate Charles Solomon from Brooklyn, presided in court today to help Magistrate Paige familiarize himself with its routine. Paige to take the bench Sept. 4.

Ibid July 29, 1937

Negro magistrate refused to jail woman accused in South of abducting her son. "There is no justice in putting a woman in jail because of love for her own child".

Ibid July 5, 1938

Nazis of today were linked with the "mercenary Hessians" of the American Revolution and the Germany of the World War by Myles A. Paige who represented

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Mayor La Guardia at the July 4th celebration yesterday in the Central Park
Mall sponsored by the Patriotic Memorial League of the National War Veterans.

Bibliography

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