

BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL ON PAULI MURRAY

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, November 21, 1910.

Pauli Murray is a young woman lawyer with a labor background. She has always been associated with movements to advance the cause of the underprivileged. As early as 10 years old when she sold newspapers and magazines among the factory workers of her community, she gained a deep and abiding interest in the conditions of labor. As a student volunteer union organizer and later as a teacher of workers education and as field secretary of the Workers Defense League, she proved herself a determined fighter for labor's rights.

She has been equally passionate in her struggle to gain equality for minorities. In 1938 she applied for admission to the University of North Carolina graduate school, but was refused because she was a Negro. Her application was pending when the famous Gaines decision was handed down by the United States Supreme Court and caused the North Carolina legislature immediately to appropriate funds for a segregated school for Negroes at Durham, North Carolina. The case aroused considerable interest in North Carolina and the students of the University of North Carolina graduate school voted three to one in favor of the admission of qualified Negroes.

In 1940, Pauli Murray challenged the segregation laws of Virginia on a Grayhound interstate bus. She was arrested and imprisoned. Her case was handled by NAACP attorneys and was lost on appeal because the Commonwealth of Virginia withdrew its charges of violation of the segregation laws and charged her with disorderly conduct. Her contention was vindicated in 1946 by the Morgan decisions which declared the Virginia segregation statute invalid as applied to interstate passengers.

From 1940 to 1942 Pauli Murray spearheaded the defence of Odell Waller, a Negro sharecropper convicted of murder and sentenced to the electric chair for the shooting of his landlord in Vienna, Virginia in a dispute over shares of a wheat crop. As Special Field Secretary for the Workers Defence League, Miss Murray toured the country with Waller's mother, Mrs. Annie Waller, raising funds and support for Waller's defence, and exposing the evils of the poll tax in the southern states.

In 1943 and 1944 while a student at Howard University School of Law, Pauli Murray helped to organize a campaign of direct action against the exclusion of Negroes from Washington restaurants through the Civil Rights Committee of the Howard University Chapter of the NAACP. The picketing and sit-in campaigns carried on by the Howard University students forced the dropping of the color bar in two Washington restaurants.

In 1942 as a student delegate to the International Student Assembly at Washington, D. C., she was active in persuading that body to take a position supporting the struggle of India for recognition.

In 1944, Pauli Murray graduated from Howard University School of Law, with honors, and winner of a Rosenwald Fellowship to study graduate law at Harvard University. She forthwith applied for admission to Harvard University School of Law and was rejected solely by reason of her sex. She appealed to the Board of Governors of Harvard University. Her fight for admission attracted the interest of the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt who wrote to the president of Harvard University in her behalf, to no avail. Upon losing her appeal, Pauli Murray renewed her application to the faculty of the Harvard University Law School and requested them to make concrete recommendations to the Board of Governors. Her request was defeated by a 7 to 7 vote and the faculty decided to take no action until after the war. In 1945 and again in 1946 Miss Murray renewed her application to Harvard but was informed that the question of admission of women would not be acted upon until the problem of veteran students was solved. Recently, the Harvard University School of Law announced that qualified women would be admitted in 1950 and Miss Murray has received a letter from that institution in answer to her inquiry, inviting her to submit her qualifications.

As a writer and a poet, Pauli Murray has always used her pen to fight against injustice and discrimination. In numerous articles she has fought segregation whether with reference to Negroes in the South, Japanese Americans and Spanish speaking school children in the West.

She is at present completing a monumental compilation of state laws on race and color for the Woman's Division of the Methodist Church, an important reference work which will be published shortly.

Pauli Murray lives with her mother and aunt, both of whom are elderly retired school teachers, at 388 Chauncey Street, Brooklyn, New York. Her mother, who recently celebrated her seventy-ninth birthday, has completed 50 years in the classroom.

An intense lover of the outdoors, her hobbies are hiking, rowing, bicycle riding and tennis. A graduate of sandlot baseball herself, Pauli Murray is an ardent Dodger fan.

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