

Ethel L. Payne - Women in Journalism

Scott #3667 designed by Fred Otnes

Issued September 14, 2002 in Fort Worth, TX



Ethel L. Payne was born in Chicago Illinois on August 14, 1911. She attended Lindblom High School, Crane Jr. College, and The Medill School of Journalism.

Ethel originally wanted to be a lawyer, but began writing in high school when she was encouraged by an English teacher who recognized her talent. She was the first African-American female to report international news.

Ethel was known as the "First lady of the Black Press" and wrote for The Chicago Defender for twenty-seven years starting in 1951. Many of her articles concerned desegregation and Civil Rights issues. Ethel considered Civil Rights to be top priority and she worked tirelessly covering Civil Rights marches and interviewing the leaders of the movement. She reported on many of the major events of the Civil Rights movement including the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1956, desegregation efforts at Little Rock Central High School in 1957, and the March on Washington in 1963. One of her most memorable articles was a series written for The Defender titled "The South at the Crossroads," chronicling the South during the civil rights period. Ethel accompanied Vice President Nixon to the independence ceremonies in Ghana.

Ethel became the chief of The Chicago Defender's Washington bureau in 1954. In 1966 she provided on-site coverage of African American troops in Vietnam. She became the first black female radio and television commentator at a national news organization when CBS hired her in 1972 and worked there until 1982. In the early 1980s she campaigned for the release of South African leader Nelson Mandela from prison. She saw her work as a form of activism and is said to have often quoted Frederick Douglass's admonition to "agitate, agitate, agitate."

Ethel received many awards, honors and citations during her illustrious career including the Africare Distinguished Service Award in 1983, the TransAfrica African Freedom Award in 1987 and an award in 1967 from the Capital Press Club for her Vietnam Report.

Ethel L. Payne died of a heart attack on May 28, 1991, at the age 79.

"I fought all of my life to bring about change, to correct injustices and the inequalities in the system." --  
Ethel L. Payne

Sources:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/13/books/review-the-reporter-ethel-payne-in-eye-on-the-struggle.html>

Encyclopedia Africana