

BOOK REVIEW

Loren Miller: Civil Rights Attorney and Journalist. Race and Culture in the American West Series. By Amina Hassan. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. xv. + 294 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$26.95.)

Amina Hassan presents us with an excellent synthesis of African American History and the history of the West in her biography of Loren Miller. Miller's origins were both humble and revolutionary. Miller's father, John Bird Miller, was born a slave and after the Civil War found work as a laborer on the Union Pacific near Leavenworth, Kansas. There he met Nora Herbaugh, a white woman and normal school teacher. The two married in 1900 Iowa and quickly moved to Perder, Nebraska. There, Loren was born in 1903. Despite poverty and racial prejudice, young Miller graduated from high school, and attended the University of Kansas and then Howard University where he exhibited his literary skills and developed a life-long friendship with Langston Hughes. Eventually, Miller returned to Kansas and graduated with a bachelor of laws degree from Washburn College in June 1928.

After graduation, Miller joined his family in Los Angeles, but instead of sitting for the bar he pursued his literary interests writing news copy for *The Eagle*. During this time period, Miller traveled to the Soviet Union in the company of Langston Hughes and others. Over the course of his subsequent career, Miller wrote numerous articles for communist

publications and debated the merits of socialism, but Hassan presents conflicting information as to whether Miller became a communist or not (p. 123). In later years, after he purchased *The Eagle* in 1951, his politics were more clearly liberal.

Returning from the USSR, Loren Miller sat for the California Bar and married Juanita Ellsworth who introduced him LA's upper class African American community. Miller spent considerable time writing for *New Masses* and other left-leaning publications; but also developed a cottage industry pursuing restrictive covenant housing cases, particularly in the 1940s when prominent African Americans began purchasing homes in the West Adams district of LA. When Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund began pursuing housing discrimination, they approached Miller for help. Hassan presents convincing evidence that Miller took the lead in *Shelley v. Kramer* (1948), which outlawed restrictive covenants nationwide. After the *Shelley* decision, Loren Miller continued his law practice and was named as a Los Angeles Municipal Court Judge by Edmund G. (Pat) Brown in 1964. Governor Brown was effusive in his praise of Miller. It is ironic that Loren Miller's highest judicial appointment was to serve as a Municipal court Judge, whereas Thurgood Marshall served as both the U.S. Solicitor General and as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Loren Miller was never fully recognized for his judicial talents.

Hassan's biography reveals Miller as a hidden jewel in the history of California journalism and legal system, and an unsung hero of the national Civil Rights movement. Over the course of his lifetime, Miller saved most of his personal and professional correspondence. Hassan was the first scholar to gain access to those papers. Hassan has opened doors into

the most significant relationships of his life, with Langston Hughes and with Juanita Ellsworth Miller.

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