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Noah Parden biographical sketch

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Noah Parden

Written by Korry LaLumondier.

Noah Parden was born in Rome, Georgia in 1868. He was raised in the average Georgia cotton plantations where he was a slave until he was seven years old and when his mother died, he was sent to an orphanage.¹ In 1884, Parden left Georgia for Chattanooga, Tennessee where he would become one of the first and few African American attorneys in the city. Parden worked as a barber for five years, attended Howard High School, and later went on to enroll as a senior in the law department at Central Tennessee College in Nashville.² This would be the beginning of Noah Parden's law career but not before he married Mattie S. Broyles who died in 1934 and later Elizabeth Polk.³ At this point, Parden's career reached a critical point. Throughout the 49 years he worked as a prosecutor, assistant state's attorney, Assistant Prosecuting Attorney and had a private legal practice.⁴ He was honored in East St. Louis, where he had settled with his first wife, Broyles, in 2003 for his work as one of the first African American lawyers and the way he argued for cases during the early 20th century.⁵

Noah Parden's most significant career moments is the Ed Johnson case. Ed Johnson was a young African American man who in 1906 was accused of raping a 19 years old white woman. He was found guilty by all-white jury, sentenced to death, and was encouraged to waive his right to appeal by his own lawyer.⁶ Noah Parden and his partner, Styles Hutchins, took on the case to overturn Johnson's conviction. Together, they worked as a team to fill the first ever habeas corpus petition in a state criminal case, arguing that Johnson's fair trial rights were violated and excluded black from juries which was illegal.⁷ This left the white population in Chattanooga furious. Johnson was taken hostage by an angry mob from a prison in Chattanooga where he was then lynched and shot at off of the Walnut Street Bridge over the Tennessee River.⁸ During the trial to expose racial injustice in the city, Parden and Hutchins became no strangers to racial violence themselves. At 1:30am on March 15th 1906, a group of men set first to the law office of Parden and Hutchins, and was followed by rocks being thrown and gunshots fired through

¹ Peoplepill.com. "About Noah W. PARDEN: American Politician (1868 - 1944): Biography, Facts, Career, Wiki, Life." Accessed March 9, 2021. <https://peoplepill.com/people/noah-w-parden>.

² Peoplepill.com. "About Noah W. PARDEN: American Politician (1868 - 1944): Biography, Facts, Career, Wiki, Life." Accessed March 14, 2021. <https://peoplepill.com/people/noah-w-parden>.; "East St. Louis will honor pioneering black attorney" The Daily Chronicle, (DeKalb, Illinois), 04 January 2003.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "East St. Louis will honor pioneering black attorney" The Daily Chronicle, (DeKalb, Illinois), 04 January 2003.

⁶ Mark Curriden and Leroy Phillips, Contempt of Court, The Turn-of-the-Century Lynching that Launched 100 Years of Federalism (Anchor Books, 2001), pgs. 122-127, 162-163. Peoplepill.com. "About Noah W. PARDEN: American Politician (1868 - 1944): Biography, Facts, Career, Wiki, Life." Accessed March 14, 2021.

⁷ Curriden, Mark. Contempt of Court: A Lesson in Legal History. PDF file. January 10, 2011.; Linder, Douglas O. "The Trial of Sheriff Joseph Shipp Et Al.: An Account," Famous Trials, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://www.famoustrials.com/sheriffshipp/1118-home>.

http://www.texasbarcle.com/Materials/Events/9795/128094_01.pdf

⁸ Emily Yellin, "Lynching Victim Is Cleared of Rape, 100 Years Later," The New York Times (The New York Times, February 27, 2000), <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/02/27/us/lynching-victim-is-cleared-of-rape-100-years-later.html?mcubz=3>.

the windows of Parden's home.⁹ Once the federal government became aware of the lynching and other evidence, they responded to it as a violation of federal law and charged Hamilton County Sheriff Joseph F. Shipp, along with 7 other deputies with criminal contempt of the US Supreme Court.¹⁰ Noah Parden and Hutchins made their mark on Chattanooga history by gathering information to fight the injustice that Ed Johnson lived. Sadly, this is where their work stopped as they were constantly getting harassed, threatened, and terrorized by the white mob and both Parden and Hutchins never returned to Chattanooga.¹¹

Parden shortly after moved back to East St. Louis, IL and St. Louis, MO, after receiving countless death threats because of his work in the Ed Johnson case. There, he continued to practice law for both black and white Americans.¹² He became involved in the East. St. Louis 1917 race riots which went on to kill around 50 people and destroy over 240 buildings.¹³ Parden observed and confronted racial violence when bullets penetrated his home from a carload of white men cruising passing by his home. While this event left Parden's family and himself unharmed, he was traumatized and his political career suffered. He lost his post as Assistant State's Attorney after the white-on-black violence incident in May 1917, which led to his arrest and a criminal charge for organizing a black militia.¹⁴ Parden and his family relocated to St. Louis where he finished out his law career as a successful defense and prosecution attorney and remained in local politics, spending the final five years of his career working as the first black attorney to be working as an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney.¹⁵ Noah Parden died in 1944 leaving behind a legacy for future African American lawyers and his wife, Elizabeth, a daughter, and stepdaughter Gertrude Polk, who as of 2003, still resides in East St. Louis.

Credit

This biography was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of HIST 3920R: History of White Rage taught by Professor Susan Eckelmann Berghel, Ph. D. in the Department of History at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in Spring 2021.

⁹ Mark Curriden, "A Supreme Case of Contempt," ABA Journal, accessed March 19, 2021, https://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/a_supreme_case_of_contempt/.

¹⁰ Peoplepill.com. "About Noah W. PARDEN: American Politician (1868 - 1944): Biography, Facts, Career, Wiki, Life." Accessed March 19, 2021. <https://peoplepill.com/people/noah-w-parden>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Asher, Robert. "Documents of the Race Riot at East St. Louis." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1908-1984) 65, no. 3 (1972): 327-36. Accessed March 21, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40191384>.

¹⁴ Peoplepill.com. "About Noah W. PARDEN: American Politician (1868 - 1944): Biography, Facts, Career, Wiki, Life." Accessed March 21, 2021. <https://peoplepill.com/people/noah-w-parden>.

¹⁵ Ibid.