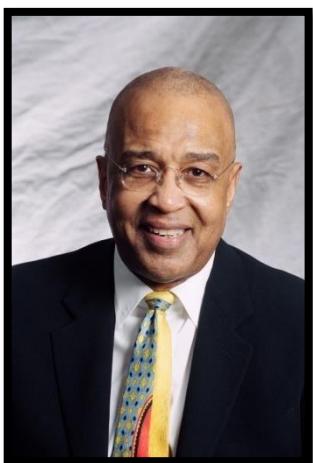


Biography

LEWIS MYERS, JR.

**Attorney, Civil & Human Rights Activist,
Community Advocate & College Professor**



Lewis Myers, Jr. was born in the historic Fifth Ward Community of Houston, Texas. He attended the segregated public school system that existed throughout his education and until his graduation from Phillis Wheatley High School, with honors, as a member of the class of 1965. As a student leader at Wheatley, he was recognized in *"Who's Who Among Students in American High Schools"* at Wheatley. At the early age of fifteen, Myers affirmed his commitment again as a leader when he launched his lifelong career endeavor as a community activist after being elected NAACP Youth Council President for the A. A. Lucas Branch of the NAACP in Houston. He further emphasized his civil rights leadership as a youth while in high school when he led student demonstrations that helped to integrate the Houston Independent School District. He was

one of several youth leaders to initiate an historic boycott that spotlighted the segregated apartheid policies of the Houston Independent School District, thus clearly demonstrating that both his high school and the school district needed to be integrated in order to provide equal and quality education.

After completing his high school education, Myers entered Tennessee State University in Nashville where he joined the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (S.N.C.C.) Chapter on the Campus. SNCC was a predominately Black/African-American student and youth civil rights organization that focused its organizing efforts on many historically Black colleges in the South. He also became the Chairman of the Students Rights Organization Chapter at Tennessee State which was organized to protest the banning of SNCC at the University because of its advocacy of students rights and "Black Power" ideology.

Myers subsequently transferred from Tennessee State University to Howard University (Washington, D.C.) where he graduated. Again, he became a student leader as he joined the emerging *"Black Power Movement."* In 1968, he was elected President of the Undergraduate Student Council at Howard. He also participated in the building-takeover demonstrations there that were aimed at protesting the University's lack of relevance in developing a Black University that addressed the needs and aspirations of its student body. As a vigilant campus leader at Howard, Myers was elected to *"Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities"* in 1969.

After graduating from Howard University, Myers entered Law School at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey. As he approached his last two semesters in 1971, he entered a transfer program between Rutgers and the University of Mississippi which offered him the opportunity to work in rural Mississippi as a last year law student and to expand his civil rights work during the

late 1960's. Myers subsequently earned his law degree from the University of Mississippi in 1972. Even before transferring there, he initiated a program at Rutgers as a first-year law student called the "*Southern Mobilization Committee*" which was an African American law student organization formed for the purpose of giving its members the opportunity to work in the Deep South with civil rights firms during the summer breaks from law school study. The initial Southern Mobilization Program occurred in the summer of 1970 when Myers and several students from Rutgers worked in Mississippi and Georgia with civil rights law firms in those respective states. During the same period, Myers also became a student assistant to famed constitutional and civil rights lawyer Herbert Reid. Attorney Reid was the former Dean of the Law School at Howard University, as well as Chief Counsel to legendary Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. from New York. Previously, Myers had met Reid as a student leader at Howard University during the student demonstrations and Reid had served as his counsel.

In 1971, Myers, along with Professor Herbert Reid, worked with what was then called the Goldberg Commission (named in honor of former United States Ambassador and former United States Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg) in New York City. The Commission was charged with investigating confrontations between the Black Panther Party and law enforcement agencies. Myers served as an assistant on the staff and visited many of the cities where the Black Panther Party had been involved in confrontations with the local police departments.

In the summers of 1970 and 1971, Myers worked with the Southern Mobilization Committee in Mississippi along with the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee and North Mississippi Rural Legal Services. This was a logical evolution of his previous civil rights work with SNCC in the South. In fact, a number of the law students who worked with him in the Southern Mobilization Committee summer programs referenced previously went on to become successful and well known lawyers in the South.

When Myers graduated from the University of Mississippi Law School in 1972 with his Juris Doctorate Degree, he accepted a Reginald Heber Smith Fellowship which enabled him to work with a civil rights legal services program across the United States. He was selected to work in Mississippi. In the summer and fall of 1972, he started work as a staff attorney with *North Mississippi Rural Legal Services* in Oxford. Initially, he handled school desegregation cases; however, within a year of his graduation from the University of Mississippi's Law School, he filed suit on behalf of Black (African-American) law students at the University in the case of *Robinson vs. University of Mississippi*. The suit challenged the University's historic policies of racial discrimination and exclusion of African-Americans from admission to its Law School. This lawsuit subsequently opened up the admissions process at "Ole' Miss" which has allowed many African American students to complete their education since that time.

After serving between two and three years at North Mississippi Rural Legal Services, Myers was elevated to the position of Director of Litigation in charge of more than 45 lawyers and 40 paralegals. In this capacity, he was responsible for managing seven legal service offices throughout cities in Northern Mississippi and the Mississippi Delta which included Clarksville, Batesville, Holly Springs, Tupelo, Cleveland, and Greenville. While Director of Litigation, he initiated numerous lawsuits challenging racial discrimination in municipal governments and in private employment practices in the State of Mississippi. In 1973, Myers was one of the lawyers that filed the historic case of *Ayers vs. Mississippi*. This case ultimately led to the desegregation of institutions of higher learning in the United States after reaching the United States Supreme

Court. Between 1974 and 1976, he was on the cutting edge of filing more than six lawsuits against county jails in the State of Mississippi for inhumane conditions and the treatment of their inmates. Several of these lawsuits were for damages and became landmark precedents in the area of jail reform litigation.

In late 1975, Lennox Hines, the leader of the *National Conference of Black Lawyers*, contacted Myers and asked if he would relocate back to New York City in order to serve as General Counsel for the organization. At the time, a young African-American woman named *Joanne Chesnard (aka Assata Shakur-mother of Tupac Shakur)* had been arrested by the New Jersey State Police, and had been accused of killing a New Jersey State Trooper. Chesnard was alleged to be the leader of a group then known as the Black Liberation Army which was supposedly an offshoot of the Black Panther Party. The Black Liberation Army had been accused of a number of police killings in the New York City area, as well as other places, in the early 1970's. With the capture of Chesnard in New Jersey, a long saga of courtroom drama commenced. Early on, the National Conference of Black Lawyers signed on to assist in Chesnard's defense. Thus, at the end of 1975, Myers moved from Mississippi to the New York area to become Co-Counsel, along with noted civil rights attorney William Kuntsler, in the case of *New Jersey vs. Joanne Chesnard a/k/a Assata Shakur*. For two years, Myers worked closely with Kuntsler. During this same period, while the case was pending, he had the opportunity to argue *En Banc* in front of the Third United States Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of Chesnard's Constitutional Right as a Muslim inmate being housed in the Middlesex County Jail, a situation that raised serious First Amendment Questions.

Myers visited Cuba as part of a delegation with the National Conference of Black Lawyers in the late 1970's. While there, he spent several weeks with famed human rights activist Huey P. Newton who at the time, was exiled in Havana. Newton and Myers became friends and exchanged many "movement" stories during their stay together in Havana.

In 1978, Myers accepted another celebrated case in New York, *United States vs. Rene Leon*. The Leon case involved a group of Haitian nationals who had been charged with planning the invasion of Haiti, while on American soil, in order to overthrow the Duvalier government. The defendants were accused of violating the United States Neutrality Act which makes it a crime for any persons to attempt to invade a nation with which the United States is at peace. The case was tried in the U. S. Federal District Court for the Middle District of New Jersey. One of the issues in the case was whether or not the American CIA had helped finance the defendants in planning and preparing for the invasion of Haiti. At one point during the course of the litigation, a former CIA operative submitted an affidavit on behalf of the defense saying that the CIA was aware that the defendants were preparing an invasion and had provided some material support for their efforts.

About the time that the *Joanne Chesnard* case was completed in the spring of 1977, Myers began to garner some national attention for his efforts and good works in the civil rights movement. The publishers of Essence Magazine initiated a series of articles that were published under the designation of "Essence Men." Myers was one of the first "Essence Men" featured in the series. Later, he was recognized in the national media as one of the co-leaders of the boycott of the town of Bahayu, Mississippi. A young African American man by the name of Butler Young had been murdered by two Marshall County (MS) sheriff deputies, and an all-white grand jury had refused to indict the officers. This set off a chain of events that brought about the

boycott which ultimately received national attention through an organization called the "*United League of Mississippi*" which Myers had founded. In conjunction with another civil rights leader in Marshall County, Alfred "Skip" Robinson, the two together led a successful boycott for a year in the town of Bahayu following the shooting. National news media covered the case which even included a front-page article in the Washington Post.

By 1978, the United League of Mississippi had been involved in an ongoing day-to-day battle with the KKK in the State of Mississippi. It had staged numerous anti-Klan demonstrations in Tupelo, MS that were led by both Robinson and Myers. The largest of these demonstrations was held in November of 1979 when more than 10,000 people came from around the country, and the two of them were featured speakers at the rally. As a result of the anti-Klan activities in Mississippi, the United League and Myers went on a three-month speaking tour across the United States to promote anti-Klan violence in America. Myers spoke at more than 20 universities in the State of California during the tour, and he was hailed as both a reputable civil rights advocate and leader during this period.

In February of 1979, Myers was one of the guest speakers at the convention of the National Lawyers Guild in San Francisco, CA. The convention speeches were carried live on the Pacifica Radio Station in California on the night that Myers addressed the huge legal organization. One of the listeners to his speech was former convicted inmate *Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt* who had been a long-time member of the Los Angeles Black Panther Party. In the early 1970s, he had been falsely accused and convicted of a murder in Santa Monica, CA. At the time, his trial lawyer was none other than well-known attorney *Johnnie Cochran*. Unfortunately, Pratt was convicted and sentenced to the California Adult Prison System. From all evidence, it was clear that Pratt had been the victim of a frame-up by the FBI counter-intelligence program. Over the years, information began to leak out about the case with indication that the FBI had wiretaps showing that Pratt was at the Black Panther Party office in Oakland at the time of the murder. Of course, this information was never revealed to Attorney Cochran or the other defense attorneys for Pratt. Moreover, it was also revealed that at least one of Pratt's defense attorneys had been cooperating with the FBI and sharing information against Pratt during the course of his trial preparation. It took a number of years and the *Freedom of Information Act* before this devastating information regarding the prosecution's case eventually leaked out.

Myers met with *Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt* in San Quentin Prison in February of 1979 after the San Francisco convention. As a result of this meeting, Myers agreed to serve on Pratt's legal team. In May of 1979, Myers relocated to San Francisco and began working on the Pratt case full-time in an attempt to get a new trial. By this time, what was becoming an avalanche of information continued to develop that showed the FBI had framed Pratt. Ultimately, Pratt was vindicated and awarded over four million dollars for his illegal incarceration.

During the time that Myers was in San Francisco (1979-1980) working on the Pratt case, he was contacted by the "People's Law Office" in Chicago, IL and a number of African-American activists concerning a prison rebellion that had occurred in Pontiac Correctional Facility in Pontiac, IL. As a result of this rebellion, three White prison guards were killed and eighteen African-American inmates were charged with capital murder. This was the largest mass prosecution of defendants for capital murder in United States history. In 1980, at the request of many of the accused inmates, Myers moved from San Francisco to Chicago and ultimately agreed to sign on as one of the defense attorneys. He represented Larry Hoover, the alleged

leader of the Black Gangster Disciples street gang in Chicago. At the time, the State of Illinois had accused Hoover of being the mastermind behind the prison rebellion and the principal party responsible for the deaths of the prison guards. In the latter part of 1980, the case of *People of the State of Illinois vs. Larry Hoover, et. al* went to trial; and the trial lasted for eighteen months. At the conclusion of the trial, Myers decided to make Chicago his place of residence.

In 1978, during the height of the struggle with the KKK in Mississippi, Myers met the *Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan* who was in the process of rebuilding the Nation of Islam after the passing of its leader, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Myers became General Counsel for the new *Nation of Islam* under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan, as well his friend and confidant. Myers served in this capacity for almost 14 years. To date, he still serves as Counsel to the Nation of Islam and Personal Counsel to Minister Louis Farrakhan.

In 1986, Myers began working with *Rev. Jesse L. Jackson* and the *Operation PUSH* organization prior to Rev. Jackson's second bid for the United States Presidency in 1988. Myers served as General Counsel for the organization and he assisted in the 1988 Jackson Presidential Campaign and served as one of the regional coordinators for the Midwest. For over 20 years, he continued to work as General Counsel to the *PUSH* organization as well as Counsel to the Board of Directors for the newly formed *Rainbow/PUSH Coalition*. In 1990, Myers served as Counsel for the seven young boys who were expelled from the Decatur, Illinois public schools after a fight at a football game, thus raising the level of discussion which brought about the introduction of "zero tolerance" policies and legislation within school districts across the country.

In the mid-1990's, Myers met a young activist in New York by the name of *Al Sharpton* during the resolution of the *Tawana Brawley* case. Both advocates quickly became associated and worked together in the civil rights movement; Myers later coordinated Sharpton's Presidential Campaign in the State of Illinois. For many years, Myers has served as counsel and advisor to Sharpton.

Between 1993 and 1994, Myers served as the Chief Operating Officer and the National Deputy Director of the NAACP in Baltimore, MD. In this capacity, he was in charge of seven NAACP regional offices, as well as responsible for coordinating 1,500 branches throughout the world. In August of 1993, he also served as National Deputy Coordinator of the historic 30th Anniversary for the *"March on Washington"* led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1963.

Attorney Myers is recognized as one of the most outstanding civil/human rights lawyers in the country and one of the top litigation lawyers in the Chicago area. In the early 1990s, he became associated with several law firms in the City of Chicago that engaged in the general practice of law in both civil and criminal matters. In 2000, Myers changed his litigation focus from a predominately criminal practice to personal injury and civil rights cases. To date, he has won a multi-million dollar verdict in a personal injury case; and he has been involved in "Mass Tort" litigation, including *Rezulin* and other deadly drugs that have affected the lives of many Americans. Myers' law firm recently settled a major *Rezulin* case involving hundreds of clients in Mississippi and Illinois.

For two years, he taught "*Evidence and Trial Advocacy*" as an adjunct professor at DePaul University's School of Law in Chicago. He also taught at several of the City Colleges of Chicago including Roosevelt University, Harold Washington College, Wright College and Daley College. He has a tenured position at City Colleges where he's taught for over 20 years and is an expert in the areas of criminal law, procedure criminal justice and constitutional law. He's also taught at Kennedy King College and served as the Director of the Criminal Justice Program at Kennedy King College where he created the new program. During the 2002-2003 academic year, Myers was placed on special assignment in the City Colleges administrative offices where he worked with their Inter-Governmental Affairs Division as a lobbyist on behalf of City Colleges to the State Legislature in Springfield, IL. Currently, he is a Professor teaching Criminal Justice at Chicago State University.

Myers has tried hundreds of cases in jurisdictions all across the United States. He is a member of the Illinois Bar, the Bar of the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, the Bar of the Federal Appellate Court for the Third Circuit, the Bar for the Federal Appellate Court for the Fifth Circuit, the Bar of the United States Federal District Court for the Northern District of California, and the Bar for the Federal Court of Claims. Complementing these professional memberships are other legal associations such as the National Conference of Black Lawyers, the National Lawyers' Guild (Executive Board, Chicago Chapter), the National Bar Association, the National Association of Criminal Defense Attorneys, and the National Conference of Black Lawyers (Chairperson, Chicago Chapter).

Myers holds membership in a numerous professional non-legal organizations including: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the NAACP (Life Member), 500 Black Men (Founder of Chicago Chapter), Black Men's Forum, and the American Historical Association. Throughout his long and distinguished career, he has been the recipient of many accolades and awards in his profession and beyond; he's been listed in various **Who's Who** publications; and recognized as one of the most influential African-Americans in the United States in various publications and by various organizations.

Myers is truly a "*man for all seasons*" and a national credit to the legacy of our historic national civil and human rights movement. He is a great source of pride for the entire Phillis Wheatley High School and Alumni Family as well as the Houston community. Myers is married and the father of a son.

