

Extract from
DIAMONDS OF DELAWARE AND MARYLAND'S EASTERN SHORE: SEVEN
BLACK MEN OF DISTINCTION

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Louis L. Redding (1911 - 1998)
Champion of Civil Rights

There is probably not a man, woman, or child in Delaware who has not heard of the deeds of Louis L. Redding, who could easily be identified as "Mr. Civil Rights" of Delaware.

Mr. Redding's fight for the rights of African Americans in the First State is a tribute to his commitment to change the lives and opportunities of those who had for so long been treated as second-class citizens.

At the age of 28, Redding became Delaware's first black lawyer. A graduate of Wilmington's Howard High School, Brown University, and Harvard Law School, he was equipped with the skills necessary to practice law. He was also a product of "The Reddings," an upwardly mobile, middle class black family, whose father, Lewis Alfred, taught his eldest son to fight back. The family included Jay Saunders Redding, college professor and famed writer and author of *No Day of Triumph*. His sister, the late Gwendolyn Redding, has a legendary reputation as a serious English teacher at Howard High School.

Louis L. Redding, the first of five children, was born in 1911 in Wilmington, Delaware. His father, Lewis, a graduate of Howard University, relocated to Wilmington to earn enough to support a family. As one of four black postal carriers in Wilmington, the elder Redding was able to provide for his family. Louis' father was a community leader in Wilmington, serving as Secretary of the NAACP, Trustee of Bethel AME Church, and member of the Board of the Layton Home. Growing up in a mixed neighborhood with strong middle-class values of education and thrift probably served Louis well in his later legal barriers toward equity in education and opportunity.

In 1949 (20 years after becoming a lawyer), Louis was finally included as a member of the Bar Association. Redding, like most young lawyers, had aspirations of working in a city law firm. But, fate took another turn. Delawareans today profit because of Louis L. Redding's decision to return to Delaware and unlock the doors of inequality and opportunity. For Redding, it was no easy task. He was isolated and alienated from the

legal community. Redding was unwilling to allow his three daughters to grow up in a segregated society and attend segregated schools, so he chose to take up residence in nearby Pennsylvania.

Comments have always been offered about Redding's demeanor. He presented himself in a dignified fashion. *News Journal* columnist Laurie Hays found him charming, witty, and kind. Others suggested that he was detached and aloof. Another observation was that Redding had ". . . a low tolerance for fools." Whatever his personal traits, it is clear that in the area of civil rights, he earned the utmost respect from his peers and fellow citizens. Advocating school integration to end racial disparities in education, Redding served as legal counsel for the plaintiff in the first school desegregation case in Delaware. And, he argued successfully before the Supreme Court, the Delaware case in *Brown versus the Board of Education*.

In 1949, students at Delaware State College applied for admission to the all white University of Delaware. They were rejected on the basis that Delaware State was provided for colored students. The students took the case to Louis L. Redding, the lone black lawyer at the time. Redding, with the aid of NAACP Assistant Special Council Jack Greenberg, argued *Parker v. University of Delaware* (1950). Vice-Chancellor Collins Seitz, after considering the evidence, ordered the University of Delaware to open its doors to the plaintiffs. Delaware did not appeal the decision. The University of Delaware became the first state-supported institution in America to be desegregated at the undergraduate level--by law.

Louis L. Redding, committed to the task of school racial integration, and at great personal and professional sacrifice, became Delaware's foremost advocate of civil rights.

The leadership exemplified by Redding in the area of civil rights is a milestone in American history. For his vision of a true democracy, embracing equality of opportunity, citizens throughout Delaware and the nation are beneficiaries of his commitment. Louis L. Redding's return to Wilmington changed the populace's attitude toward racial injustice forever. He will be forever remembered for his role as Delaware's Champion of Civil Rights.