

Leaders of Afro-American Nashville



LUTHER PLATO CARMICHAEL 1905-1998

Photograph courtesy of Floyd C. Redd

A pioneer in the field of black journalism, Luther P. Carmichael was born in Snow Hill, Alabama, on July 1, 1905. He was the youngest of nine children born to Michael and Frances (Rivers) Carmichael. He was educated at the Snow Hill Institute where he studied music and played the bass horn, clarinet, and saxophone. During his senior year, he was a member of the school's football team. In 1925, Carmichael was graduated from Snow Hill Institute as class valedictorian. For a brief period after graduation, he found employment in print shops in Montgomery and Selma, Alabama. On September 30, 1925, Carmichael moved to Nashville and was employed as a linotyper by the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. Inc., where he remained for 47 years.

Carmichael began his journalistic career in 1932 and is believed to have been among the first African-American journalists to contribute to *The Tennessean*. In addition to contributing to *The Tennessean*, he wrote for the *Nashville World*, *The Chicago Defender*, the *Nashville Globe*, and the Associated Press.

Two years after beginning his career in journalism, Luther P. Carmichael united with the Spruce Street Baptist Church and became a member of the Sanctuary Choir, the Spruce Street Orchestra, and later directed the Spruce Street Men's Chorus. His baritone voice contributed to the popularity of the choir and was often compared to that of Paul Robeson. A member of several choral groups, including the Hopkins Singers, the Allegro chorus, and the Nashville Jubilee Singers, he made numerous radio and television appearances, including the *Teddy Bart Noon Show*. Carmichael composed the music and lyrics to *Dear Ole Masons*, the *Alma Mater* for the Mason's School of Business (1952-1982). The same year he united with Spruce Street, he met and

married the former Irma Haynes on November 29. They became the parents of one daughter, Agnes Regina Carmichael Hall.

From the time he began his journalistic profession until his retirement from the Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., in 1976, Carmichael covered athletic events at Tennessee State University. His coverage of the university's athletic programs included the career of Forrest Strange, the university's first All-American football star, as well as a host of other athletic competitors who proved to be superior on the school's athletic courts, fields, and tracks. During the late 1960s, he served as part-time sports information director at Tennessee State University. In 1972, Carmichael began a four-year tenure as the school's Sports Information Director. He also served in the athletic department at Fisk University.

In 1997, for his contributions to the field of journalism, the National Association of Black Journalists elected Luther P. Carmichael to the Region VI National Association of Black Journalists Hall of Fame.

Nine months before Carmichael's death, the Spruce Street Baptist Church congregation recognized and honored him for his 64 years of devoted service and publicly bestowed upon him the title of Deacon *Emeritus*. After an extended illness, Luther Plato Carmichael died on December 16, 1998. Funeral services were held three days later at the Spruce Street Baptist Church and his remains were interred in the Greenwood Cemetery.

-Linda T. Wynn

This publication is a project of the 2000 Nashville Conference on Afro-American Culture and History. The authors compiled the information. Tennessee State University's College of Arts and Sciences edited the materials. The Metropolitan Historical Commission assisted with editing and design.