



NAACP Lawyer
George Vaughn

Bio & Character Sketch of George Vaughn

March 9, 1880 – August 17, 1949

Age in April, 1923: 43 Age at Death: 69

Age when picture was taken: est. 40

George Vaughn was an American lawyer and judge active in Saint Louis, Missouri. As a lawyer he was involved in a prominent civil rights case involving housing discrimination, (*Shelly v. Kraemer*), in which the eviction of an African American family from a white neighborhood was upheld by the Missouri Supreme Court, but subsequently overruled by the US Supreme Court.

Vaughn was born in Columbus, Kentucky, on March 9, 1880, the son of former slaves Monroe and Josephine Vaughn. Little is known of his early life. He attended Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee, and completed his legal training at Walden University in Nashville. Early in the twentieth century he established a law practice in St. Louis, where he became involved in local politics. He served as a first lieutenant in WW I.

In 1919, Vaughn, along with Joseph E. Mitchell and Charles Turpin formed the Citizens Liberty League to help identify and elect African Americans to public office. Their activism resulted in the election of Turpin to the position of St. Louis constable in 1910, the first Black candidate elected to a public office in Missouri.

After serving as an officer in an artillery unit during World War I, Vaughn resumed his law practice in St. Louis. He also became active in the St. Louis chapter of the NAACP and served for many years as chairman of its executive committee. He was an ardent anti-lynching crusader and investigated the 1923 lynching of James T. Scott in Columbia, Missouri. He later wrote a report of the incident for the national office of the NAACP that appeared in the *St. Louis Argus* on May 4, 1923. Vaughn was appointed Justice of the Peace for the 4th District of Saint Louis in 1936. He was also a Delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

Vaughn was a founding member and first president of the Mound City Bar Association. He was also active in the African-Methodist Episcopal Church and in several fraternal lodges, including the Masons and the Elks. George L. Vaughn died at his home in St. Louis on August 17, 1949. Burial was in the Washington Park Cemetery in St. Louis. He was survived by his wife, Eva Vaughn; a son, George L. Vaughn Jr.; and two daughters, Mary and Carolyn. His son George also became a lawyer.

In 1957, the George L. Vaughn Public Housing Project, a 660 unit housing complex, was posthumously named in his honor.



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Character Sketch

In the screenplay, George Vaughn is the guiding voice that carries us through the story, from the very beginning after the glimpse of the lynching, all the way through to the verdict in George Barkwell's trial and the closing follow through comments of each of the main characters .

In the few scenes in which Vaughn appears and has a speaking role, he is confident, charming and knowledgeable. He is a proud black man, unbent by any white racists around him. On the train platform, while Rev. Caston's head is bent down, averting his eyes to white passengers who are disembarking the train, Vaughn's head and eyes are held high.

Vaughn is well dressed, well connected (he knows DuBois) and he is a shrewd lawyer with a very firm sense of right and wrong.



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CASTON

Thank you, George, for dropping everything and coming to help us. I know you had other matters to attend to.

VAUGHN

Nothing I have to do could be more important than this. Perhaps nothing I do in my life will ever be. Are we on our way to meet Mr. Scott?

CASTON

No, we missed visiting hours today and I'm afraid the jailer would make no exceptions. Sarah has prepared us an early supper.

VAUGHN

I hope she won't be offended if we make it a brief one. I want to go to the scene of the attack while we still have the daylight.

CASTON

She knows you too well to expect anything else. How was your journey?

VAUGHN

Uneventful. I had good company on the express to Centralia, but a lonely ride from there.

The men start along the platform. As they walk through the now thinning crowd, Caston holds his hat in his hand and keeps his eyes low, Vaughn keeps his hat on his head and his eyes level.

VAUGHN

Your porter here took me for a minister. He'll expect me to preach your sermon tomorrow.

CASTON In that suit and riding into Columbia on a Saturday evening. What else could you be but a visiting preacher?

VAUGHN (smiling) A jazz man?

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HULEN

I know your work, Mr. Vaughn. I've read your accounts of the lynching in the Argus. It's good to have someone of your character on our side.

VAUGHN

And what exactly is "your side," Mr. Hulen? Because after Edwards' testimony, you were in favor of lynching Mr. Scott. So what side are we talking about?

HULEN

I assure you, those comments were not made by me. I indicted Mr. Scott because I thought he was guilty. I said so to Mr. Edwards. But I never implied we should forego a trial. Never.

VAUGHN

Mr. Scott's attorney told you his client didn't have the scratches on his neck that the girl claimed she inflicted.

HULEN But she identified him by sight, sound and smell! I thought I had a solid case!

VAUGHN Until you didn't Mr. Hulen!

HULEN

I follow the evidence as it comes. I can't be held accountable when the town goes rogue.

VAUGHN

You certainly can if you contributed to inciting them, sir. Hulen stands and straightens his tie—the conversation is over.

HULEN

You'll have to excuse me Mr Vaughn. I have a murder to prosecute.

VAUGHN

I wish your pursuit of the truth had been just as diligent with James Scott.