**BHM 2024-“History” feature**

**Ethel Lois Payne: American journalist, editor, and foreign correspondent**

**Ethel Lois Payne** (August 14, 1911 – May 28, 1991)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-1)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-2) was an American journalist, editor, and foreign correspondent. Known as the "First Lady of the [Black Press](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_American_newspapers)," she fulfilled many roles over her career, including columnist, commentator, lecturer, and [freelance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freelancer) writer. She combined advocacy with journalism as she reported on the [Civil Rights Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_Rights_Movement) during the 1950s and 1960s. Her perspective as an [African American](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_American) woman informed her work, and she became known for asking questions others dared not ask.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-PBSNewsHour-Profile-2015-3)

First published in [*The Chicago Defender*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Chicago_Defender) in 1950, she worked for that paper through the 1970s, becoming the paper's Washington correspondent and an editor for over 25 years.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-CSPAN-CoveringTheSouth-1987-4) She became the first female African-American [commentator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pundit_%28expert%29) employed by a national network when [CBS](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CBS) hired her in 1972. In addition to her reporting of American domestic politics, she also covered international stories, and worked as a syndicated columnist.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-CSPAN-CoveringTheSouth-1987-4)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-EyeOnTheStruggle-2015-5)

In 2022, the [White House Correspondents' Association](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_House_Correspondents%27_Association) created the Dunnigan-Payne Lifetime Achievement Award in memory of Payne and fellow White House reporter [Alice Dunnigan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Dunnigan).[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-CBS_News-6)

Early life and education[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ethel_L._Payne&action=edit&section=1" \o "Edit section: Early life and education)]

Payne was born in [Chicago, Illinois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago%2C_Illinois), to William A. Payne, a [Pullman porter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pullman_porter) who was the son of Tennessee farmers who were former slaves,[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-WashPost-OpEd-2011-7) and Bessie Payne (née Austin), a former Latin teacher who was from Ohio, the daughter of former slaves from Kentucky.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-EyeOnTheStruggle-2015-5)[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-HowardUniv-FindingAid-2016-8) The fifth of six children, Payne's siblings were Alice Wilma, Thelma Elizabeth, Alma Josephine, Lemuel Austin, and Avis Ruth. She grew up on Chicago's [South Side](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Side_of_Chicago).[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-EyeOnTheStruggle-2015-5) The family first settled in [West Englewood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Englewood%2C_Chicago), then [West Woodlawn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woodlawn%2C_Chicago), and then moved back to West Englewood. In 1917, they bought a house located across the street from the Greater Saint John [AME](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Methodist_Episcopal) Church, where the family belonged and participated in community events.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-EyeOnTheStruggle-2015-5)

In Chicago, Payne attended Copernicus Elementary School, then [Lindblom Technical High School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Lindblom_Math_%26_Science_Academy%22%20%5Co%20%22Robert%20Lindblom%20Math%20%26%20Science%20Academy), where one of the writing teachers, who inspired her, had also taught author [Ernest Hemingway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Hemingway).[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-ChicagoSunTimes-LindbloomHigh-2016-9) Both schools at the time had very few African-American students, and walking to school through largely white neighborhoods was sometimes challenging.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-EyeOnTheStruggle-2015-5)

From the late 1920s to early 1930s, Payne attended [City Colleges of Chicago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Colleges_of_Chicago), then known as Crane Junior College, and the [Garrett Institute's](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garrett%E2%80%93Evangelical_Theological_Seminary) Chicago Training School for City, Home and Foreign Missions.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-LibraryOfCongress-FindingAid-2010-10)[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-11) In the 1940s, Payne received a three-year certificate. From 1940 to 1942, she attended night school at [Medill School of Journalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medill_School_of_Journalism) at [Northwestern University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwestern_University).[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethel_L._Payne#cite_note-HowardUniv-FindingAid-2016-8)

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