



BIOGRAPHY OF RUBY AURORA BLACK

Ruby Aurora Black was born on a farm near Thornton, Texas in 1896. She received a B.A. from the University of Texas in 1921, having already worked as a teacher and journalist. She was in Chicago from April 1921 through September 1921 as the manager of the "Women's National Journalistic Register" employment agency, a short time but one that loomed large in her memory and seems to have supplied many contacts important to her subsequent life. She then studied economics and taught journalism at the University of Wisconsin 1921-23; the noted economist John R. Commons was one of her professors and Marquis Childs was one of her students. She also worked for the *Wisconsin State Journal*. She met and married Herbert Little in Wisconsin (actually, they took the train to Chicago and were married there, where it was easier) and moved with him to St. Louis, Missouri, where she was labor editor and general reporter for the *St. Louis Times*, 1923-24. Herb was reassigned to Washington in 1924.

After the usual difficulties that faced women looking for a job at the time, Ruby worked for the George H. Manning News Bureau (later named the General Press Association) 1926-28. From 1928 to 1940 she ran her own news bureau serving daily newspapers in Wisconsin, upstate New York, Texas, Iowa, and Nebraska. In addition, she was correspondent for Ernest Gruening's *Portland, Maine Evening News* and Luis Munoz Marin's Puerto Rican newspaper *La Democracia*. She also had articles published in a wide variety of magazines, including *Look*. From 1933 to 1940 she covered Eleanor Roosevelt for the United Press—thanks to Mrs. Roosevelt's decree that only women reporters would be admitted to her press conferences.

Ruby was active in Theta Sigma Phi, the women's journalism honorary society, and edited its magazine *The Matrix* from 1921 to 1929. She was a member of the National Woman's Party and associate editor of *Equal Rights*. A "Lucy Stoner" (i.e., follower of the feminist pioneer Lucy Stone) who used her maiden name personally as well as professionally, she was the first married woman to obtain a U.S. passport under her own name. Along with May Craig and Ruth Finney she waged a successful campaign for women's rest rooms in the Congressional press galleries.

Ruby once wrote that her "biggest scoop was on President Roosevelt's whole plans for TVA, a week before anyone else got even a part of them." She was an important figure in Puerto Rico and is believed to have been responsible for Mrs. Roosevelt's going there in 1934, a trip on which Ruby accompanied and covered her. Earl Parker Hanson wrote about Ruby that "there were times when she literally was the Puerto Rican dream in Washington.... a Joan of Arc so indefatigably fighting for Puerto Rico's liberation from misery...." (*The Island Times*, San Juan, December 20, 1957.)

She was also given credit for arranging a tea at the White House with Mrs. Roosevelt for Luis Munoz Marin, which turned into a conversation between Luis and FDR.

Ruby was co-editor of *Washington: Nerve Center*, by Edwin Rosskam with introduction by Eleanor Roosevelt (Alliance, 1939) and author of *Eleanor Roosevelt, a Biography* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940), the first full-length biography of Mrs. Roosevelt.

During World War II Ruby worked for Nelson Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs. Her last years were unhappy; she died in 1957.

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote this tribute to Ruby for *The Matrix* (March 1955):

I remember Ruby Black when she was a correspondent for the UP. She was one of the best of the American women journalists, and she went on a number of trips with me in this country and on one very remarkable one to Puerto Rico.

Miss Black's interest in Latin America and especially in the little island of Puerto Rico brought her warm recognition from some of the people who were trying to bring the island to a better standard of living.

She has had many Latin American friends and has been a real influence, I think, in creating better understanding between our country and the countries of Latin America.

Miss Black has held many important places in journalistic societies and I think will always be remembered as one of the women who helped to gain recognition for women in the field of journalism.

The same issue of *The Matrix* quotes Ishbel Ross (*Ladies of the Press*, 1936): "A Congressman once asked her as they rode up in one of the Capitol elevators, 'Is everything you are writing today the truth?' 'Everything not enclosed in quotation marks,' said Miss Black." Indeed, that was her standard, and she never failed to live up to it.

Ruby Black's papers have been donated to the Library of Congress where they are available for study.

For more about Ruby Black see
[*Handbook of Texas Online*](#)

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[Return to Muna Lee](#)