In Memoriam: Rev. Dr. Phale D. Hale, Sr.

Phale D. Hale was born in Columbus, Mississippi on July 16, 1911. He was the sixth of twelve children of Church and Lee Ellen Hale, who were sharecroppers on a plantation near Greenwood, Mississippi, where he spent his early years. In 1933, he graduated from Greenwood Colored High School on a Friday. On the following Monday, he left Mississippi, walking with his best friend Rusty in search of employment that would lead to an opportunity to go to college. Walking was too slow, so the hobos showed them how to catch the freight trains which was a dangerous mode of transportation. Men who were caught hoboing were often placed on the chain gangs as prisoners.

After unsuccessfully seeking employment in Chicago, he continued on to Buffalo, New York as a hobo. His brother-in-law, Allen Spivey assisted him in securing work in the steel mills in Buffalo. He was inspired by Rev. E.J. Echols, Sr., pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church to go to Morehouse College. His sister, Magnolia Spivey and his brother-in-law lent him money in emergencies to assist him in attending Morehouse. At one point, he was dismissed because he could not pay his college bill. He went back to Buffalo to work in the steel mills and returned to Morehouse and graduated. He eventually earned a Masters of Divinity degree from what is now the Interdenominational Theological Center and was awarded two Honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees later in life.

While at Morehouse, he became President of the Student Body. He interviewed Dr. Benjamin E. Mays when he was a candidate for president of Morehouse. He met Dr. Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University in that capacity. He walked Chestnut Street in stride with Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois and received words of inspiration which he later shared with his children. While at Morehouse, he was mentored and inspired by the leading Negro men of the 20th Century. Through that network, he met the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., who introduced him to his sons, Martin Luther King, Jr., and A.D. King. Phale Hale called Martin Luther King, Jr., by his intimate name, “Mike.”

Later in life, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., preached for the church Rev. Phale Hale pastored in Columbus, Ohio on two occasions. The Hale house was the only home in Columbus in which Dr. King spent the night. Their friendship is memorialized by a “King” room in the Hale house with many mementos and the bed he slept in.

Phale Hale’s first pastorate was in LaGrange, Georgia. He was deeply affected by the lynchings of Negroes in that community. He started the first NAACP chapter there and called in the national NAACP leaders to investigate and give that community relief from lynching. His second pastorate was in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He was likewise disturbed by the racism that was rampant in that community. He started his second NAACP chapter in that community. When he accepted the pastorate of the Union Grove Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, he became President of the NAACP chapter in that city.

While serving as President of the NAACP, he placed the first Black teller in a bank in Columbus, Ohio, placed the first Black Highway Patrolman on the highways of the State of Ohio, and was responsible for the appointment of the first Black professor on the faculty of The Ohio State University.

Phale Hale was also a personal friend of Aretha Franklin’s father, Rev. C.L. Franklin who was born in the Mississippi Delta. Their paths also crossed in Buffalo, New York where Rev. Franklin pastored at one time.

Phale Hale was elected to the Ohio State Legislature, served 14 years and retired undefeated. He also served as Chairman of the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. His contribution to the Columbus, Ohio community is memorialized in a street, Phale D. Hale Drive, that is named in his honor. His life is memorialized in three chapters of a book written by his daughter, Janice E. Hale, Unbank the Fire: Visions for the Education of African American children, published by the Johns Hopkins University Press in 1994.

Leaving to cherish his memory are his wife of 65 years, Cleo Ingram Hale; two sons, Phale D. Hale, Jr., Hilton Ingram Hale; two daughters, Dr. Janice Ellen Hale, Marna Amoretti Hale; two grandsons, Richard W. Pace, Jr., Keith A. Benson, Jr.; two foster grandchildren, Deandre and Deante George; a special nephew, Ralph Y. Grier; two sisters, Juanita Harris, Ann Moorman and a number of nieces and nephews.

Memorial Donations
A Memorial Donations tab will be added to the ISAAC website. A memorial page will be created on which donations to ISAAC in the memory of Rev. Hale will be memorialized. Dr. Janice E. Hale, his daughter, will match all donations tendered to ISAAC in his memory. Time to Give slips can be downloaded under the Donations Tab from the website for that purpose.

Any supporter of ISAAC who wants to request that donations be made in the memory of a loved one in lieu of flowers can request the creation of a memorial page with a listing of donations made in their memory.