

## PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

### Fredrick L. McGhee

lawyer

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#### Background Information

Born: October 28, 1861; Died: September 9, 1912

McGhee was born into slavery in Aberdeen, Mississippi. His father, Abraham McGhee was a literate Black slave who learned how to read and write without formal education and he taught his three children how to read and write. McGhee attended Knoxville College in Tennessee and graduated with a degree in law in 1885.

#### McGhee's Resistance

He began his legal career in Chicago, but settled in St. Paul, Minnesota. He gained a notable reputation for expertise and oratory. He became one of the most skilled criminal defense lawyers in the Old Northwest. He won clemency from President Harrison for a Black soldier who had been falsely accused of a crime, which was a groundbreaking feat during the time.

In 1892, McGhee was chosen to be a presidential candidate by the Minnesota Republican Party, but he was replaced before the start of Republican National Convention. Racial prejudice caused white Republicans to not want a Black candidate. He later left the Republican Party altogether and become one of the first prominent Black Democrats. In 1905, McGhee and twenty-eight others formed one of the first civil rights organizations, the Niagara Movement. This organization was an attempt of radical Blacks to oppose the conservative views of Booker T. Washington.<sup>1</sup>

#### Achievements

McGhee was the first Black lawyer to be admitted to the bar in the states of Minnesota, Tennessee, and Illinois.<sup>2</sup> He established the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's first Minnesota chapter.

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia contributors. (2020, November 21). Fredrick McGhee. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fredrick\\_McGhee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fredrick_McGhee)

<sup>2</sup> <https://saintpaulhistorical.com/items/show/65>

## Essential Questions

1. As you have read in the text, McGhee had a series of “firsts” as an African American throughout his career. Although this may ideally seem like a success in many instances, being the “first” can be isolating and in many cases dangerous, causing some people to forgo the opportunity.
  - a. Is it best for a person to take on the challenges of being “the first” to do something or is it best to wait until someone else does it and learn from their example?
  
2. McGhee left the long favored Republican Party, also known by Blacks at the time as “The Party of Lincoln” after a humiliating act of racial prejudice.
  - a. Afterwards he aligned himself with the Democratic Party. Currently, more than 85% of African Americans self-identify as Democrats. Should African Americans periodically change their political affiliations?
  - b. How could changing political parties benefit or harm African Americans?
  
3. ***“He knew by bitter experience how his own dark face had served as excuse for discouraging him and discriminating unfairly against him, he became especially an advocate of the rights of colored men”***
  - a. Given what you know about McGhee, how did he use career to help other Black men?
  - b. How can you use your own experiences in discrimination as a platform to advocate for others?

