

## Samuel Moore

Samuel Moore was an African-American prisoner in the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta when he wrote these letters to Clarence Darrow's wife Ruby in 1939 and 1940. In October 1891, Moore, age 17, was convicted of first degree murder in Washington D.C. and sentenced to death for killing a white man. Moore claimed he killed the victim in self defense during a fight while Moore was serving a one year sentence in the District of Columbia jail. Before the execution date, the trial judge and the United States Attorney who prosecuted the case asked the President to commute Moore's sentence to life because he was "at the time a mere youth and very ignorant" and Washington D.C. did not recognize degrees of murder.<sup>1</sup> If it had Moore would likely have been convicted of second degree murder instead of first degree because the prosecutor did not believe "Moore intended to kill Jandorf when he dealt the blow. He simply struck him and didn't care much about the consequences."<sup>2</sup>

President Harrison commuted Moore's sentence to life in prison. Moore was denied parole numerous times and his cause was championed by Eugene Debs who for a time was in the same federal prison. Moore got out of prison in 1927 but was sent back to prison at some point. Moore most likely wrote to Mrs. Darrow because he knew of Clarence Darrow's sympathy for African-Americans. Moore may have actually known Darrow during the time he got out of prison because in one of his letters he asks Ruby if she has anything to help substantiate a promise that Attorney General Sargent made to Ruby and Clarence Darrow in regard to Moore's parole. In another letter he asks Ruby to contact Eleanor Roosevelt on his behalf. The letters clearly indicate that Ruby Darrow wrote back to Moore.

In September 1942 the 8<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed Moore's pro se petition for a writ of habeas corpus asking to be dismissed from custody.<sup>3</sup> The court recommended Moore apply for Executive clemency. The court stated "Petitioner is an aged negro who has served more than half a century in prison. He wants to die a free man."<sup>4</sup> At the time of his petition Moore was in the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners in Springfield Missouri. He had been in prison for a total of over fifty years.

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<sup>1</sup> Moore v. King, 130 F.2d 857, 858 (8<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1942).

<sup>2</sup> Id. at 858-59.

<sup>3</sup> Id.

<sup>4</sup> Id. at 860