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PASS THE WORD
A PROJECT OF THE KENTUCKY ORAL HISTORY COMMISSION

**CIVIL WAR TO CIVIL RIGHTS:
LYMAN T. JOHNSON (EDUCATOR, ACTIVIST)**



University of Kentucky

LOUISVILLE, LEXINGTON — Lyman T. Johnson, the grandson of Tennessee slaves, was an educator, activist and veteran of World War II. A long-time teacher at Central High School in Louisville, Johnson was active in the Louisville chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and fought for equal pay for black teachers in Jefferson County and throughout Kentucky.

In 1948 he filed a lawsuit challenging Kentucky's Day Law, which banned interracial

education. He sought entrance into the University of Kentucky as a graduate student. In March 1949, Federal Judge H. Church Ford ruled in Johnson's favor; UK admitted Johnson and officially desegregated the university. In fact, however, integration initially occurred only at the graduate level since undergraduate African American students were not admitted until 1954.

Johnson's challenge to the Day Law opened Kentucky's higher education system to integration. A graduate fellowship at the University of Kentucky bears his name.

The Kentucky Oral History Commission (KOHC), administered by the Kentucky Historical Society, is dedicated to supporting documentation of Kentucky's rich history along with the issues confronting its people. Pass the Word (passtheword.khs.gov) is an online database from the KOHC that facilitates discovery of more than 30,000 oral history interviews from Kentuckians in all 120 counties, located in more than 100 repositories across Kentucky.

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