

Darryl T. Owens

(1937 -)



Darryl T. Owens is a model of leadership, devoting his life to public service and civil rights. His success, intelligence and commitment have pioneered the way in many areas. As an attorney, political candidate and government official, he broke racial barriers by becoming the first black person to gain recognition on many fronts. As a former National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) president and a Louisville civil rights champion since the 1960's, he became prominent by taking a stand and fighting for equality.

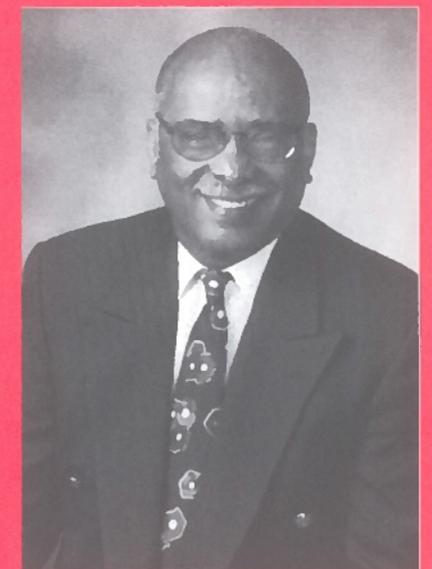
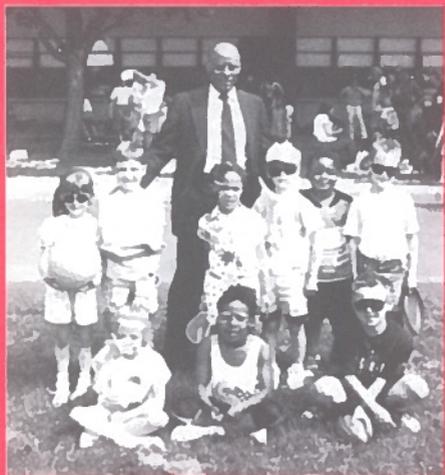
Mr. Owens was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1937. He graduated from Central High School and left Kentucky to earn a bachelor's degree from Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. An excellent student and committed to education, he was accepted into Howard University Law School in Washington where he earned a juris doctorate degree in 1962. He returned home to Louisville to pursue a career and has practiced civil and criminal law in Louisville since 1965. He completed further studies at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in the early 1990's.

From 1965 to 1969, he served as the first black assistant prosecutor of Louisville police court. He was the first black assistant Kentucky attorney general and handled legislation on collective bargaining for public employees, landlord-tenant issues, minority vendors, vehicle emissions testing ordinances, hazardous waste sites and Jefferson County residency requirements. He was the first black president of the Louisville Legal Aid Society and became a member of the University of Louisville Board of Trustees, the Louisville Urban League and local and state government advisory committees.

Mr. Owens became increasingly involved with civil rights issues as an attorney, community leader and NAACP member after a number of disturbances heightened racial tensions during the late 1960's in Louisville and Jefferson County. He helped calm the unrest that developed in May 1968, when two people died, 10 people were injured and 472 people were arrested in Louisville's West End after a civil rights rally. He provided leadership when two fire bombings threatened the safety of the city in August 1968, one at Zion Baptist Church and the other at Newburg Community Center. He served as president of the NAACP, Louisville branch, from 1970 to 1976. As NAACP president, Mr. Owens was involved in school busing protests and discussions of equal rights in public education.

He was a juvenile court judge in 1980 and served as the trial commissioner of Jefferson County Court. He was a member of the Kentucky Workmen's Compensation Board and, from 1976 to 1983, he was instrumental in obtaining government grants to assist chronically ill patients, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Big Brothers program, homeless programs, vocational educational programs and various parks in Kentucky. In 1983, Mr. Owens became the first black person to serve in a countywide office as Jefferson County commissioner for "C-District" in Louisville. In 1985, he became the first black person to run for mayor of Louisville.

Mr. Owens was the architect of the African American Strategic Planning Group (AASPG), which helped develop the Economic Opportunities Act that was approved by the 1999 Kentucky General Assembly to promote minority businesses in Louisville. He completed his fifth, and last, commission term for Louisville and southwestern Jefferson County in 2002.



A Gallery of
Great Black Kentuckians

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