

GEORGIA DAVIS POWERS (1923-2016)

Georgia Montgomery Davis Powers was an American Civil rights leader, and she was the first African American and the first woman elected to the Kentucky State Senate. She served as a senator representing the 33rd District in Louisville, Ky., for 21 years, from January 1968 until her retirement in January 1989.

Georgia Lee Montgomery was born to Ben Gore and Frances Walker Montgomery on October 29, 1923, in Springfield, Ky. The family moved to Louisville when she was 17 months-old, after a tornado destroyed their home. She grew up in West Louisville on Grand Avenue with eight brothers; Georgia was the only girl. She attended Mary B. Talbert School, Virginia Avenue Elementary, Madison Junior High, Central Colored High School and Louisville Municipal College.

She became one of the organizers of the Allied Organizations for Civil Rights, a coalition that planned the 1964 March on Frankfort. There, an estimated 10,000 marchers pushed for a state civil right act, which passed the following year. She helped organize the Kentucky Christian Leadership Conference.

During her tenure in the senate, she authored more than 150 bills, including statewide fair housing legislation and sponsored bills prohibiting employment, sex and age discrimination. Senator Powers also supported legislation to improve education for the physically and mentally disabled.

“She was the author of four books, including her autobiography, “I Shared the Dream,” and, “Celia’s Land,” a biography of her great-aunt. She received hundreds of awards and honors, including five honorary doctorate degrees from University of Kentucky, University of Louisville, Kentucky State University, Spalding University, and Simmons College of Kentucky. At the age of 81, she was elected First Vice President of the Louisville Branch NAACP and served for 10 years. She created the Friends of Nursing Home Residents, a group of faith-based volunteers to visit local nursing homes.

She was among the women of distinction included in a 1989 national photograph exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., called, Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America. The 2010 Kentucky Legislature named a portion of Interstate 264 the Georgia Davis Powers Expressway. The University of Kentucky endowed a chair in her name as part of its Center for Research on Violence against Women. She was an inaugural inductee in 2000 to the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame. She died on January 30, 2016, at the age of 92.



Gallery of Great Black Kentuckians

No. 18

Kentucky Commission

on Human Rights

Kentucky Commission on Human Rights Enforcing Fair Housing and Civil Rights in Kentucky

