

## L. T. Johnson, 91, Plaintiff Who Helped Integrate U. of Kentucky

By ERIC PACE

Lyman T. Johnson, the plaintiff in a lawsuit that led to the integration of the University of Kentucky in 1949, five years before the Supreme Court paved the way for the desegregation of all public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education*, died on Friday in Jewish Hospital in Louisville, Ky. He was 91 and lived in Louisville.

Mr. Johnson, a native of Columbia, Tenn., was the grandson of slaves. He held a bachelor's degree from Virginia Union University and a master's degree in history from the University of Michigan, and had been teaching at Central High School in Louisville for 13 years when he ap-

plied for the University of Kentucky's 1948 summer session. He said he hoped, to do graduate work toward a doctorate in history and political science.

The university's registrar said in March 1948 that its policy, state law and the Kentucky Constitution would not allow Mr. Johnson to be admitted. Mr. Johnson said: "If I am not admitted, I want to know the reason why. I have no apology to make for being a Negro. I stand on my rights as an American citizen."

He sued, and in March 1949, Federal District Judge H. Church Ford ruled in Lexington, Ky., that Mr. Johnson was entitled to attend the

university's graduate school. Judge Ford said that the defense had failed to prove that Kentucky State College for Negroes at Frankfurt provided opportunities equal to those at the all-white university in Lexington.

Later in 1949, Mr. Johnson and about 30 other blacks matriculated at the university. But his entry led to the burning of crosses on the campus. He left school the end of the 1949 summer session without obtaining a degree, saying that his motive in suing had been simply to help black students gain entry to the school.

He went on to teach — mainly history, but also economics and mathematics — for a total of 33 years at Central High and to become an assistant school principal at three other Louisville schools and to serve on the school board of Jefferson County, which includes Louisville.

Mr. Johnson also was president of the Louisville branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He was prominent in successful struggles to achieve parity in salaries for black teachers with white teachers in Louisville; to forge open-housing laws and to integrate public housing throughout Kentucky.

In 1991, he contended that a proposal to end the mandatory busing of



Keith Williams

Lyman T. Johnson

elementary school children in Jefferson County would mean a swift return to separate and unequal education for blacks.

His wife, Juanita, died in the 1970's. He is survived by a son, Lyman Morrell Johnson, of New Jersey, and two grandchildren.