

# 70 YEARS OF INTEGRATION

*The University of Kentucky  
commemorates seven  
decades of diversity*

It was 70 years ago in 1949 that Lyman T. Johnson, who already earned a master's degree from the University of Michigan, challenged the status quo in his landmark court case, which opened the University of Kentucky campus to African-American students. That summer, nearly 30 African-American students enrolled in graduate and professional programs at UK. Johnson did not finish his graduate studies at UK, but he was awarded an honorary doctorate in 1979. An educator and civil rights activist, he dedicated his life to fighting against segregation and racial inequalities in Kentucky.

In addition to opening the door for thousands of minority students to attend UK, he led struggles to integrate neighborhoods, swimming pools, schools and restaurants. Johnson was also at the helm of the Louisville chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for six years. A biographer wrote, "Every door marked 'White Only' was a challenge and an invitation to be forced open. He never asked whether such doors should be opened, only when and how."

Johnson's courage and leadership resulted in the first racially-integrated class at the University of Kentucky.

Today, awards, ceremonies, programs and a residence hall proudly bear his name on the UK campus. The University of Kentucky is increasingly the first choice for students, faculty and staff to pursue their passions and their professional goals. In the



Photo: Explore UK

last two years, Forbes has named UK among the best employers for diversity and INSIGHT into Diversity recognized us as a Diversity Champion two years running. The commemoration this year of the 70 Years of Integration is a reminder that everyone — students, faculty, staff and the community — benefits from increased diversity on campus.

And now, our seven-decade journey — from court-ordered integration to a university that strives to be a supportive community — is the subject of a yearlong examination.

To honor Johnson's significant first steps and the examples set by many students, faculty and

In March 1949, Lyman Johnson, right, and Kentucky State University President R. B. Atwood, left Federal District Court in Lexington after the court ruled in favor of Johnson's admission to the University of Kentucky.

staff who followed him, the university will host a series of events throughout the 2019-2020 academic year that commemorate UK's 70 years of integration.

This year of commemoration began with an assembly on the morning of Friday, Aug. 30, 2019, featuring remarks from Trevor Noah, host of "The Daily Show" on Comedy Central.

In addition to being an accomplished comedian and television personality, Noah is also the author of "Born a Crime," a nationally-acclaimed autobiography focused on his childhood growing up during apartheid in South Africa. This assembly drew on Noah's reflections of his life from South Africa to the United States, sharing thoughts on the importance of diversity and social justice dialogues.

The assembly also featured remarks from UK representatives and the granting of an honorary doctorate to UK alumna Doris Wilkinson '58 SW. In 1967, Wilkinson became the first African-American female alumna appointed to a full-time faculty position at UK. In 1989, she was the first African American elected to the UK Alumni Association Hall of Distinguished Alumni. (Porter "P.G." Peoples '68 ED will receive an honorary doctorate at the UK December Commencement. He has been the president and CEO of Lexington-Fayette County Urban League and has served on numerous community boards.)

The Trevor Noah assembly is one of many events that will be held throughout the academic year by UK colleges and units as the university continues creating a campus where every voice matters.

"UK aspires to be what we call a community of belonging. With that goal always present, we are committed to being a place that welcomes, respects and celebrates all people — regardless of where they are from, what they look like or how they identify," says President Eli Capitulo. "Our progress on this path has not been a straight line. There are moments where we have fallen short of those aspirations. Our commitment to this ongoing journey — one we make with compassion and determination — is resolute and fundamental to our purpose as Kentucky's university. We are a place — we are a community — for all people."

## CAMPUS-WIDE COMMEMORATION

The programming that will take place across campus units will not only have impact on students and faculty. Many of

the events slated for the year-long commemoration will be open to alumni and the local community.

"Anniversaries provide an invaluable opportunity to remember our past, recognize our successes, and anticipate the on-going work that lies ahead. Our '70 Years of Integration' commemoration affords us an opportunity to do just that," says Sonja Feist-Price, vice president of the Office for Institutional Diversity, which is spearheading the planning of many of the year-long events. "We recognize and appreciate the many ways in which our campus has evolved over the past 70 years, and we are excited about the myriad ways we strive to create a community where all of our constituents, irrespective of identity or perspective, feel a sense of belonging and realize how much we matter to each other."

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— SONJA FEIST-PRICE

One of the important upcoming key events slated on campus this year will be the Lyman T. Johnson Luncheon on Oct. 11.

"Mr. Johnson's grandson, Imar Hutchins, will serve as our keynote speaker," says Feist-Price. "The banquet is among our signature events for Homecoming, where we are looking forward to having our alums return to the campus community to see classmates and participate in our events."

Feist-Price also noted that George Wright '72 '74 AS, former president of Prairie View A&M University, is visiting professor in the College of Arts & Sciences Department of History. "He is teaching a course in the fall and spring semesters, and will be sharing his expansive international knowledge about the history of human rights and social justice. Not only will

Dr. Wright share information about his research within our campus community, but throughout the state of Kentucky, as well. We are extremely honored and excited to have Dr. Wright with us throughout this academic year," she says.

In addition, time and effort is being spent to remember and record African-American alumni who were on the front lines of integrating UK. People are familiar with the name Lyman T. Johnson, but he was not alone in those efforts and others also played a major role in that integration. The Nunn Center Oral History Project is interviewing many others who followed, such as Jim Green '71 ED of Louisville, the first African-American student-athlete to graduate from UK and was inducted to the UK Athletic Hall of Fame in 2007. These interviews can be heard at [kentuckyoralhistory.org](http://kentuckyoralhistory.org)

Doug Boyd, director of the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at UK, says "Having the individuals' perspectives on history is always important. It's too easy to create these grand narratives that generalize. But to have specific memories and peoples' specific experiences, it personalizes history so much. That's one of the major functions of oral history.

"To hear Lyman Johnson — not read about Lyman Johnson — tell his story about integrating the University of Kentucky is incredible. And we have 10 interviews with Johnson from 10 different oral history projects," he says.

The Nunn Center is interested in humanizing history, Boyd says. "The center is identifying the gaps in history and figuring how to fill those gaps. What is not being told and what perspective is not being represented? We are very much committed to documenting both diversity and the history of the University of Kentucky."

UK's first Inclusive Health Summit provided an opportunity for health care providers, graduate and professional students, and community members to engage in conversations about health disparities and creating inclusive clinical spaces. This summit took place on Saturday, Sept. 7, 2019, at the Bill Gatton Student Center.

"The summit was a collaborative effort between UK HealthCare Transform Clinic, the six professional health colleges and the Office of Institutional Diversity," says Tukea Talbert, assistant operations executive for hospital administration at UK HealthCare. "It was a great opportunity to demonstrate our partnerships and com-

mitment to an inclusive care environment for all patients.”

Also in September, the College of Arts & Sciences and African American and Africana Studies at the University of Kentucky hosted a three-day symposium titled, “Black Studies at 50: A Celebration of the History of African American and Africana Studies at UK.” Anastasia Curwood, associate professor of history and director of African American and Africana Studies, says that this event was free and opened to the public. It began on the evening of Sept. 19 with a panel of alumni from the class of 1968 who organized the Black Student Union and whose activism helped in the development of Black Studies at UK. The closing keynote was given by the historian Nathan Connelly of Johns Hopkins University and one of the hosts of the podcast “Back Story.” Over the course of several days, she says, UK faculty appeared on thematic panels and shared how the areas in which they work have shaped Black Studies and how they will impact the field moving forward.

“We had this conference to commemorate the milestone of offering the first black studies course here at UK, and to acknowledge the work of the students who made it happen. We also looked at the present moment and the future, as we welcomed half a dozen new faculty and inaugurated a new B.A. in African American and Africana Studies,” says Curwood.

UK Homecoming is well known for bringing together former classmates and friends to reminisce at individual college reunions and tailgate. This year, the campus celebration will include special events as a part of the 70 Years of Integration.

“We are happy to continue to discover new ways to engage with all our UK alumni and look forward to partnering with other campus units as we invite all alumni and friends back for our 2019 Homecoming festivities,” says Jill Smith,



### JOHN WESLEY HATCH FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENT ADMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

John Wesley Hatch was the first African-American student admitted to the University of Kentucky in 1948. But because of the Day Law, he wasn't allowed to attend classes on the UK campus. Instead, he had to receive his instruction at Kentucky State, and UK professors drove daily to Frankfort to teach him.

After Lyman T. Johnson's landmark court case, Hatch undertook his third semester at UK but left after that. (Johnson had been Hatch's 10th-grade history teacher at Central High School in Louisville.) He continued his education earning bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. Hatch became an internationally-recognized authority on public health issues and was instrumental in the establishment of one of the two first community health centers in the United States.

interim executive director of the UK Alumni Association.

Special events scheduled for Homecoming Weekend include the NPHC Step Show, Mo-Betta Basketball Game, Mr. & Mrs. Black UK contest and a Black Voices Gospel Choir Brunch.

As if coming full circle, it's poignant that UK has been able to commission artist Imar Hutchins to create a portrait of his grandfather, Lyman T. Johnson, for the commemoration. Hutchins, formerly an attorney, is a self-taught artist based in Washington. He is known for working in mixed media and collage, often creating portraits that not only include pieces from vintage black magazines but fragments of hate mail, other documents and found

objects. The portrait of his grandfather will hang in the Residence Hall named for Lyman T. Johnson on campus.

“I was fortunate that he lived long enough for me to know him as a young adult. He was my mother's father. She was Yvonne Johnson Hutchins ... He was a great influence on me, and as I got older, I learned more about what he meant to others, not just his family,” he said.

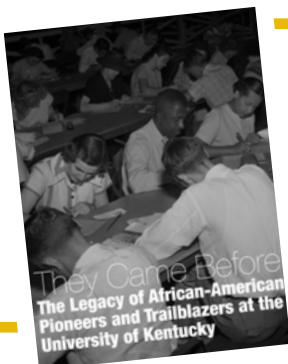
“He always treated everyone as if they were his grandchildren, no matter what your age. He would tell you about all the struggles some people had gone through to make the world the way it is today and how fragile it all was. He talked about how it could all be erased in a moment if we weren't careful. It's an honor, privilege and a challenge to do this project for UK.”

Hutchins is including Lyman T. Johnson's portrait in a body of his work entitled “Inheritance,” which will be exhibited first in Washington and then travel to UK for its unveiling during Homecoming. After that, UK is lending the portrait to the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville in January 2020 for the “Inheritance” exhibition, before it returns to campus and is installed permanently in the Lyman T. Johnson Residence Hall on the UK campus.

“Muhammad Ali was one of my grandfather's students. Ali credited him as one of his early inspirations toward activism and social justice. They remained friends their whole lives,” Hutchins says.

The artist also studied his grandfather's legacy extensively via Johnson's archived papers.

“My work is all collage, and often I use the hate mail and death threats that my grandfather got as part of my pieces. From a distance, it will look pretty, but up close, you'll see it is made up of all these hateful things that you can't even imagine,” Hutchins says. “You'll see that it is about transforming hate into love. He was able to do that.” ■



## THEY CAME BEFORE: THE LEGACY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN PIONEERS AND TRAILBLAZERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

In 2015, the UK Alumni Association published “They Came Before: The Legacy of African-American Pioneers and Trailblazers at the University of Kentucky.” Now out of print, the document was a resource which told of the wide array of some of the first African-American students at UK and the positive changes that they brought. Today, readers can enjoy learning of these trailblazers via the online version of the book by visiting [www.ukalumni.net/ukpioneers](http://www.ukalumni.net/ukpioneers).



**DORIS WILKINSON**  
FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE TO BE FULL-TIME UK FACULTY MEMBER

Doris Wilkinson '58 SW was the first African American elected to the UK Alumni Association Hall of Distinguished Alumni.



**BLACK VOICES GOSPEL CHOIR, 1989**

Founded in 1968-1970, the Black Voices Gospel Choir began when a small group of African-American students came together based on their mutual love of gospel music. This UK student organization started under the direction of Lutischa Coleman-Morton, with the assistance of what was then called the Minority Student Affairs Office. Over the years, the choir has participated in performances such as the National Collegiate Gospel Festival, the Bobby Jones Gospel Explosion, and the Gospel Praise Company Workshop. They were also hosted by the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. at the Ebenezer Baptist Church.



**PORTER "P.G." PEEPLES**  
YOUNGEST DIRECTOR OF URBAN LEAGUE

Porter "P.G." Peeples '68 ED was only 22 years old when he was named the director of the Lexington chapter of the Urban League, becoming the youngest director in the United States.

**JAMES GREEN**  
FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN CAPTAIN OF UK TRACK TEAM

James "Jim" Green '71 ED was the first African-American student-athlete to graduate from UK and at one time was the world's fastest human.



**ZIRL A. PALMER**  
UK TRUSTEE

In 1972, Zirl A. Palmer became the first African American to become a member of the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees, named to the board by Gov. Wendell Ford. He was a graduate of Bluefield State College and Xavier University of Louisiana College of Pharmacy. Palmer was the first African American to own a Rexall franchise in the United States, opening his drugstore at Fifth and Race streets in Lexington in the early 1950s.



**EDYTHE JONES HAYES**  
UK TRUSTEE

Edythe Jones Hayes '53 ED was the first African-American woman on the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees. By the age of 18, Hayes had graduated from both high school and college. She was an educator who began teaching in Lexington's Carver Elementary School in 1953. Later, Hayes became director of the adult education program and was named assistant superintendent in 1972. A Lexington middle school was named for her in 2004.



**ELAINE ADAMS WILSON**  
PAST PRESIDENT OF THE UK ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Elaine Adams Wilson '68 SW of Somerset was elected president of the UK Alumni Association for 2014-2015, the first black UK alumna to hold this office. Beginning her term, she said, "Having this opportunity to serve the university and the alumni association is one of the greatest honors of my life. I have long appreciated the University of Kentucky and have long felt that coming to this university literally changed my life. ... It is my opinion that being a person of color in this position will help people in our Commonwealth and beyond to know and understand there is an opportunity at our university for all people, no matter who they are or where they come from." Wilson also served as a member of the UK Board of Trustees for six years from 1999 to 2005.

**LYMAN T. JOHNSON AFRICAN AMERICAN ALUMNI GROUP**

As a constituent group of the UK Alumni Association, the Lyman T. Johnson African American Alumni Group supports, promotes and initiates activities, programs, strategies and services which address the unique needs of, and foster the inclusion of, African American alumni in all aspects of UK life.

