

Who is Donald Lee Hollowell?



Birth: **Dec. 9, 1917**
 Wichita
 Sedgwick County
 Kansas, USA

Death: **Dec. 27, 2004**
 Atlanta
 Fulton County
 Georgia, USA

Civil Rights Figure. Regarded as one of the preeminent Civil Rights attorneys in the South who held a long career at the center of historic events. Donald L. Hollowell's work and contributions to the movement during the 1950s through 1960s, as an attorney, changed the face of history throughout Georgia and changed the lives of its people. Hollowell is closely associated with two pivotal Georgia Civil Rights cases, the integration of Atlanta Public Schools and the integration of the University of Georgia (1961), but for 40 years this man was a quiet leader in the battle for Civil Rights in Georgia. His legacy also includes desegregating buses in Augusta and schools in Macon, and freeing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from Reidsville Prison in the 1960s where he landed following a parole violation stemming from a traffic offense. When Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta refused to allow African-American doctors to work in the hospital, Hollowell argued and won the

Civil Rights case that had national impact. His success is credited to his hard work, integrity and unique abilities to understand the law and race relations. Donald Lee Hollowell was born in Wichita, Kansas on Dec. 9, 1917. He was the third of five children born to Ocenia and Harrison Hollowell. His mother encouraged all her children to get a good education and each played a musical instrument. Hollowell played the tuba and sousaphone in the school band and was an excellent athlete. Hollowell, like most African-Americans at the time was introduced to racial prejudice at a young age. The systematic discrimination accelerated as he grew older, enraging Hollowell. In order to find work and secure a better life for their children, the Hollowell's moved often. During 1935, the summer that Hollowell was to start his senior year in high school, and during the Great Depression years, Hollowell's father indicated that he would have to quit school and support himself with a full time job. Furious with his father and the economic situation that changed his life, Hollowell decided to join the U.S. Army. At the age of 17, he enlisted in the 10th Calvary Regiment, known as the Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Leavenworth, KS. By 1938, Hollowell attained the rank of PFC Specialist Five. In 1938, he received a chance to attend Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee. There a friend convinced Hollowell to leave the Army and try-out for the college football team. Besides being starting quarterback on the football team, he played basketball joined the track and field team, became class president, helped establish a KAPPA ALPHA PSI CHAPTER at Lane and joined the C. M. E. (Christian Methodist Episcopal) Church. However, in 1941, during WWII, Hollowell was recalled to active duty with a segregated U.S. Army having to weather the steady barrage of bitter racial affronts. Hollowell later had other assignments across the country before arriving at Fort Benning,

Georgia where he met and later married Louise Thornton who owned a beauty salon in Atlanta. The couple married in May 1943, a few months before Hollowell re-enlisted in the army and was transferred overseas where he rose to the rank of captain. After the war, Hollowell returned to Lane College and graduated magna cum laude in 1947. He went on to earn a law degree from Loyola University in Chicago in 1951. Hollowell said that he was inspired to become a lawyer to help others achieve social justice because of his experiences with racism and because of his work with the Southern Negro Youth Conference while he was in college. He moved to Atlanta after college and opened a law practice (Hollowell, Foster & Gepp). Hollowell would eventually become one of the leading Civil Right's attorneys in the country. Along the way, Hollowell mentored a host of young black attorneys, including Vernon Jordan and Horace Ward, now a federal judge. In 1966, Hollowell accepted an appointment from President Lyndon B. Johnson as the first regional director of the new Equal Opportunity Commission, which monitors workplace discrimination. He remained at the EEOC as regional attorney until 1985 and was later considered a likely candidate for a federal or state judgeship, although no nomination ever came. In 1998, Atlanta renamed Bankhead Highway in Donald Lee Hollowell's honor. Donald Lee Hollowell died in Atlanta on Dec. 27, 2004, at age 87 from heart failure. Days later at his funeral service befitting a giant of the civil rights movement at Morehouse College's Martin Luther King, Jr. Chapel, judges, college presidents and a former United Nations ambassador were among the several hundred people who came to remember the contributions of Hollowell. Two dozen speakers spoke for more than three hours of the attorney including Washington lawyer Vernon Jordan, a friend and adviser to former President Bill Clinton who

once worked for Hollowell, saying "I am not sure we will ever see the likes of Hollowell again, but I hope so." Among Hollowell's honor's include the University of Georgia honoring Hollowell an honorary doctorate, only the 75th such honor bestowed in the school's 200 year history. His alma mater Lane College, honored him post humously following his death with the Order of the Dragon, the third person to receive the honor and Lane College also plans to name its library in his honor.

(BIO BY: CURTIS JACKSON)

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