

Harold Holliday Sr.

Lawyer, Legislator, and Civil Rights Activist
1918-1985

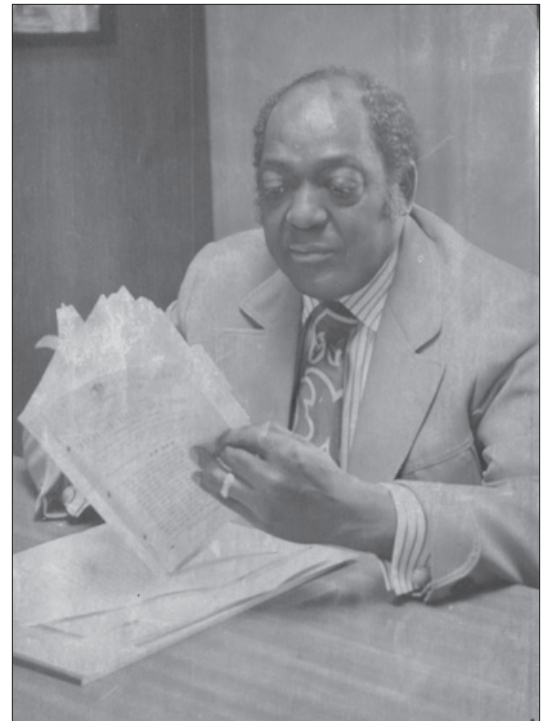
By David Conrads

Harold Holliday Sr. was a lawyer and legislator who devoted his career to advancing the cause of civil rights in Missouri. He was a founding member of Freedom Inc., an important black political organization in Jackson County, and served for 12 years in the Missouri House of Representatives, where he was known for his fiery oratory and dedication to progressive legislation.

Holliday was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma, in 1918 and moved to Kansas City with his mother Eliza and sister Isola two years later. He attended Dunbar Elementary School in the Leeds neighborhood and graduated from Lincoln High School in 1935. He earned a bachelor's degree from Lincoln University, in Jefferson City, Missouri, in 1939 and a master's degree in economics from the University of Michigan in 1941. Drafted into the U.S. Army in 1942, he attained the rank of second lieutenant before his honorable discharge in 1945.

Holliday began blazing civil rights trails when he applied for admission to the University of Kansas City (now the University of Missouri-Kansas City) Law School, but was rejected because of his race. Working with the American Veteran's Committee, he gained admission in 1948 and graduated with honors in 1952, the first African American to receive a law degree from the school.

Kansas City was an almost entirely segregated city in the early 1950s. After Holliday passed the bar exam and entered the practice of law in 1952, he immediately put his legal training to work in attempts to improve conditions for African Americans in Kansas City. He joined with parents of students at Booker T. Washington School to protest the over-crowded conditions there. That protest led to a successful lawsuit by Holliday and attorney Lewis W. Clymer that allowed black students to attend Benton School, later renamed D.A. Holmes School. In 1957, Holliday served as the general counsel for the Community Committee for Social Justice in a suit to desegregate eating establishments in downtown Kansas City stores.



Holliday was a charter member of Freedom, Inc. when it was founded in 1961 and later served as chairman of the board of directors. He began his career as a legislator in 1964 when, running on the Democratic ticket and with the backing of Freedom, Inc., he won a seat in the Missouri House of Representatives. Holliday served in that body until 1976 where he became known as a staunch and impassioned advocate for the poor and oppressed citizens of Missouri. He wrote numerous laws, including one abolishing the ban on interracial marriage in Missouri. In his 12 years in the House, Holliday became known as a skilled and knowledgeable legislator and a spellbinding speaker.

Holliday was noted for supporting progressive legislation in consumer protection and other areas. He fought against proposed increases in interest rate ceilings on small loans and helped win support for new laws to tighten requirements on door-to-door sales and to permit suspension of payment on defective merchandise.

In 1976 Holliday lost a bid to become the first black state senator for Kansas City. After leaving the legislature, he served as a magistrate judge in Kansas City and then as associate regional counsel in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). He retired from that position in 1983.

In addition to his work with Freedom, Inc., Holliday was active in other organizations that benefited African Americans. He spent 25 years as either a member of the executive committee or an officer of the Kansas City chapter of the Missouri National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), including president. He also served for ten years as an officer or member of the board of directors of the Kansas City Urban League.

Holliday died at his home in Kansas City on March 21, 1985, following a lingering illness from prostate cancer.

Sources

Christensen, Lawrence O., William E. Foley, Gary R. Kremer, and Kenneth H. Winn, eds. *Dictionary of Missouri Biography*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999.

"Death to Harold L. Holliday Sr. at 67." *Kansas City Call*, March 22-28, 1985, 1, 12.

Fitzpatrick, James C. "Harold Holliday Sr. Recalled as a Leader." *The Kansas City Times*, March 23, 1985, B3.

Gillis, Delia C. *Kansas City*. Black America Series. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2007.

"Harold L. Holliday A Man of Vision and Action." *Kansas City Call*, March 29-April 4, 1985, 22.

"Harold Holliday Sr. dies after battle with cancer," *The Kansas City Star*, March 22, 1985, 1A.

"Harold Holliday." *The Kansas City Star*, May 21, 2000, (Special Section, KC @ 150) 48.

Stewart, Donna. "Rites Held for Harold Holliday," *Kansas City Call*, March 29-April 4, 1985, 1.

©2009

Photo: Courtesy of The Kansas City Star