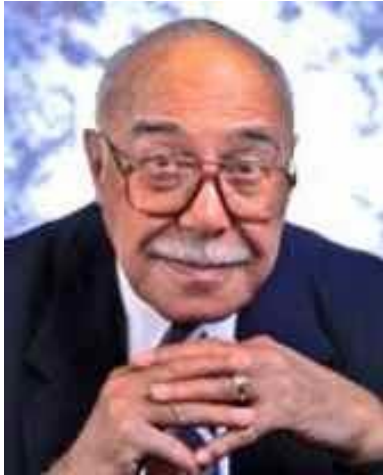


## A Reflection on the life of Woodford Roy Porter, Sr.

*By Michael Higgs, Cave Hill Heritage Foundation, Inc.*



Woodford R. Porter, Sr.

When I first began working in funeral service, as a very young and eager-to-learn college student, an early memory that is forever etched in my mind is a chance encounter with Woodford Roy Porter, Sr. He was a man that seemed larger-than-life. Just by the power of observation, one could tell by the look in his eye that he was focused on the family in front of him and that he knew exactly what needed to happen and by the exact sequence.

A gentle nod and gesture of hand, like that of an orchestral conductor, seemed to set the motion of a graveside funeral service in action. As he gently led the family to the gravesite, there was a peace about the grieving family, perhaps because they knew that they were being served by one of the most respected funeral directors in the city. There was something to be said about this; and, most impressively, every family that I had the pleasure of serving alongside Mr. Porter was served in the same manner. The same sequence of events. The same gentle guide and slow walk never faltered, even at the last service that I can recall having with him, as he was largely retired by this point.

Seeing the dedication and gentleness that this larger-than-life figure exuded made me to want to learn more about Mr. Porter. Of course, as time passed, I became more and more familiar with his son, Woody Porter, Jr., and the many others in the Porter family who have served and continue to serve Louisville's families. It can be safely said that the city of Louisville is greatly indebted to the life and contributions of the Porter family. Mr. Porter was the first African American elected to the board of Jefferson County Public Schools and to the board of the University of Louisville. His strong presence, impressive influence, and charismatic spirit promoted unity in the midst of challenging times. His unwavering devotion to his family and to those that he served, even in the face of adversity, demonstrated that success is not given, but sought after and earned with continuous effort. It was only later, long after Mr. Porter, Sr. passed, that I had the opportunity to truly sit down with Woody, Jr. to learn more about the family. This opportunity was worth the wait, and my appreciation was increased ten-fold as I gained a remarkable understanding of the palpable struggles that the family encountered while serving this community. It was a life lesson for me, and one that I can teach my children as they grow. The lessons of perseverance, dignity, unwavering devotion to serving others, and equality are certainly those that I want my children to embrace and live out daily, just as the Porter's have demonstrated for over 100 years.

Thank you to Woodford Roy Porter, Sr. and the entire Porter family, for your dedication, service, and exemplary example of how to live and be resilient in a tumultuous time.

Here is a brief [video tribute](#) from WDRB-TV regarding the life of Woodford Roy Porter, Sr.