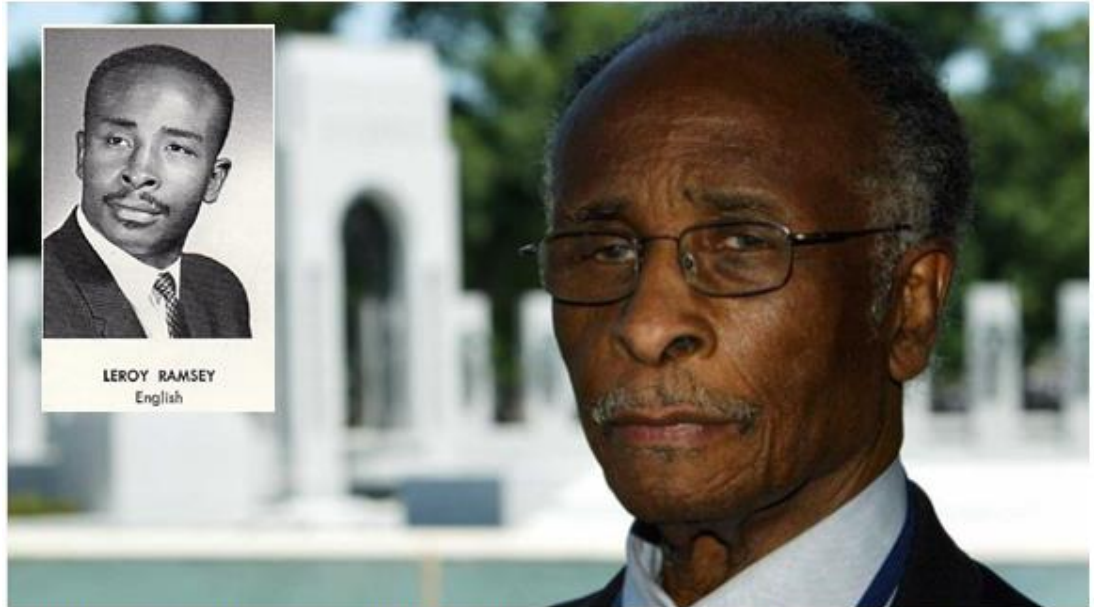


# Leroy Ramsey, school desegregation advocate, dies

By MARTIN C. EVANS [martin.evans@newsday.com](mailto:martin.evans@newsday.com) Updated March 13, 2013 9:53 PM

He grew up in poverty in racially troubled Meridian, Miss., the son of a railroad laborer and a fourth-grade-educated mother who taught him to read.

But by the time Leroy L. Ramsey died Saturday in a suburban Philadelphia nursing home, the strapping southerner had helped shape Long Island, championing school desegregation efforts here in the 1960s and '70s, and founding the African American Museum in Hempstead in 1970.



World War II veteran Leroy L. Ramsey, 90, died of complications of dementia. Photo Credit: Matthew Cavanaugh  
Inset photo: Dr. Leroy Ramsey, Plainview High School, 1963 Yearbook Photo inset by CDReilly

"He knew the struggle because he came through it himself in Mississippi, and never forgot it," said Reneer Reed, a Lakeview resident who worked with Ramsey to integrate the Malverne school district in the 1970s. "He tried to do what was right."

Ramsey, 90, died of complications of dementia. But by all accounts, he lived an exceedingly full life.

A product of segregated schools, he left Mississippi in 1960 to take a job at then virtually all-white Plainview-Old Bethpage High School, in an era when the southern civil rights movement was forcing a re-examination of race relations in northern communities. With young children of his own, he soon found himself a leader among black Long Islanders pressuring local and state officials to end the practice of steering black children from schools white students attended.

He was named to Nassau County's Human Rights Commission. Hired by several area colleges, including Hofstra University, he introduced black history courses. A black history exhibit he organized at Hofstra drew such support that he founded the museum in Hempstead to house the material.

He was hired by the New York State Education Department in 1972 to direct its efforts to integrate school systems across the state. He left state employment in 1982.

In Mississippi, Ramsey did not begin attending school until he was 11, but managed to graduate high school when he was 19. Offered a scholarship by Lincoln University in Pennsylvania -- a school founded by black Civil War veterans -- he couldn't raise \$40 to get there.

He married Velma Alexander in 1942, the same year he joined the [Army](#). He served in the Pacific, and was injured when a Japanese plane attacked his anti-aircraft gun.

He returned to Mississippi in 1946 and attended [Jackson State](#). After graduating in 1952, he taught in Mississippi, then, starting in 1960, on [Long Island](#). In 1972, he earned a doctorate at [New York University](#), for studies on government discrimination.

A prolific author, he wrote dozens of articles and essays about black military history in the last decades of his life. His first marriage ended in divorce in the 1970s. A second marriage, to Marjorie Mussman, with whom he had two children, ended in 1996.

Survivors include longtime companion Joan Niles of [Philadelphia](#); sons, Walter of Brooklyn, and David of the Bronx; and daughter; Julia of the Bronx. A daughter, Sandra Johnson, died in December. A funeral will be held Thursday at [Mount Zion Baptist Church](#) in Meridian. No additional information was available.