

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This is an archived edition when our program was called Leadership Landscape TV.

(music)

Kirt Jacobs: Welcome to a new partnership between Metro T.V. and Y-PAL, the Young Professionals Association of Louisville called Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and allow them a chance to offer some keen insights into how they see themselves and most importantly explore just what makes them tick. I am Kirt Jacobs a Y-PAL board member and host of Leadership landscape. Today our guest is Raul Cunningham and for those of you can do not know our guest allow me to read some of his bio for you.

Raoul, a Louisville native, was elected as president of the Louisville branch of the National Association of Colored People better known as the NAACP. The NAACP is the nation's oldest civil rights group founded in 1909 in New York with a Louisville branch opening all the way back in 1913. Raoull is no stranger to being a civil rights activist for the last five decades. Cunningham began his career in civil rights working as a member of the NAACP chapter at age fourteen helping with voter registration. His activism as a teen continued as he organized and led nonviolent demonstrations at local Louisville theaters, restaurants, and stores that in the early 1950s and early 1960s simply did not welcome African-Americans.

His first nonviolent direct action was picketing Louisville's Brown theater which would not honor the tickets of young black students who wanted to see Porgy and Bess. Cunningham began recruiting other young people to the cause and after careful planning they began picketing at an ever expanding number of lunch counters and restaurants in downtown Louisville where African-Americans were refused service. His leadership during the Nothing New for Easter Campaign paved the way for African-Americans to be able to try

on clothes in downtown Louisville stores. Cunningham went on to attend Howard University where his activism continued. At Howard he organized a young Democrats chapter and was named president of the D.C. Federation of College Young Democrats and vice president of the Young Democrats Club of America. His numerous accomplishments continued on after Howard University.

When he returned to Louisville, Cunningham managed the successful campaign to elect Georgia Davis Powers to the Kentucky Senate. He was inducted into the Kentucky Civil Rights Hall of Fame in 2003 and he is the proud 2006 recipient of the Martin Luther King Freedom Award from the City of Louisville. Cunningham is listed in *Who's Who Among American Blacks*, *Who's Who in American Politics*, *The Fascinating Story of Black Kentuckians* by Alice Dunnigan, *I Share the Dream* by Georgia Davis Powers, *Sonny's Down South* by James Chatham.

Cunningham previously served for three years as a regional director for the NAACP's National Voter Empowerment Program working to remove barriers to voting and increase the number of minorities who participate in the electoral process. He has been involved in government and politics by interweaving civil rights, nonviolence, and better government issues into his own efforts to get more people who are committed to racial justice into the electoral process. Today Raoul is focusing the Louisville branch of the NAACP on equality in the educational and justice systems including jury selection, bail, sentencing, and parole. Welcome Raoul.

Raoul Cunningham: Thank you for having me.

Kirt Jacobs: What an impressive background backstory there. Our first question on Leadership Landscape that we ask all of our guests is what drives you to do all this back in a time so long ago.

Raoul Cunningham: I think it was a passion and the desire for equality and took this to make my community and my world a better place for everyone to live. And I think that's important to try to improve our community and to make our system work.

Kirt Jacobs: What do you credit most influential in your life road or whom do you credit?

Raoul Cunningham: My mother. My. Father died when I was two.

Kirt Jacobs: Really

Raoul Cunningham: I was an only child and it was basically my father's mother lived with us for this while but basically my mother and myself. She worked. I had to become independent. Had to think for myself and those were characteristics that she instilled in me. I didn't have a brother or sister. And so my creativity was by myself most of the time.

Kirt Jacobs: Imagination.

Raoul Cunningham: Yeah. And. Even when I started in civil rights that she wasn't going out there.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Raoul Cunningham: But she never tried to stop me. She was always encouraging and trying to make sure that I understood what I was doing.

Kirt Jacobs: The risks.

Raoul Cunningham: And the consequences and sacrifices.

Kirt Jacobs: What was the most defining moment of your life Raoul. If you could name one, armchair quarterback your life you can look at that.

Raoul Cunningham: It was interesting I had spent 12 years with Senator Huddleston in Washington.

Kirt Jacobs: OK.

Raoul Cunningham: And after he had lost that election had gone

back late. Stayed down here for a while and went back. And there was job. I knew that we had to I had to start looking for employment and one of my fellow staff members asked me if someone from Senator Kennedy's office had reached me. And I said no he said they're looking for you for a job opportunity. I thought Ahh. But it was a strange situation was it with at that time a small private brewery. That had gone national. And they were looking for that they said that a Director of Minority Affairs. And when checking into it they had been on Madison Avenue and couldn't find anyone they said.

And I thought. Something's wrong with this picture. And the process was not the normal application process. I had to write a letter. That was all they wanted. I wrote the letter. Took me several days and submitted it and about a couple weeks the executive vice president called. And said that he would come to interview, had dinner with him. Had breakfast with him the next morning, went out to their headquarters. By the time the whole process was over they told me that I did not have what they needed in that far as hands on management. But when they hired the person they had changed the title of the position. It was no longer Director of Minority Affairs but Director of Public Relations. That obviously did not set very well with me.

Kirt Jacobs: No.

Raoul Cunningham: And I became determined that no one would ever tell me again that I didn't have hands-on management experience. As a matter of fact, a couple months later I took a job in Kentucky state government as Deputy Commissioner Personnel for the State and that's when I thought well now I was on the right career path for that and then I guess to realize that color may played a major part in the reason I didn't get it but I also realize it wasn't just me. Because they had scoured Madison Avenue to fill that position for Minority Affairs and ended up with a non minority and change in the title.

Kirt Jacobs: Things have changed.

Raoul Cunningham: Yeah hopefully

Kirt Jacobs: Yes. On that note, if there is one thing what is your biggest professional regret, in other words if you could look back over the course of your life and achievements.

Raoul Cunningham: I don't know if it is a regret. But it causes me to ponder and think. I must have been about 1968 I had a job offer to go with a local T.V. station as a news reporter and that would have been the first African-American news reporter in the city in this area. And I was involved in a campaign and someone asked me the question do you want to be a newsmaker or a news reporter.

Kirt Jacobs: Wow.

Raoul Cunningham: And I often wondered

Kirt Jacobs: What a choice.

Raoul Cunningham: I wonder what would have happened if I had made that other decision.

Kirt Jacobs: Fork in the road.
Raoul Cunningham: Yeah.

Kirt Jacobs: That's really interesting. And on the flip side of that what's your biggest professional triumph Raoul.

Raoul Cunningham: That question gave me more problems than any of them

Kirt Jacobs: Did it.

Raoul Cunningham: Yeah I think it would be the election of Georgia Power or Georgia Davis Powers to the state Senate. She was the first African-American elected, the first woman elected to the state Senate.

Kirt Jacobs: Wow. Double whammy there.

Raoul Cunningham: Yeah and it was an uphill battle.

Kirt Jacobs: I bet.

Raoul Cunningham: And to manage, to help manage that campaign. I think and although it was so long ago and it just gave me a lift and a boost that I think we're all still proud of.

Kirt Jacobs: and that was I guess after 1968.

Raoul Cunningham: No 67.

Kirt Jacobs: So that's you were a newsmaker when you were trying to be a news reporter that's interesting. What do you find exciting in all of this. You know what you did at the age of fourteen out in front of the Brown Theater leading up to the election with Georgia Davis.

Raoul Cunningham: Brown Theatre wasn't that exciting.

Kirt Jacobs: Sounds exciting historically. From was a guy who didn't know the 50s and 60s.

Raoul Cunningham: Well it was in a way. But we'd started on Christmas day.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Raoul Cunningham: And my mother had told me -- I was dressed getting ready to go -- you don't really want to wear those new shoes on the picket line. What do you mean it's Christmas Day I'm going to wear my new shoes. In 20 minutes I was calling asking her if she would please bring me some old shoes that I don't care how they look feet were killing me. Triumph. What was the question I got ...

Kirt Jacobs: What do you find most exciting.

Raoul Cunningham: Challenges.

Kirt Jacobs: OK. Just the challenge

Raoul Cunningham: Challenge in and of itself and the challenge and at the Brown Theater was a challenge.

Kirt Jacobs: Oh yeah especially at 14.

Raoul Cunningham: Yeah and sitting in to desegregate was a challenge. Now I can get a challenge on an issue. Most the issues that we deal with are very very challenging. And you can get up and excited for it. Taking the problem from the beginning, developing a plan, and carrying that plan out, recruiting.

Kirt Jacobs: What would in the great lexicon English language Raoul, what's your favorite word if you could pick one.

Raoul Cunningham: Don't have one.

Kirt Jacobs: Really

Raoul Cunningham: I'd really thought about that and thought about that. And I don't, I can't come up with one word that I would consider my favorite.

Kirt Jacobs: All right. Well then let's try this one to see if I get you on this which is the whole concept behind the show. Can you define leadership in one word?

Raoul Cunningham: I would try to: concert master.

Kirt Jacobs: Concertmaster. Unique I like that.

Raoul Cunningham: Concert master or concert choral director.

Kirt Jacobs: OK. Why is that.

Raoul Cunningham: I'm an old jack lay choir director.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Raoul Cunningham: And you have to take the individuals that present themselves. You do some training. You do an awful lot of listening to the voice, the quality. and you work with them and it. You could have 50 to 100, 200 people who may not even know one another and you work with them. So one they blend together and they get on a common course for product and hopefully you come out of there with different individuals on the same page with the same purpose. And all working together for a common cause.

Kirt Jacobs: Well this is a question that provokes some interesting and discomfort in some of our guests but it's a question that I think needs to be asked of all of our guests. When the great day comes Raoul how do you want to be remembered?

Raoul Cunningham: Probably going out rejoicing.

Kirt Jacobs: Really

Raoul Cunningham: And not so much remembered but hopefully it will be able to be said when he was a hard worker. He believed in his causes and that he did make a difference in his community. And when they lower me or burn me or whatever they decide to do they will be able to say that this is a better community.

Kirt Jacobs: Raoul, it's a great note to end on. I want to thank you Raoul.

Raoul Cunningham: thanks so very much for having me.

Kirt Jacobs: For being on Y-PAL's Leadership Landscape. Until next time I'm Kirt Jacobs.

(music)

Kirt Jacobs: Thank you for listening to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This episode was archival audio from when we were known as

Leadership Landscape TV. If you have any feedback, general comments, or a recommendation for a suitable guest feel free to email me at kirt@moxietalk.com or catch us on Facebook under MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs, or on Twitter under [@kirtjacobs](https://twitter.com/kirtjacobs) or our extensive website at www.moxietalk.com