

## **Another history moment for us and our children**

### **The Higher Education of the Nation's Top African-American Restaurateur**

Each week tens of thousands of diners eat at an Olive Garden or Red Lobster restaurant. Few of these diners know that the CEO heading these large restaurant chains is a black man.



Clarence Otis Jr. is the CEO of Darden Restaurants Inc., the largest casual dining operator in the nation. The firm operates nearly 1,400 company-owned restaurants coast to coast serving 300 million meals annually. Darden employs 150,000 workers and has annual revenues of \$6 billion.

Born in Vicksburg, Mississippi, Otis moved to Los Angeles when he was 6 years old. His father was a high school dropout who worked as a janitor. The family lived in Watts at the time of the 1965 riots. In the post-Watts period, Otis recalls being stopped and questioned by police several times a year because of the color of his skin.

A high school guidance counselor recommended him for a scholarship at Williams College, the highly selective liberal arts institution in Massachusetts. Otis graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Williams and went on to earn a law degree at Stanford.

Otis landed on Wall Street as a merger and acquisitions attorney for J.P. Morgan Securities. He joined Darden Restaurants in 1995 as corporate treasurer. He became CEO in 2004.