

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jeff Greenup

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Greenup, Jeff, 1919-2013
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup,
Dates:	April 26, 2007, April 28, 2007 and April 5, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:09:38).
Abstract:	Civil rights lawyer Jeff Greenup (1919 - 2013) was a former president of the New York NAACP, one of the founding members of the Metropolitan Black Bar Association, and co-founded the law firm, Greenup, Schimmel, Golar & Levister. Greenup was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 26, 2007, April 28, 2007 and April 5, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_125
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Jeff L. Greenup was born on March 24, 1919, on a farm in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana. His family included some staunch civil rights activists, and Greenup was only thirteen when he and his father were arrested for objecting to a powerful Baton Rouge businessman when he refused to pay the agreed upon price for the delivery of produce from the Greenup farm. Greenup grew up in New Orleans where he was drafted into the U.S. Army. After spending four years, one month, twenty days, and nine hours in the army, including twenty-eight months in World War II combat in the China, Burma, and India Theater, Greenup moved to New York City where he attended Long Island University on the GI Bill of Rights and received his B.S. degree in 1948. In 1951, Greenup received his law degree from Brooklyn Law School and was admitted to the New York State Bar.

After graduation, Greenup formed the law firm of Mack, McFadden and Greenup. In 1963, Greenup's eighty-two-year-old Aunt Charlotte was arrested in Clinton, Louisiana, for protesting the treatment of African Americans, and Greenup served as one of her lawyers. Around the same time, he organized what would be known as the "United Nations Law Firm" of Greenup, Schimmel, Golar & Levister, a firm that included four partners and fourteen associates of diverse ethnic makeup. Greenup worked primarily in the area of litigation, and many of his cases were pro bono. Greenup spent six weeks during the summer of 1964 in St. Augustine, Florida, defending Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his followers. Over the years, he also represented the NAACP, CORE, and SNCC.

Greenup served as legal counsel to the Harlem Urban Development Corporation during its entire existence and was elected as president of the New York Branch of the NAACP, where he served six consecutive terms. He litigated several famous cases, including his representation of the family of Clifford Glover, a ten-year-old black youth killed by a New York City police officer, successfully winning a significant monetary reward from the City of New York. In 1984, Greenup would serve as one of the founding members of the Metropolitan Black Bar Association, an organization determined to advance equality, excellence and support minorities in the legal profession.

Throughout the 1980s, Greenup traveled extensively. He was selected to travel to Russia to study the Russian legal system and was sent to South Africa to ensure the legitimacy of the nation's first democratically-held election. The NAACP awarded Greenup a Valor Award in 1991. He also received the Wiley A. Branton Award from the National Bar Association and the Ming Advocacy Award from the New York City NAACP.

Greenup passed away on March 1, 2013 at the age of 93. He was the father of two daughters, Carolann and Melanie Theresa Greenup.

Jeff Greenup was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 5, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Jeff Greenup was conducted by Shawn Wilson on April 26, 2007, April 28, 2007 and April 5, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights lawyer Jeff Greenup (1919 - 2013) was a former president of the New York NAACP, one of the founding members of the Metropolitan Black Bar Association, and co-founded the law firm, Greenup, Schimmel, Golar & Levister.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Greenup, Jeff, 1919-2013

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Greenup, Jeff, 1919-2013 --Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Interviews

African American lawyers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Lawyer

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, April 26, 2007, April 28, 2007 and April 5, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_001_001, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

Jeff Greenup was born on March 24, 1919 in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana to Emmaline Jones Greenup and Wallace Greenup. His mother grew up on a farm in Louisiana with her two brothers, one of whom became a blacksmith. Greenup's father also grew up in Louisiana with several siblings, one of whom, Jeff Greenup, was murdered as a teenager by a group of white men. Greenup, who was named for this uncle, did not know of his death until early adulthood. Greenup's parents raised ten children on a farm in East Baton Rouge Parish, where Greenup attended the Cornucopia School alongside future football coach Eddie Robinson. At thirteen years old, Greenup was arrested with his father for refusing to sell melons to a white merchant at a discounted price. Their pastor, Gideon T. Carter, Sr., requested help from NAACP Director Walter White, who sent attorney A.P. Tureaud to secure their release. Tureaud successfully litigated the case; and, from that time, Greenup aspired to become a lawyer.

African American civil rights workers--Interviews.

African American lawyers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_001_002, TRT: 0:30:17 ?

Jeff Greenup grew up in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, where his parents, Emmaline Jones Greenup and Wallace Greenup, were farmers. On one occasion when Greenup was young, a merchant sold his father poor quality seed potatoes. His father decided to confront the seller, but Greenup's mother called a prayer meeting, and a neighboring white farmer donated a share of his own seeds to Greenup's family. Greenup joined the NAACP as a teenager; and, while serving as a sergeant in the U.S. Army, recruited everyone in his unit as NAACP members. Throughout his childhood, Greenup searched for distant relatives who shared his surname, and once wagered with his aunt that he could find a Greenup unrelated to him. Although he found two towns, Greenup, Illinois and Greenup, Kentucky, his aunt claimed they were named for distant relatives. Later, Greenup became an attorney in New York City, and spoke to another lawyer named Greenup, but was forced to cancel their lunch plans due to a delay in court.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_001_003, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

Jeff Greenup joined the U.S. Army during World War II. He trained at Camp Stewart in Georgia, where he heard a speech from Mary McLeod Bethune. The U.S. Army was segregated at the time, and Greenup was assigned to an all-black unit under the command of Captain James B. Moore, a white man, who asked the soldiers to report any discrimination by the other white officers. Upon returning to the United States, Greenup became the first of his siblings to attend college. He went on to study law, and joined the staff of the NAACP in New York City. While there, Greenup learned that his paternal aunt, CORE activist Charlotte B. Greenup, had been arrested for registering voters in their home state

of Louisiana; and returned to represent her case. Greenup also talks about his aunt's career in Chicago, Illinois, where she worked for Congressman Oscar Stanton De Priest; and describes his maternal cousin, Johnnie Jones, who served as the lead attorney for the bus boycott of 1953 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_001_004, TRT: 0:30:27 ?

Jeff Greenup was jailed at thirteen years old for refusing to sell melons to a white merchant in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Civil rights lawyer A.P. Tureaud secured his release; and, fearing for their son's safety, Greenup's parents sent him to live with a family friend in New Orleans, Louisiana. There, he attended Albert Wicker Junior High School and McDonogh No. 35 Senior High School; and worked at a drugstore, gas station and restaurant. After serving in World War II, Greenup attended the Brooklyn Law School in New York. He was offered a teaching position at Southern University Law School in Baton Rouge, but decided to practice law in New York City. During his career, he successfully defended an African American student at a recently integrated school in West Chester County, New York, who had been charged with assault for striking a white student who spit on her. Later in life, Greenup met A.P. Tureaud, Jr., the son of the attorney who inspired him to practice civil rights law.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_002_005, TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Jeff Greenup served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He completed his training at Camp Steward in Georgia, and was slated to attend Officer Candidate School; but, after a riot at the camp, he was deployed overseas to Perth, Australia, and then to Bombay, India. Upon his discharge, Greenup lived at the Harlem YMCA in New York City, and attended Brooklyn's Long Island University, where he was influenced by Dean Tristram Walker Metcalfe. On campus, he was active in political groups, and led the Democratic club in 1948, when Harry S. Truman unexpectedly won the U.S. presidency. Upon beginning his law career, Greenup worked in Florida with a group of lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union. There, his white colleagues were frequently targeted for associating with African Americans, and once had to be rescued by federal marshals. Greenup also recalls fearing for his life while arguing a case in segregated Quincy, Florida, where the judge had never met a black attorney.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_002_006, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Jeff Greenup was admitted to the bar in 1954; and joined the staff of the NAACP New York Branch, where he eventually became chairman of the Legal Redress Committee. For his first case, he represented a lawsuit on behalf of a woman whose husband was killed by police in Nassau County, New York. Later, he assisted his paternal aunt, CORE activist Charlotte B. Greenup, following her arrest in Clinton, Louisiana. His aunt had led the voter registration efforts in Clinton; and, when her group wrote to the leaders of East Feliciana Parish requesting an integrated council to address racial conflicts, the district attorney demanded their arrest, referring to CORE as a criminal conspiracy. Greenup also worked with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in St. Augustine, Florida, where he helped thwart an attempt on Dr. King's life. During this time, Greenup established the law firm of Mack, McFadden and Greenup in New York City with Malcolm C. McFadden and Ruben H. Mack, his peers from the Brooklyn Law School.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_002_007, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Jeff Greenup first met attorney Thurgood Marshall as a young member of the NAACP, and often competed with the other youth members for the honor of carrying Marshall's briefcase. In 1954, Marshall allowed Greenup to carry his briefcase into the U.S. Supreme Court during the arguments for Brown v. Board

of Education of Topeka. Greenup admired Marshall's conversational style of argumentation, and went on to practice civil rights law himself. He worked in this capacity with Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. in St. Augustine, Florida, where their group was warned by a white child about a threat to Dr. King's life. Greenup remembers their strategies for evading such attacks, as well as avoiding arrest by southern law enforcement, who often targeted civil rights activists. Later, Greenup represented the family of eleven year old Clifford Glover, who was killed by white police officer Thomas Shea in 1973. After Shea was acquitted, the defense lawyer apologized to Greenup, as he knew the defendant was guilty.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_002_008, TRT: 0:31:08 ?

Jeff Greenup continued to practice law after moving to Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, where he enrolled his daughters, Carolann Greenup and Melanie Greenup, in the public schools. Greenup often represented cases pro bono, and mentored his former clients, including a teenaged boy accused of theft, who went on to become a dentist; and a girl who faced assault charges for defending herself from racial discrimination at school. Although she could not afford to pay Greenup for his services, she thanked him with an honorary plaque. Later, Greenup organized the law firm of Greenup, Schimmel, Golar and Levister, where he was tasked with the defense of a man charged with robbery. Greenup located witnesses with exculpatory evidence, but they initially refused to come forward, as it would reveal their affair. However, Judge Vito Titone offered to seal the record of their testimony, and the defendant was acquitted. Greenup also explains his decision to turn down a judicial appointment.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_002_009, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Jeff Greenup served as counsel to New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller during the era of Rockefeller Republicanism, and befriended attorney Gloria Toote, who was a member of Rockefeller's staff. Later, Greenup joined the Harlem Urban Development Corporation, and argued for its independence from Edward J. Logue's New York State Urban Development Corporation. When the organization gained independence, Greenup was offered a place on the board, but turned it down. In addition, Greenup talks about black physician Godfrey Nurse; who, in his role as a surgeon at Harlem Hospital, saw many patients suffering from asthma due to substandard housing. When Nurse attempted to buy and redevelop a housing property in Harlem, his bid was rejected, and the site was sold to a white property development company. At the time of the interview, Greenup represented the original tenants, whom the property firm was attempting to evict. Greenup also reflects upon the changes in Harlem's real estate market and demographics.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_003_010, TRT: 0:30:18 ?

Jeff Greenup was chairman of the NAACP New York Branch Legal Redress Committee when its president, Basil Paterson, decided to run for the U.S. Senate. The organization's board then elected Greenup to serve as president, a position he held from 1950 to 1960, for a total of five terms. During his tenure, Greenup sued the City College of New York to increase the diversity of its student body, as there were many qualified African Americans in the school's neighborhood. While practicing law in New York City, Greenup helped to found the Metropolitan Black Bar Association, which merged the Harlem Lawyers Association and the Bedford Stuyvesant Lawyers Association in order to increase the organizations' power and reach. Greenup worked with lawyers from both associations, including Wallace L. Ford, II, Howard Bell and Shirley Stewart Farmer. In the 1980s, Greenup travelled with the U.S. State Department

to study the legal system of the Soviet Union, where he was more welcome than his white colleagues.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_003_011, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Jeff Greenup travelled to South Africa with the National Bar Association to study the country's judicial system, following its first democratic election in 1994. Later, he returned to work with the South African board of elections alongside former National Bar Association president Arnette Hubbard. Greenup recalls his arrival in South Africa, including his surprise at the country's well developed infrastructure; as well as a conversation with a black South African, who reminded him that the country was built by oppressed labor. In recognition of his achievements with the NAACP, Greenup was honored with the William Robert Ming Advocacy Award, the NAACP Men of Valor award and the Wiley A. Branton Award. He describes his hopes for the next generation of lawyers, and concludes this part of the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_003_012, TRT: 0:30:42 ?

Jeff Greenup narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Jeff Greenup, Section A2007_125_003_013, TRT: 0:05:47 ?

Jeff Greenup narrates his photographs.