

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Dempsey, Alford J., 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr.,
Dates:	April 20, 2011
Bulk Dates:	2011
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:56:05).
Abstract:	County superior court judge The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr. (1947 -) has been the presiding judge of the Fulton County Superior Court in Atlanta, Georgia and was instrumental in the development and implementation of the Fulton County Family Court. Dempsey was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 20, 2011, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2011_019
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

County Superior Court Judge Alford J. Dempsey, Jr. was born on March 19, 1947 in Atlanta, Georgia to his parents Alford J. Dempsey, Sr. and Maenelle Dempsey. His father served in the U.S. Army and was assigned to General Eisenhower's honor guard in Europe after World War II. While growing up, Dempsey wanted to join the military to emulate his father. His mother was an educator who worked for the State of Georgia's Department of Education, developing schools in African American communities throughout Georgia. In 1965, Dempsey graduated from New Hampton School, a boarding school in New Hampshire where he played football, basketball, and baseball. Dempsey entered Columbia University that same year as a pre-med student. While at Columbia, Dempsey participated in the 1968 student protests. He later transferred to Morehouse College in Atlanta where he graduated with honors with his B.A. degree in economics in 1972 and in 1976, Dempsey earned his J.D. degree from Harvard Law School. Dempsey began his legal career working on Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign. He later became assistant city attorney for the City of Atlanta's Department of Law. In 1992, Dempsey was named judge of the Magistrate Court of Fulton County/State Court in Atlanta. He was appointed by Fulton County State Court Chief Clarence Coopers. In 1995, Dempsey was then appointed to the Fulton County Superior Court by Governor Zell Miller where he presided over civil and felony criminal cases. Dempsey was also instrumental in the development and implementation of the Fulton County Family Court. Dempsey has presided over many high profile cases throughout his career including the case involving the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and allegations of mispending by its leadership.

Dempsey has served as a member of a number of professional legal organizations, including the American Judges Association, the American Judicature Society, the Atlanta Bar Association (Past Chair Judicial Section), the Bleckley Inn of Court, the Gate City Bar Association (Immediate Past Chair Judicial Section), and the National Bar Association. Dempsey has also been active in numerous community organizations including serving as the District Chair of the South Atlanta District of the Boy Scouts of America, a Board member and past president of the Board

of Carrie Steele-Pitts Home and a Board member of Sisters By Choice, Inc.

Alford J. Dempsey, Jr. was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 20, 2011.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr. was conducted by Denise Gines on April 20, 2011, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. County superior court judge The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr. (1947 -) has been the presiding judge of the Fulton County Superior Court in Atlanta, Georgia and was instrumental in the development and implementation of the Fulton County Family Court.

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:

Dempsey, Alford J., 1947-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Dempsey, Alford J., 1947- --Interviews

African American judges--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

County Superior Court Judge

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 The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., April 20, 2011. 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 The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., Section
A2011_019_001_001, TRT: 1:28:31 ?

County Superior Court Judge Alford James Dempsey, Jr., was born on March 19, 1947, in Atlanta, Georgia. His father, Alford James Dempsey, Sr., was born in Americus, Georgia, on December 10, 1911. At an early age, Alford, Sr.'s older brother moved the family to Aliquippa, Pennsylvania when their parents died. Dempsey's father graduated from Morris Brown College with a degree in biology and spent a large portion of his career in the U.S. Army's 92nd Division. Dempsey's mother, Maenelle Dixon Dempsey, was born in Newnan, Georgia, November 8, 1912. Her parents were William L. Dixon, Jr., a master brick mason, and Opal Hunter Dixon. She was a supervisor, traveling around the South setting up school systems for African American children. She graduated from Spelman College in 1933. His mother received a Rosenwald Fellowship and earned her M.Ed. degree from the University of California Berkeley in 1943.

United States. Army. Infantry Division, 92nd.

World War, 1939-1945.

African American families--Georgia.

African American educators.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., Section
A2011_019_001_002, TRT: 2:29:20 ?

County Superior Court Judge Alford Dempsey, Jr., describes how his parents met in Butts County, Georgia, where his mother hired his father for his first teaching job. Dempsey's earliest childhood memory is being scratched in the face by a classmate at Spelman College Nursery School. Dempsey has an adopted brother named, Albert Jean Pierre Dempsey. The interviewer and Dempsey discuss McLendon Hospital, a black hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, and Dr. Asa Yancey and family, who were well known physicians and lawyers. Dempsey describes the sights, sounds, and smells of his neighborhood, remembering the sound of trains from the railroad tracks near his home and the smell of grass. Dempsey describes his childhood neighborhood, which was mostly African American middle class. Dempsey attended Oglethorpe Elementary until 1960. Dempsey's family have been longtime members of the First Congregational Church. Outside of school, Dempsey was a member of Boy Scout Troop #99.

African Americans--Georgia--Butts County.

African Americans--Education--Georgia--Butts County.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., Section
A2011_019_001_003, TRT: 3:28:37 ?

County Superior Court Judge Alford Dempsey, Jr., began playing sports around the fourth grade and continued through high school. He graduated from Oglethorpe Elementary School in 1960, and then went on to Washington High School. Dempsey left Washington High after eighth grade and went to boarding school in New Hampshire at the New Hampton School in 1962. He found the transition to the New Hampton School to be difficult. His parents were not very active in the Civil Rights Movement because his father was in the military and it was frowned upon. His mother was involved as an educator advocating for better education in African American schools. There were only three African Americans at New Hampton School. Dempsey was elected to the student council his sophomore year, and became a proctor his senior year. In 1965, Dempsey enrolled as a pre-med freshman at Columbia University in New York, New

York.

Columbia University.

Boarding schools--New Hampshire.

Academical and Theological Institution (New Hampton, N.H.).

Social advocacy.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., Section
A2011_019_001_004, TRT: 4:28:07 ?

County Superior Court Judge Alford Dempsey, Jr., began at Columbia University as a pre-med student in 1965. He felt the professors at the university were not committed to the African American students. Due to this discrimination, Dempsey did not do well during school. However, he remained in school to avoid being drafted into the Vietnam War. Dempsey was a member of the Student's Afro-American Society and was a founding member of Omega Psi Phi's Omicron. Dempsey was involved in the student takeover of the administration building in 1968, when students took over the administration building in protest of gymnasium construction in Morningside Park. Despite the university's efforts to expand in other parts of Harlem, the protest was successful and the school never built the gym in Morningside Park. Dempsey was also a part of a ten-piece band with five singers called the Soul Syndicate.

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity.

Discrimination in higher education--New York.

Morningside Park (New York, N.Y.)--History.

Columbia University--Student strike, 1968.

Black power--New York (State)--New York--History.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., Section
A2011_019_001_005, TRT: 5:29:59 ?

County Superior Court Judge Alford Dempsey, Jr. transferred from Columbia University to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia in 1969, because he received a high draft number and was no longer in danger of being drafted. Upon his return to Atlanta, he worked at The Bird Cage Restaurant and Lounge as a bartender. He got married to Colleen Bozman in August of 1970. While at Morehouse, Dempsey worked full time at the airport loading food onto planes. Dempsey graduated with his B.A. degree in economics in 1972, after which he applied and accepted admission to Harvard Law School in 1973. During his second year at Harvard Law School, Dempsey was hired by the Massachusetts Public Defender's Office. In 1976, he moved his family back to Atlanta, Georgia, and worked for the 1976 James Carter Presidential Campaign, after which he was hired by the City Attorney's Office in Atlanta, Georgia.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

City attorneys--Georgia.

Carter, Jimmy, 1924-.

Harvard Law School.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., Section
A2011_019_001_006, TRT: 6:38:48 ?

County Superior Court Judge Alford Dempsey discusses his work with the Minority and Female Business Enterprise Program with the City of Atlanta Attorney's Office, created by Mayor Maynard Jackson. Dempsey states that Mayor Jackson pushed the powers of the city mayor to its limits, creating a strong mayoral city government. Dempsey discusses the 1979 Atlanta Child

Murders, but he did not have a direct role in the investigation. Dempsey remained at the City of Atlanta Attorney's Office from 1977 to 1992. He was involved with the Personnel and Civil Service Board, had a small private practice and taught in the department of social work at Atlanta University. Dempsey was appointed to the Magistrate Court in 1992 presiding over the small claims court and probable cause hearings. Governor Zell Miller appointed Dempsey to the Fulton County Superior Court in 1995.

Minority business enterprise--Georgia--Atlanta.

Women-owned business enterprises--Georgia--Atlanta.

City attorneys--Georgia.

Jackson, Maynard, 1938-2003.

Georgia. Superior Court (Fulton County).

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., Section A2011_019_001_007, TRT: 7:28:13 ?

County Superior Court Judge Alford Dempsey was appointed to the Fulton County Superior Court in 1995. Dempsey has run and been elected every four years since 1996. Dempsey discusses the important cases over which he has presided during his career. He mentions handling cases with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and several death penalty cases that never went to trial. In 1999, Dempsey's wife was diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer and died in 2003. He was involved with Sisters by Choice, an organization that provides support and education to women with breast cancer, and free medical care for breast cancer patients. Dempsey became involved with a state pilot project to find a more humane way of dealing with domestic disputes and divorce by streamlining the process. They also created a simplified docket to deal with the case backlog in Fulton County and to separate out less complex felony cases.

Georgia. Superior Court (Fulton County).

Law--United States--Cases.

September 11 Terrorist Attacks, 2001.

Community service--Georgia--Atlanta.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., Section A2011_019_001_008, TRT: 8:13:56 ?

County Superior Court Judge Alford Dempsey discusses the Brian Nichols case, in which Nichols escaped while being held at the Fulton County Court, before going on a shooting spree throughout the building killing three people. Dempsey feels that he has an obligation to do good works for his community, as an extension of his family's values. He has been involved in many philanthropic organizations such as the Carrie Steele-Pitts Home, which houses abandoned and neglected children. He has served on the board of directors for that organization. Dempsey believes that education is important for future generations. He hopes his legacy is that he helped make his community a little better. Dempsey became a judge to serve a public need and to provide fairness in the judicial system.

Community service--Georgia--Atlanta.

Nichols, Brian.

Education--Aims and objectives.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Alford Dempsey, Jr., Section A2011_019_001_009, TRT: 9:10:34 ?