

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable William Sylvester White

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	White, William Sylvester, 1914-2004
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Sylvester White,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 5, 2000
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2000
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:18:34).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Juvenile court judge and military officer The Honorable William Sylvester White (1914 - 2004 ) was one of the first African American officers in the United States Navy, known as the "Golden Thirteen." In the 1960s, White became a judge in Chicago, and by 1990, he began his tenure as a Juvenile Court justice. White was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 5, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2000_041
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Judge William Sylvester White was born in Chicago, Illinois, on July 27, 1914. He attended law school at the University of Chicago after graduating from Hyde Park High School. Upon graduation, he was hired as the assistant U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, where he tried a myriad of cases and enjoyed the experience thoroughly. After fifteen years at this position, he became assistant state's attorney for Cook County.

Interested in becoming a judge, White involved himself in local politics, and his stellar performance earned him three separate appointments between 1961 and 1964. In 1972, White was honored by the Cook County Bar Association as Judge of the Year. In 1990, he began his tenure as a Juvenile Court justice and his expertise in this area garnered him several awards and honors over the years. In additions to these credits, White has also authored and co-authored several articles.

Prior to his judicial career White joined the United States Navy in 1943. White became one of the Navy's first commissioned African American officers in March of 1944, along with twelve other African American men. These men were later known as the "Golden Thirteen." Although nearly one hundred thousand African Americans were enlisted in the Navy, none were considered officers until this date.

White passed away on February 16, 2004.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable William Sylvester White was conducted by Julieanna L.

Richardson on September 5, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Juvenile court judge and military officer The Honorable William Sylvester White (1914 - 2004 ) was one of the first African American officers in the United States Navy, known as the "Golden Thirteen." In the 1960s, White became a judge in Chicago, and by 1990, he began his tenure as a Juvenile Court justice.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

White, William Sylvester, 1914-2004

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

White, William Sylvester, 1914-2004--Interviews

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African American judges--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Cook County (Ill.)

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United States. Navy

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## Occupations:

Juvenile Court Judge

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Military Officer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|MilitaryMakers

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## 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 William Sylvester White, September 5, 2000. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Sylvester White, Section A2000\_041\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Judge William S. White describes his family's background, explaining that both of his parents attended college and earned degrees, a noteworthy achievement at the time. White recalls his childhood growing up on Chicago's South Side, describing his favorite activities, his home life, and his schools. White also talks about him being rather class conscious for a small child.

African American families.

African American communities--Illinois--Chicago--South Side.

Childhood--Illinois--Chicago.

African American parents--Education.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Sylvester White, Section A2000\_041\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:02 ?

Judge William S. White continues to share memories about his childhood and youth in Chicago, Illinois and also discusses his education. White explains his decision to attend the University of Chicago for both his undergraduate and law school studies. White talks about his success there and his early career as a lawyer. White's big break came when he was hired to be an assistant United States attorney. White describes many of the cases he tried in this new position.

Childhood and youth--Illinois--Chicago.

African Americans--Education.

University of Chicago. Law School.

United States. Attorney (Illinois : Northern District).

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Sylvester White, Section A2000\_041\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Judge William S. White narrates several stages of his career. He begins by describing his time as assistant U.S. Attorney, and explains how his time in that position was cut short by his being drafted into the Navy during World War II. White describes his experience as one of the Golden Thirteen, the first thirteen blacks to be commissioned as officers in the Navy. White then explains how he got his career started again after the war, first as the Illinois State Attorney, and then as a judge for the Circuit Court of Cook County.

United States--Armed Forces--African American officers.

Draft--United States.

United States. Attorney--Illinois.

Illinois. Circuit Court (Cook County)--African American judges.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Sylvester White, Section A2000\_041\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Judge William S. White evaluates his long career as a judge, first with the Circuit Court of Cook County. White discusses his time in the Criminal Court and the Juvenile Court, explaining how his rulings helped to revolutionize juvenile court systems across the country by insisting that juvenile suspects be given the same rights as adult suspects. White then reflects back on his law career and recommends it as a profession, as well as describing how he would like to be remembered.

Illinois. Circuit Court (Cook County)--Juvenile Courts.

Vocational guidance.

Illinois. Circuit Court (Cook County)--Criminal courts.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Sylvester White, Section A2000\_041\_001\_005, TRT: 0:16:39 ?

The Honorable William Sylvester White narrates his photographs.  
Pictures.