

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Robert L. Carter

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Carter, Robert L., 1917-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Robert L. Carter,
Dates:	May 22, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:24:38).
Abstract:	Federal judge and lawyer The Honorable Robert L. Carter (1917 - 2012) began his law career as an assistant to Thurgood Marshall. Later, Carter became a lawyer for the NAACP for twenty-four years. During his tenure, he argued twenty-two cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, including Brown v. Board of Education, and won twenty-one. Carter was appointed as a U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of New York in 1972. Carter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 22, 2001, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_012
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born on March 11, 1917, in Careyville, Florida, Robert L. Carter moved north to Newark, New Jersey, as an infant, with his mother. Carter's childhood was beset by family tragedy. He lost three siblings and his father, all during his early childhood years. Studious and introspective, Carter excelled in school, skipping two grades and graduating from high school at age 16. He received a scholarship

that enabled him to attend Lincoln University, and upon receiving his A.B. in Political Science, was offered a scholarship to Howard University's School of Law.

After obtaining his Masters in Law from Columbia University, Carter was drafted into the armed forces. The pervasive racial prejudice he encountered affected him deeply, and shortly after he ended his tour of duty, he was hired as an assistant to NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall. Carter would stay on as a lawyer for the NAACP for the next 24 years. During his tenure, he argued 22 cases before the U.S. Supreme Court (including *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)) and won 21.

After *Brown v. Board of Education*, many southern states sought to stem the tide of desegregation by aggressively intimidating the organization most responsible, the NAACP. Attempting to incapacitate the NAACP, southern states passed legislation that required the organization to make its membership lists public, believing that this would intimidate and cow NAACP supporters. In a series of cases, beginning with *NAACP v. Alabama* (1958), Carter argued successfully that such legislation violated the NAACP's first amendment right to free speech, because it was clearly intended to intimidate people. In each instance, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Carter and the NAACP; the membership maintained its anonymity; and the NAACP remained a powerful force for desegregation in the South.

After leaving the NAACP in 1968, Carter spent several years at a private law firm before he was appointed as a U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of New York in 1972. He held adjunct faculty positions at the University of Michigan and New York University law schools and at Yale University graduate school. Carter was an outspoken advocate of equal rights, and made headlines when he decried the rampant racial prejudice plaguing the criminal justice system.

Over his lengthy and esteemed career, Judge Carter was the recipient of many awards, honors and degrees. He sat on dozens of boards, committees and task forces and published numerous articles.

Carter passed away on January 3, 2012 at age 94.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Robert L. Carter was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 22, 2001, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Federal judge and lawyer The

Honorable Robert L. Carter (1917 - 2012) began his law career as an assistant to Thurgood Marshall. Later, Carter became a lawyer for the NAACP for twenty-four years. During his tenure, he argued twenty-two cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, including *Brown v. Board of Education*, and won twenty-one. Carter was appointed as a U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of New York in 1972.

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:

Carter, Robert L., 1917-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Carter, Robert L., 1917---Interviews

African American judges--New York (State)--Interviews.

United States--Army--African Americans--Social conditions--20th century

Howard University. Law Dept.

Marshall, Thurgood, 1908-1993

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka

Constitutional law--United States

United States.Supreme Court--Cases

Criminal justice, Administration of--United States

Crime and race--United States

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. District Court (New York : Southern District)

Occupations:

Federal Judge

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 The Honorable Robert L. Carter, May 22, 2001. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Robert L. Carter,
Section A2001_012_001_001, TRT: 0:36:29 2001/05/22

Robert L. Carter describes his family background, telling of his family's migration from Florida to New Jersey during the Great Migration period. Carter recalls growing up in Newark, New Jersey, and describes his experience attending school in a mostly white neighborhood. In particular, he remembers a school teacher who discouraged him from his ambitions to attend college. Carter says that his mother nurtured and encouraged these ambitions starting from an early age. Carter discusses his time at Lincoln University, where he had a positive experience majoring in sociology. From there, he describes studying law at Howard University. Carter recalls the distinguished faculty at Howard who placed an emphasis on constitutional law. Carter begins to describe his time in the U.S. Army, in which he encountered severe racism.

African American judges--New York (State)--Interviews.

African American lawyers--Interviews.

Rural-urban migration--United States.

Newark (N.J.)--Social life and customs.

Discrimination in education--New Jersey.

African American soldiers--Social conditions--20th century.

Howard University. Law Dept.

Marshall, Thurgood, 1908-1993.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.

Constitutional law--United States.

United States. Supreme Court--Cases.

Criminal justice, Administration of--United States.

Crime and race--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Robert L. Carter,
Section A2001_012_001_002, TRT: 0:30:02 2001/05/22

Robert L. Carter describes his time in the U.S. Army, focusing on dealing with the racism he faced during all of his nearly four years in the military. Carter explains how he came to work with Thurgood Marshall at the NAACP after getting out of the military. He describes the working environment at the NAACP, and details numerous winning cases in his and the organization's fight against segregation, including the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education*. Carter discusses some of the NAACP's strategies behind many of these cases, including dealing with opposition from the black middle class. He reflects on his incredible success record arguing in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, but still painfully remembers the one case he lost. Before briefly discussing the beginning of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Carter tells of how his time at the NAACP came to an end over a dispute about an article in the *New York Times*.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Robert L. Carter,
Section A2001_012_001_003, TRT: 0:18:07 2001/05/22

Robert L. Carter describes the progression of his law career, explaining his move from the NAACP to a private firm and then his appointment as District Court Judge in New York City. Carter then reflects on *Brown v. Board of Education* and its impact on African Americans and on American society in general. Carter expresses his hopes and concerns for the black community, focusing on a need to eliminate prejudice from the criminal justice system.