

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Earl Neal

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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>	Neal, Earl Langdon, 1928-2005
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Earl Neal,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 30, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:33:54).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Trial lawyer Earl Neal (1928 - 2005 ) was assistant corporation council for the city of Chicago before forming his own firm. Neal was president of University of Illinois Board of Trustees and chair of Chicago/Gary Regional Airport Authority. Neal was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 30, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_085
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

For three generations the name Neal has been a benchmark of commitment, integrity and extreme professionalism. Earl Langdon Neal stands as one of the most respected attorneys on the Chicago legal scene. The son of Chicago attorney Earl James Neal, Earl Langdon Neal was born in Chicago on April 16, 1928. He received his B.A. from the University of Illinois in 1949, and his J.D. from Michigan Law School in 1952.

Following his graduation from law school, Neal served briefly in the United States

Army. In 1955, he joined his father's law firm, Neal & Neal. Their first trial together took them to Lincoln, Illinois. The two were forced to commute from Chicago because Lincoln, nearly one hundred and seventy miles away, had no hotels that would admit African Americans. In 1960, Neal began working with the Chicago city government. That year Neal was appointed assistant Corporation Counsel and worked closely with the Bureau of Engineering in acquiring land for the Dan Ryan and Kennedy rapid transit extension projects. He also served as trial lawyer for the Land Acquisition Division and the Land Clearance Committee. In 1962, Neal accepted the responsibility as principal of his father's law firm after his father was appointed judge. In 1968, he formed his own firm, Earl L. Neal and Associates and continued to handle trial work for the city of Chicago and other public agencies.

In 1975, Neal was elected President of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees. His election made him the first ever African American trustee in the United States. While serving his twelve-year tenure, he helped to guide debates over issues of minority medical school recruitment and the provision of health services to the surrounding community. He was also instrumental in launching land acquisition and development of the University of Illinois Circle Campus. In 1995, Mayor Richard M. Daley appointed Neal chair of the Chicago/Gary Regional Airport Authority. As chair, Neal concentrated his efforts in support of an economic and strategic solution to the growing aviation transport demands on the region.

Earl Langdon Neal was the recipient of a host of honors and awards, including the Robert S. Abbott Memorial Award; the Justice John Paul Stevens Award; and the Defender of Justice Award. His community work included membership in the Chicago Urban League, the NAACP, and co-chairmanship of the Teachers Academy for Mathematics and Science. He resided in Chicago with his wife, Isobel. Their son, Langdon Neal, is an attorney.

Neal passed away on February 13, 2005.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Earl Neal was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 30, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Trial lawyer Earl Neal (1928 - 2005 ) was assistant corporation council for the city of Chicago before forming his own firm. Neal was president of University of Illinois Board of Trustees and chair of Chicago/Gary

## **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:**

Neal, Earl Langdon, 1928-2005

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Neal, Earl Langdon, 1928-2005--Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Trial Lawyer

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

LawMakers

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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 Earl Neal, May 30, 2002. 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).

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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 Earl Neal, Section  
A2002\_085\_001\_001, TRT: 0:23:54 2002/05/30

Earl Neal narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Earl Neal, Section  
A2002\_085\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:03 2002/05/30

Earl Neal was born on April 16, 1928 in Chicago, Illinois, to Evelyn Smith Neal and Earl J. Neal. His maternal grandmother, Emma Smith was descended from free blacks in Ohio, and his paternal grandfather, Langdon Smith, was one of the first black insurance salesman in Montgomery, Alabama. Smith later managed the estate of the wealthy Maytag family in Colorado, and subsequently, Neal would spend his summers there growing up. Neal's father was also from Chicago, and his paternal grandparents died when his father was young. His father graduated from Chicago-Kent College of Law and became a successful Chicago lawyer and judge. Neal grew up in a segregated neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois, where he lived in an apartment building his grandmother owned before losing it during the Depression. He attended the largest public school in the city, Forrestville Elementary School, where his mother was a teacher. Neal later attended Englewood High School and experienced gang violence in his neighborhood; but he describes his

supportive family and friends.

Video Oral History Interview with Earl Neal, Section  
A2002\_085\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:58 2002/05/30

Earl Neal grew up in Chicago, Illinois, in a mostly black neighborhood, where his family attended Christ Scientist Church. Neal became interested in politics, and while at Englewood High School, he worked for Chicago Alderman Kenneth Campbell. Initially wanting to attend the nearby Parker High School in Chicago, Neal had to attend Englewood High School, which was in the district, where he felt he received an inadequate education. In 1945, he attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he joined Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. Though he experienced discrimination there, Neal developed his friendships with many of the students. He majored in political science with goals of attending law school. After graduating from the University of Illinois in 1949, Neal went to the University of Michigan Law School and graduated from there in 1952. After graduating from law school, where he met his future wife, HistoryMaker Isobel Neal, he was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1952.

Video Oral History Interview with Earl Neal, Section  
A2002\_085\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:11 2002/05/30

Earl Neal was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1952 after graduating from the University of Michigan Law School, where he served in Orleans, France. He returned to Chicago, Illinois in 1955 and joined his father's, Earl J. Neal, law firm. Neal worked for the Chicago Land Clearance Commission, which developed Lake Meadows and Prairie Shores public housing projects from 1955 to 1960. In 1960, he began representing the city of Chicago, where he helped acquire land for the interstate expansion projects. Neal then represented the city of Chicago in HistoryMaker Renault Robinson's discrimination case against the city in 1976, and he describes the difficulties surrounding that case for him and his wife, HistoryMaker Isobel Neal. After the conclusion of the case, Neal began to move away from the legal profession and into the corporate world, serving on boards of trustees, including serving on the Board of Trustees for the University of

Illinois from 1973 to 1979.

Video Oral History Interview with Earl Neal, Section  
A2002\_085\_001\_005, TRT: 0:31:14 2002/05/30

Earl Neal worked served on the Board of Trustees for the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign from 1973 to 1979, and in 1975, he was elected the President of the Board, becoming the first African American to do so in the United States. During his tenure as President, he helped recruit more minority medical students and developed the Circle Campus of the University. In 1982, he was appointed to chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority by Mayor Jane Byrne, which was difficult and not fulfilling for him. Neal moved away from his legal profession into the corporate world, and then in 1983, Neal served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees of First Federal Savings and Loan in Illinois, one of the largest banks in the United States. Neal reflects on the advice his father, Earl J. Neal, gave him, to be like an iron fist in a velvet glove, and how that helped shape his career. He then describes his hopes and concerns for the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Earl Neal, Section  
A2002\_085\_001\_006, TRT: 0:10:34 2002/05/30