Overview of the Collection

Repository:  The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator:  Keith, Damon J., 1922-2019

Title:  The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Damon J. Keith,

Dates:  August 21, 2002 and March 6, 2007

Bulk Dates:  2002 and 2007

Physical Description:  6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:52:29).

Abstract:  Federal district court judge The Honorable Damon J. Keith (1922 - 2019) has served as a Federal District Appellate Court Judge for the Sixth Circuit since 1977, and was appointed by Jimmy Carter. Keith is a Spingarn Medal winner. In 1993, the Damon J. Keith Law Collection, an archival resource devoted to the substantial historical accomplishments of African American lawyers and judges as well as the African American legal experience, was created at Wayne State University. Keith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 21, 2002 and March 6, 2007, in Detroit, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification:  A2002_154

Language:  The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Judge Damon J. Keith has had an illustrious career. Born on July 4, 1922, he has served as a United States Court of Appeals judge for the Sixth Circuit since 1977. Keith was the youngest of six children born to Annie and Perry Alexander Keith and the first to attend college. He graduated from West Virginia State College in
1943 and was then drafted into the military. His experiences in the segregated Army strengthened his conviction to the cause of civil rights. Keith received a J.D. from Howard Law School in 1949, passed the Michigan bar exam in 1950, and earned an L.L.M. from Wayne State University School of Law in 1956.

In 1964, Keith established his own law practice, Keith, Conyers, Anderson, Brown, & Wahls, with four other African American attorneys. Keith was also very active in the Democratic Party and used his political connections to help his community. He served as the chair to the Detroit Housing Commission and the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Keith to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, where he served as Chief Judge from 1975 to 1977 before President Jimmy Carter appointed him to the Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. Keith took senior status in 1995.

In 1993, the Damon J. Keith Law Collection, an archival resource devoted to the substantial historical accomplishments of African American lawyers and judges as well as the African American legal experience, was created at Wayne State University and named in his honor. Keith has received numerous awards and honors, including: thirty-eight honorary degrees from various colleges and universities; the NAACP's highest award, the Spingarn Medal; the 1997 American Bar Association's Thurgood Marshall Award; the Detroit Urban League's 1998 Distinguished Warrior Award; the Distinguished Public Service Award for the National Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith; the prestigious Edward J. Devitt Award for Distinguished Service to Justice; the Pinnacle Award at the 2000 Trumpet Awards in Atlanta; and the American Bar Association Spirit of Excellence Award in 2001.

Keith has also received the lifetime achievement award from the National Black College Alumni and was inducted into their Hall of Fame. Keith is married to Rachel Boone Keith, M.D., with whom he has three daughters.

Keith passed away on April 28, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Damon J. Keith was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on August 21, 2002 and March 6, 2007, in Detroit, Michigan, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Federal district court judge The Honorable Damon J. Keith (1922 - 2019) has served as a Federal District Appellate Court Judge for the Sixth Circuit since 1977, and was
appointed by Jimmy Carter. Keith is a Spingarn Medal winner. In 1993, the Damon J. Keith Law Collection, an archival resource devoted to the substantial historical accomplishments of African American lawyers and judges as well as the African American legal experience, was created at Wayne State University.

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:

Keith, Damon J., 1922-2019

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)
Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Institution/Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Americans--Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith, Damon J., 1922-2019--Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American judges--Michigan--Interviews</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>African American families--Michigan--Detroit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fathers and sons</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Education--Michigan--Detroit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Glenville State College</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Howard University</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>African American lawyers-Michigan--Detroit--Interviews</td>
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**Organizations:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judicial Council of the Sixth Circuit (U.S.)</td>
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**Occupations:**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal District Court Judge</td>
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**HistoryMakers® Category:**
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


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 Damon J. Keith, Section A2002_154_001_001, TRT: 0:30:26 2002/08/21
Judge Damon Keith remembers specifics from his childhood in Detroit, Michigan. He discusses the social climate surrounding the city's black families. Keith explains the relationship he had with his father and how he was pushed to attend college and not take a manual labor job like many of his peers. Damon Keith describes his education in Detroit and influential teachers who aided him along the way.

African American judges--Michigan--Interviews.
African American families--Michigan--Detroit.
Fathers and sons.
Education--Michigan--Detroit.
Glenville State College.
Howard University.
African American lawyers-Michigan--Detroit--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Damon J. Keith, Section A2002_154_001_002, TRT: 0:31:15 2002/08/21

Judge Damon Keith explains how he ended up attending West Virginia State College and then talks about his experiences there. He sheds some light on how he came to find interest in studying law and remembers the separate but equal policy that allowed him to attend Howard University. He describes how his years at Howard influenced him as he mentions mentors that encouraged him then and throughout his career. Damon Keith talks about lessons he learned while working as an associate for Loomis, Jones, Piper, and Colden.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Damon J. Keith, Section A2002_154_002_003, TRT: 0:29:58 2007/03/06

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Damon J. Keith, Section A2002_154_002_004, TRT: 0:30:45 2007/03/06

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Damon J. Keith, Section A2002_154_002_005, TRT: 0:28:52 2007/03/06

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Damon J. Keith, Section A2002_154_002_006, TRT: 0:21:13 2007/03/06