

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable David Coar

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Coar, David H. (David Herndon), 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David Coar,
Dates:	April 2, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:30:46).
Abstract:	Federal judge The Honorable David Coar (1943 -) was a judge in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, and was later appointed as a judge of the U.S. District Court of Illinois. In this role, Coar has made a number of landmark decisions, including his 1999 fining of anti-abortion leaders under RICO statutes, which had been used to prosecute members of the mafia. Coar was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 2, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_063
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Judge David H. Coar was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on August 11, 1943. Coar was the oldest of three children and attended a religious school at the elementary level before graduating from a public high school in 1960. After commencement, Coar went to Syracuse University, earning his B.A. in 1964. In 1969, he earned his J.D. from Loyola University in Chicago, and a year later he received his LL.M. from Harvard Law School.

Coar began teaching at DePaul University in 1974, and remained there for five years. He left DePaul to take a position with the United States Justice Department as a U.S. trustee. Coar returned to DePaul in 1982, where he remained for another four years. In 1986, Coar was named a judge of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, and in 1994 he became a judge of the U.S. District Court of Illinois. Within this role, Coar has ruled on a number of landmark decisions, including his 1999 fining of anti-abortion leaders under RICO statutes, which had been used to prosecute members of the mafia.

Away from his bench, Coar is active in a number of civic and community organizations. He has been active with the Boys & Girls Clubs and serves on its board of directors. Coar also belongs to the American Bankruptcy Institute and is an active member in the National Bankruptcy Conference.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable David Coar was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 2, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Federal judge The Honorable David Coar (1943 -) was a judge in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, and was later appointed as a judge of the U.S. District Court of Illinois. In this role, Coar has made a number of landmark decisions, including his 1999 fining of anti-abortion

leaders under RICO statutes, which had been used to prosecute members of the mafia.

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:

Coar, David H. (David Herndon), 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Coar, David H. (David Herndon), 1943---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Federal 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 David Coar, April 2, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 6/7/2022 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 David Coar, Section A2003_063_001_001, TRT: 0:28:20 2003/04/02

David Coar describes his family background. His mother, Loraine Raines Coar, was born on February 14, 1919 in Shreveport, Louisiana and attended Tuskegee University in Alabama to become a schoolteacher. His maternal great-great grandmother was the daughter of a slave and a white slave owner who eventually set them free in Western Louisiana. His maternal grandfather married his grandmother in 1917 when he was fifty-seven and she was seventeen. When his great-grandfather died, a land dispute brought into question his grandfather's legitimacy and the court ruled that he was black and could inherit the land. His father, Robert Floyd Coar was born on January 9, 1913 and attended Birmingham Miles College. Although he wanted to be a doctor, he could not afford to attend medical school. Coar recalls visiting his grandmother in Shreveport, Louisiana and the intense segregation of his childhood. Coar

attended Catholic school for three years and then public school. He graduated from A. H. Parker High School in 1960.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David Coar, Section A2003_063_001_002, TRT: 0:29:15 2003/04/02

David Coar talks about his education. After graduating from A.H. Parker High School in 1960, Coar chose to attend Syracuse University in Syracuse, New York because his father insisted that he attend a school outside of the south. Coar initially wanted to play football but asked for an academic scholarship after realizing that he was much smaller than the other linemen. Coar grew up next to HistoryMaker Angela Davis's family on Dynamite Hill, an historically black neighborhood where houses were threatened to be dynamited. Coar points out that there had long been resistance to segregation in Birmingham, Alabama. At Syracuse University, Coar was one of thirty black students out of 17,000 students. Coar, who met other black students in New England, majored in international relations with a concentration on Southeast Asia. After graduating from Syracuse in 1964, Coar joined the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves in 1965 and deferred his admission to Loyola University Chicago Law School for a year.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David Coar, Section A2003_063_001_003, TRT: 0:28:40 2003/04/02

David Coar talks about his law degrees and early career. After serving in the U.S. Marine Corps, Coar worked for a War on Poverty program to help sharecroppers who had been evicted from their land in Alabama in 1965. Coar worked with SNCC and recalls the Civil Rights Movement. When he moved to Chicago, Illinois to attend Loyola University Chicago Law School in 1966, Coar looked up his family friend and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s lawyer, Chauncey Eskridge. Coar was the only African American in his law school class and one of twenty-two black law students in five Chicago law schools. Coar recalls Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech at Soldier Field. After earning his J.D. degree from Loyola, Coar received his LL.M degree from Harvard Law School. Coar then worked for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund where he met HistoryMakers Melvin Watt and Algernon Johnson Cooper, Jr. He practiced civil rights law in Alabama for three years. In 1974, Coar moved to Chicago, Illinois to teach law at DePaul University.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David Coar, Section A2003_063_001_004, TRT: 0:28:41 2003/04/02

David Coar describes his career trajectory. Coar taught at DePaul University College of Law for five years where he was impressed by the program's affirmative action policies. He left DePaul to take a position with the United States Justice Department as a U.S. trustee at the urging of HistoryMaker William Coleman's daughter, Lovida. She told him that if he withdrew there would not be an African American trustee. Coar returned to DePaul in 1982 after President Ronald Reagan's budget cuts caused staffing cuts. Coar served as a poll watcher during Harold Washington's mayoral campaigns in Chicago, Illinois. In 1986, Coar was appointed as a judge of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court following the retirement of Edward Toles, Chicago's first black bankruptcy judge. Coar presided over the high profile cases such as the UNR asbestos case and cases affecting everyday people. In 1994 he became a judge of the U.S. District Court of Illinois. Coar shares his views on Clarence Thomas's appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David Coar, Section A2003_063_001_005, TRT: 0:29:30 2003/04/02

David Coar talks about U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas's

conservatism. As a judge of the U.S. District Court of Illinois., Coar has ruled on a number of landmark decisions, including his 1999 fining of anti-abortion leaders under the RICO statutes, which had been used to prosecute members of the mafia. Coar describes other prominent cases including a defamation case involving the Global Relief Foundation and an internet telephone usage case involving MCI. He also ruled that strip searches in county jails were unconstitutional. Coar states that federal courts are typically generalist which means that judges must be versatile. While his mother influenced his personal beliefs, Coar maintains that he must uphold the law even if he disagrees with it. Coar says that he is still deciding what he wants to do with his life after retirement. Coar envisions a better world for black people where class distinctions are erased and everyone has a fair chance to succeed.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable David Coar, Section A2003_063_001_006, TRT: 0:06:20 2003/04/02

David Coar would like to be remembered as somebody who, who did his best with what he had, and, left the world a little better than the way he found it. Coar sees his legacy as his children and his courage to do what is right. Coar reflects upon the Civil Rights Movement and how each generation has paid the price to lessen the burden for the next generation.