

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles T. Duncan

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Duncan, Charles T., 1924-2004
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles T. Duncan,
Dates:	April 25, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:10:50).
Abstract:	Government lawyer, law professor, and lawyer Charles T. Duncan (1924 - 2004) is the former dean of the Howard University Law School and is a highly respected lawyer and former appointee to several government positions. Duncan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 25, 2003, in Annapolis, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_091
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Charles Duncan was born in Washington, D.C., on October 31, 1924, the only child of his mother, a teacher, and his father, a physician. After starting his education in the D.C. public school system, Duncan attended Mount Hermon Preparatory School for Boys in the tenth grade. After graduation, Duncan went on to Dartmouth College, where he graduated cum laude in 1947. During his time at Dartmouth, Duncan had served in the U.S. Naval Reserve from 1945 to 1946. He went on to study law at Harvard Law School, graduating in 1950.

Duncan began his legal practice in New York, but by 1953 he had moved back to Washington, D.C., to practice with the law firm of Reeves, Robinson & Duncan. While there, he worked on the second brief presented to the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. During that time, Duncan was a lecturer at Howard University Law School between 1954 and 1960. In 1961, Duncan became the principal assistant U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, and in 1965, he was appointed the first general counsel of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. He then went to work for the District of Columbia as corporation counsel, where he oversaw all of the legal affairs of the district and was second in line to the mayor. Duncan returned to private practice in 1970 to work for the firm of Epstein, Friedman, Duncan & Medalie.

Returning to Howard University in 1974, Duncan became dean of Howard University's School of Law, a position he held until 1977. He continued to teach for another year before returning to private practice in 1978, and in 1984 he joined the firm of Reid & Priest as a partner, serving as senior counsel for the firm from 1990 to 1994. Appointed by the secretary of state to the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal in 1994, he lived in the Hague in the Netherlands until leaving the post in 2000. Currently, Duncan works as a senior trustee for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Duncan has served on the board of directors of several companies, including Proctor & Gamble and Eastman Kodak. He is a former trustee of the Supreme Court Historical Society and has served on the boards of the Washington Urban League and the Columbia Hospital for Women, among others. Duncan's first wife, Dorothy, with whom he had one son, died in 1972. He and his wife, Pamela, reside in Maryland.

Duncan passed away on May 4, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles T. Duncan was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 25, 2003, in Annapolis, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Government lawyer, law professor, and lawyer Charles T. Duncan (1924 - 2004) is the former dean of the Howard University Law School and is a highly respected lawyer and former appointee to several government positions.

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:

Duncan, Charles T., 1924-2004

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Washington (D.C.)

Occupations:

Government Lawyer

Law Professor

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 Charles T. Duncan, April 25, 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 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 Charles T. Duncan, Section A2003_091_001_001, TRT: 0:28:55 2003/04/25

Charles Duncan was born on October 31, 1924 in Washington, D.C. to Dr. Charles A. Tignor and Nancy Gladys Jackson Duncan. His paternal grandparents, Ezekiel Tignor and Charlotte Williams Tignor immigrated to Virginia from Martinique. Duncan's biological father was a physician trained at Howard University in Washington, D.C. He died when Duncan was eight years old. Duncan's mother was a teacher who received her training at Miner Teachers College in Washington, D.C. She was a civic activist and participated in D.C.'s Home Rule Movement. She married Todd Duncan after Tignor's death. Duncan was raised in Washington, D.C.'s LeDroit Park, a middle class black neighborhood near Howard University. He was instructed by excellent teachers at Mott Elementary School, Morgan Elementary School, and Patterson Junior High School in D.C. before his mother sent him to Mount Hermon Preparatory School for Boys in Gills, Massachusetts where he learned to ski. Duncan then applied to Dartmouth College in Hanover, New

Hampshire.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles T. Duncan, Section
A2003_091_001_002, TRT: 0:28:55 2003/04/25

Charles Duncan attended Mount Hermon Preparatory School for Boys in Gill, Massachusetts. The school's values reflected Duncan's religious upbringing. Although he was one of the school's only black students, Duncan excelled academically and socially. His academic progress continued at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire where he majored in political science. Duncan's studies were interrupted in 1945 when he was drafted into the U.S. Naval Reserve. He became an ensign in the Reserve's Midshipmen's School at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York where the Navy tested whether enlisted men would listen to orders from black officers. Racially-based tension between Duncan and his captain was made easier given Duncan's abilities as an oscilloscope operator. Duncan then completed his studies at Dartmouth in 1947 and decided become a lawyer. He enrolled at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts but did not enjoy his law school experience. After graduating with a J.D. degree, Duncan struggled to find a job in New York City before he was hired by a Jewish law firm.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles T. Duncan, Section
A2003_091_001_003, TRT: 0:28:25 2003/04/25

Charles Duncan's first job was at Rosenman Goldmark Colin & Kaye in New York City. Duncan left the firm in 1953 and opened his own firm, Reeves, Robinson & Duncan. At the firm, Duncan wrote the second brief presented to the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. He describes the challenge of practicing law as a black lawyer in the 1950s and experiencing racial discrimination in court. In 1961, Duncan was appointed as the Principal Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia under President John F. Kennedy's administration. He attended Kennedy's state funeral in 1963. In 1965, Duncan became general counsel of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in its nascent state where he worked to battle employment discrimination. Duncan then joined

the D.C. Corporation Counsel's Office where he worked with Mayor-Commissioner Walter Washington. Duncan talks about rioting after the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 and his oversight of legal issues during the Poor People's Campaign.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles T. Duncan, Section A2003_091_001_004, TRT: 0:28:20 2003/04/25

Charles Duncan was the Director of Public Safety in Washington, D.C. under Mayor-Commissioner Walter Washington. Duncan and Washington appointed Jerry Wilson as the District's new Chief of Police and worked to improve the police department's standing with its citizens. In 1970, Duncan returned to private practice at the law firm of Epstein, Friedman, Duncan & Medalie before becoming the Dean of Howard Law School in Washington, D.C. in 1974. Duncan left Howard University School of Law in 1978 and practiced at Peabody, Lambert & Meyers, and at Thelen Reid & Priest. In 1994, he was appointed to the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal in the Hague in the Netherlands as part of a nine-member Tribunal. He describes his time on the Tribunal, the cases that he heard, and his experiences abroad. Duncan also reflects upon his legacy and his hopes and concerns for the African American community before sharing a story from his time in the U.S. Naval Reserve. While he was in the U.S. Navy from 1945 to 1946, Duncan advocated for the inclusion of steward's mates in his ship's Christmas party.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles T. Duncan, Section A2003_091_001_005, TRT: 0:16:15 2003/04/25

Charles Duncan describes how he would like to be remembered. He also narrates his photographs.