



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Hon. Thelton E. Henderson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hon. Thelton E. Henderson
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Thelton E. Henderson,
Dates:	April 7, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	8 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:29:35).
Abstract:	Federal district court judge Hon. Thelton E. Henderson (1933 -) is the first African American Chief Judge of the United States District of Northern California, and has served as the Assistant Dean of the Stanford University School of Law. Henderson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 7, 2004, in San Francisco, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_044
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Federal district court judge Thelton Eugene Henderson was born in Shreveport, Louisiana on November 28, 1933 to Wanzie and Eugene Marion Henderson. Henderson grew-up in the South central area of Los Angeles, California in an all-black neighborhood. He graduated from Jefferson High School in Los Angeles and was the recipient of a football scholarship to attend the University of California at Berkeley. In 1956, Henderson graduated with his B.A. degree in political science. Later, in 1962, Henderson earned his J.D. degree from Boalt Hall School of Law at the University of California at Berkeley and was admitted to the California Bar in January of 1963.

Both his high school counselor and football coach were alumnus of the University of California at Berkeley and encouraged him to attend their alma mater. While there, he became interested in African American history and helped to form an organization that catered to African American students. After graduating from college, he was drafted into the United States Army, where he served as a clinical psychology technician. Thereafter, he earned his law degree and was hired as an attorney with the civil rights division of the United States Department of Justice, where he served from 1962 to 1963. During his tenure with the Justice Department, Henderson investigated patterns of discriminatory practices in the South. Returning to Northern California, he practiced general law in private practice and was the directing attorney of the East Bayshore Neighborhood Legal Center in Palo Alto. From 1968 to 1976, Henderson was the assistant dean of the Stanford University School of Law. There, he helped increase minority enrollment to twenty percent of the student body and taught law classes.

In 1977, Henderson became a founding partner of Rosen, Remcho and Henderson in San Francisco, where he remained until 1980. He also taught administrative law and civil procedure at Golden State University of Law in San Francisco. In 1980, Henderson was appointed to the United States Federal Court and became the Chief Judge

of the United States District of Northern California in 1990, thus becoming the first African American to reach that position. In 1998, he became Senior U.S. District Court Judge. Henderson was the recipient of the 2003 American Inns of Court Circuit Professionalism Award for the Ninth Circuit in recognition of a senior practicing lawyer or judge whose life and practice serves as an example for others.

Henderson is divorced and has one son. He resides in Berkeley, California and enjoys fly-fishing.

Thelton Henderson was interviewed by The HistoryMaker® on April 7, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Hon. Thelton E. Henderson was conducted by Loretta Henry on April 7, 2004, in San Francisco, California, and was recorded on 8 Betacam SP videocassettes. Federal district court judge Hon. Thelton E. Henderson (1933 -) is the first African American Chief Judge of the United States District of Northern California, and has served as the Assistant Dean of the Stanford University School of Law.

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:

Henderson, Thelton E., 1933-

Henry, Loretta (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Henderson, Thelton E., 1933---Interviews

African American judges--Interviews.

African American lawyers--California--Los Angeles--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. District Court (California : Northern District)

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 Hon. Thelton E. Henderson, April 7, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/25/2011 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, April 7, 2004

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Thelton E. Henderson, Section A2004_044_001_001,
TRT: 0:29:10 2004/04/07

Thelton Henderson slates the interview and shares his family background and history. He was born on November 28, 1933 in Shreveport, Louisiana and was an only child. His mother, Wanzie Henderson, was a domestic worker for much of her life. Henderson describes her as serious, hard-working, and a woman of few words. Wanzie wanted Henderson to make something of his self. Henderson's father, Eugene Marion Henderson, worked as a janitor; however, he and Wanzie were employed with an airplane plant during World War II, a job previously reserved for whites. Eugene is described as a strict disciplinarian, who Henderson tried to avoid as much as possible. Wanzie and Eugene divorced when Henderson was in high school. Henderson also discusses his maternal and paternal grandparents. He goes on to talk at length about his experiences growing up in the South Central area of Los Angeles, California, then, an all-black community. He also discusses his elementary, junior and high school years.

African American families--California--Los Angeles

African American mothers--United States.

African American fathers--United States.

African American household employees--United States.

African American grandparents--United States.

African Americans--Employment--United States.

World War II, 1939-1945.

African Americans--Divorce--California--Los Angeles.

African American neighborhoods--California--Los Angeles.

African American children--Education (Elementary)--California.

African Americans--Education (Primary)--California.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--California.

African American children--Social life and customs--California--Los Angeles.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Thelton E. Henderson, Section A2004_044_001_002,
TRT: 0:30:00 2004/04/07

Thelton Henderson discusses his social and extracurricular experiences as a student and athlete. He earned a football scholarship to the University of California at Berkeley (UCB), though he thought he was a better baseball player. Henderson played semi-professional baseball long before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in the major leagues. He also reflects on his years as an athlete at John Adams Junior High and Jefferson High School, where he ran track and played baseball and football. Henderson talks about his academic experiences, recalling his performance in English, Geology, and math courses. He goes on to elaborate on his time at UCB, where he majored in political science and graduated with his B.A. in 1956. After completing his undergraduate studies, Henderson was drafted into the Army. In 1959, after working for a year, he enrolled in the Boalt Hall School of Law at UCB, where he was the seventh African American to receive a J.D. degree. Henderson contends that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968 marked a turning point in Boalt Hall's commitment to diversifying the racial

demographic of their law students. He also talks about his bar exam process and his first job with the civil rights division of the Justice Department in Washington, D.C.

African American high school students--California--San Francisco.

African Americans--High school athletes--California--San Francisco.

African Americans--Middle school athletes--California--San Francisco.

African Americans--College athletes--California--San Francisco.

Robinson, Jackie, 1919-1972.

Semi-professional baseball--United States.

University of California, Berkeley.

University of California, Berkeley, School of Law.

African American law students--Race relations--United States.

King, Martin Luther Jr., 1929-1968--Assassination.

United States. Dept. of Justice. Civil Rights Division.

Bar examinations--California.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Thelton E. Henderson, Section A2004_044_001_003,
TRT: 0:31:15 2004/04/07

Thelton Henderson talks about his interest in law as a profession and the opposition newly minted African American attorney's experienced in the field. He initially wanted to be a tax lawyer; however, after taking a tax course, he was no longer interested. Henderson talks about the rejection and discrimination African American law students encountered, noting their need to identify a successful black attorney who could mentor and help them navigate the racially divided field of law. He goes on to discuss his first job working with the civil rights division of the Justice Department, where its deputy chief John Doar had initiated a campaign to hire African Americans. At this time, President John F. Kennedy's administration was attempting to integrate its government officials. Henderson goes on to describe his time living in Washington, D.C. as exciting. He also mentions his encounter with segregation, recalling how some restaurants in D.C. would not serve African Americans. Henderson discusses his relationship with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., his investigation of discriminatory practices in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana; and his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Henderson eventually resigned from his position with the Justice department because his affiliation with Dr. King was detrimental to Kennedy's political career.

African American lawyers--United States.

Discrimination in employment--United States.

United States Dept. of Justice. Civil Rights Division.

Doar, John, 1921-.

Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963.

Segregation--Washington (D.C.).

African Americans--Social life and customs--Washington (D.C.).

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Discrimination--Southern States.

Civil rights movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Thelton E. Henderson, Section A2004_044_001_004,
TRT: 0:30:00 2004/04/07

Thelton Henderson continues to discuss his experiences working with the civil

rights division of the Justice department and his participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Henderson states that his education and lived experiences did not prepare him for the discriminatory practices he encountered in the South. Though he was not a leader on the forefront of the black freedom struggle, he says his role was as a strategist and advisor. Henderson goes on to discuss his admiration of Dr. Martin Luther, King, Jr., the importance of the Civil Rights movement and the organizations that emerged from the movement including, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He also talks about activists such as Medgar Evers and James Baldwin. Henderson discusses his investigation of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. Henderson discusses his work experiences practicing law after leaving the Department of Justice.

African American lawyers--United States.

United States Dept. of Justice. Civil Rights Division.

Discrimination--Southern States.

Civil rights workers--United States.

Civil Rights movement.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Congress of Racial Equality.

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.).

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

16th Street Baptist Church Bombing, Birmingham, Ala., 1963.

Evers, Medgar Wiley, 1925-1963.

Baldwin, James, 1924-1987.

Video Oral History Interview with Hon. Thelton E. Henderson, Section A2004_044_001_005,
TRT: 0:29:10 2004/04/07

Thelton Henderson shares his career trajectory as an attorney after resigning from his post with the Department of Justice. He was a partner at Henderson, Holliman, and Warden law firm and later worked with Nick Petruss of Fitzsimmons and Petruss law firm. Henderson also opened a legal aid office in Palo Alto, California in 1966 called the East Bayshore Neighborhood Legal Center. He goes on to discuss his position as assistant dean at Stanford University, where he helped recruit minority law students and taught courses. Henderson also talks about some of the major criminal court cases he took on and his appointment as a federal court judge.

African American lawyers--California--Palo Alto.

Stanford University.

Minority students--California.

African American judges--California.