

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with A. Dwight Pettit

PERSON

Pettit, A. Dwight, 1945-

**Alternative Names:** A. Dwight Pettit; Dwight Pettit

**Life Dates:** September 29, 1945-

**Place of Birth:** Rutherfordton, North Carolina, USA

**Residence:** Baltimore, MD

**Occupations:** Trial Lawyer

## Biographical Note

Alvin Dwight Pettit was born on September 29, 1945, in Rutherfordton, North Carolina. His mother worked as a beautician and his father worked as an engineer. His family migrated to Baltimore after his father was offered an engineering job in Maryland. In 1958, his father initiated a lawsuit against Harford County, Maryland school officials, forcing the school system to integrate the all white Aberdeen High School. Pettit, represented by Thurgood Marshall, won his suit and was admitted to Aberdeen and graduated in 1963. In

addition to being the first African American male to attend the school, he also integrated the football team.

Pettit attended Howard University from 1963 until 1967, where he earned his bachelor's of arts degree. While at Howard, Pettit played football, participated in the ROTC program, reaching the rank of colonel and pledged Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. While at Howard, he received the Holland Ware award for the student athlete demonstrating all around athletic and academic ability. Pettit earned his law degree from Howard in 1970.

In 1970, Pettit began his career as a trial attorney for the Small Business Administration under President Richard Nixon. His duties included preparing briefs for the Department of Justice on fraud cases involving SBA loans. He litigated his first private case, *Pettit vs. the United States*. The case received national acclaim and is considered a landmark decision, setting the standard for back pay awards in discrimination cases. In 1973, Pettit brought the first suit in the country against Maryland for discrimination in the bar examination. The case would lead to other states changing its testing practices. In 1973, Pettit left the SBA and formed Mitchell, Pettit, David and Gill and later his own practice.

Pettit handled many high profile criminal and personal injury cases. In 1977, he won *Scott v. Sutton Place*, which determined that Maryland landlords have responsibility and are liable for criminal activity on their property. In 1983, he won his first million-dollar judgment against the Washington, D.C. Transit Authority in the accident case, *Goodwin v. Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation*. Pettit continues to practice law in Baltimore, where he resides with his wife, Barbara.

## **Related Entries**

**Aberdeen High** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Howard University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Howard University School of Law** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**North Carolina Agricultural and Technical Nursery  
School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Fleming Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Bragg School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Havre De Grace Middle** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Lemmel Junior High School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Small Business Administration** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1970 to 1973]

**Trial Attorney**

**Mitchell, Petit, David & Gill** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1973 to ?]

**Co-Founder**

**National Democratic Compliance Commission**

[EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1980 to 1980]

**Member**

**Democrats for Erlich** [MEMBEROF]

[from ? to ?]