

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kenneth Carlton Edelin

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Edelin, Kenneth, 1939-2013
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Carlton Edelin,
Dates:	April 21, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:30:14).
Abstract:	Medical professor Kenneth Carlton Edelin (1939 - 2013) was professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Boston University School of Medicine. Edelin, who became nationally known in the 1970s for his legal battles for abortion rights, served as a leader in the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Edelin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 21, 2005, in Brookline, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_104
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Kenneth C. Edelin, professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Boston University School of Medicine, was born in Washington, D.C., on March 31, 1939. Educated in segregated Washington schools through the eighth grade, Edelin graduated from the private Stockbridge School in Western Massachusetts. After graduating from Columbia University in 1961, Edelin taught math and science at Stockbridge School for two years; he then attended Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, where he earned his M.D. degree in 1967.

In 1973, Edelin worked as the chief resident in obstetrics at Boston City Hospital. Performing abortions after the *Roe v. Wade* decision, Edelin was indicted for manslaughter in 1974 when he surgically terminated a pregnancy. Convicted on February 15, 1975, and sentenced to one year of probation, Edelin's case drew national attention. Edelin appealed the decision and the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts overturned the conviction on December 17, 1976.

A national leader in the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Edelin chaired the PPFA board of directors from 1989 to 1992. Edelin also served on both the New England and national boards of the Legal Defense and Education Fund of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and chaired the Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women of the American College of Obstetrics. In 2007, Edelin authored the autobiographical novel *Broken Justice* which told the story of his legal struggle for abortion rights in the 1970s. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America established an award in Edelin's name to honor individuals who excelled in areas of leadership in reproductive health care and reproductive rights. Dr.

Edelin passed away on December 30, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kenneth Carlton Edelin was conducted by Robert Hayden on April 21, 2005, in Brookline, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Medical professor Kenneth Carlton Edelin (1939 - 2013) was professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Boston University School of Medicine. Edelin, who became nationally known in the 1970s for his legal battles for abortion rights, served as a leader in the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

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:

Edelin, Kenneth, 1939-2013

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Edelin, Kenneth, 1939-2013--Interviews

African American surgeons--Interviews

Obstetricians--Interviews

Health reformers--Interviews

Public health personnel--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Boston University School of Medicine

Occupations:

Obstetrician and Gynecologist

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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 Kenneth Carlton Edelin, April 21, 2005. 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 Kenneth Carlton Edelin, Section A2005_104_001_001, TRT: 0:29:23 2005/04/21

Kenneth Carlton Edelin was born on March 31, 1939 in Washington, D.C. His mother, Ruby Goodwin Edelin, also born in D.C., was the neighborhood confidante and hair stylist. Edelin's maternal great-grandmother worked as a cook for prominent families. She and her husband were able to pass until she gave birth to Edelin's grandmother, who was darker than the rest of the family. After her birth, Edelin's great-grandfather abandoned his wife to live as a white man. Edelin's grandparents met at his great-grandmother's boarding house when his grandfather roomed there while attending Howard University College of Medicine. Edelin's father, Benedict Edelin, born in D.C. in 1900, was raised in a devout Catholic family originally from Charles County, Maryland. He hauled ice and coal in his father's coal yard, boxed for a while after being inspired by Jack Johnson and, as the highest scorer the year he took the Civil Service Exam, became the first African American supervisor of the official section in the D.C. post office.

African American surgeons--Interviews.

Obstetricians--Interviews.

Health reformers--Interviews.

Public health personnel--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Carlton Edelin, Section A2005_104_001_002, TRT: 0:29:18 2005/04/21

Kenneth Carlton Edelin spent hours listening to his maternal grandfather's stories of being a Pullman porter. Growing up in Washington, D.C. during World War II, Edelin often heard air raid sirens and saw searchlights in the sky. He lived on Maryland Avenue between more well-off white families and poorer black families. Though forbidden, Edelin often visited a house on the corner as he was fascinated by his neighbors' Victrola and their less conventional lifestyle. The youngest of three children, Edelin was impacted by his oldest brother's drug addiction and his other brother's academic success. His teachers at the segregated Lovejoy Elementary School encouraged him to excel. In the sixth grade, he was selected to give the graduation speech. His mother was dying of breast cancer at the time and was unable to see him deliver his speech, though he performed it for her at the hospital after the ceremony. She passed away two weeks later, and Edelin struggled to cope with the loss over the next few years.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Carlton Edelin, Section A2005_104_001_003, TRT: 0:28:36 2005/04/21

Kenneth Carlton Edelin developed a terrible stutter and acted out in anger when his mother passed away from cancer. Neither his father nor his grandparents felt equipped to take care of him. His situation changed when his brother's acquaintance, Hans Maeder, headmaster of Stockbridge School in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, offered Edelin a full scholarship. At this progressive boarding school, Edelin received a strong liberal education and met students from across the world, including the cousin of entertainer HistoryMaker Maurice Hines, Jr., whom they often saw perform. With tutoring from a drama coach, Edelin overcame his stutter and performed in the school's production of 'Electra.' Edelin matriculated at Columbia University in New York City and earned a

bachelor's degree in psychology while completing his pre-med requirements. He spent the next two years teaching math and science at Stockbridge, then entered Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee upon the advice of his mentor, Maurice Clifford.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Carlton Edelin, Section A2005_104_001_004, TRT: 0:29:10 2005/04/21

Kenneth Carlton Edelin served in the U.S. Air Force for three years as a general practitioner and obstetrician gynecologist. During his residency at Boston City Hospital in Massachusetts, he saw impoverished women of color treated inhumanely. In his last year of training, Edelin was selected as chief resident, the first African American in this position at the hospital. However, his license was suspended due to a backlash against the recent Roe v. Wade ruling, which led to him being charged with manslaughter for performing a legal abortion. After an initial suspension, Edelin was allowed to complete his residency while he awaited trial. Although found guilty by a jury and sentenced to a year of probation, his conviction was overturned on appeal and the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court entered a not guilty verdict. Four years later, Edelin became the chairman of obstetrics and gynecology at Boston City Hospital. Under his tenure, he improved the quality of patient care while operating a private practice.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Carlton Edelin, Section A2005_104_001_005, TRT: 0:25:48 2005/04/21

Kenneth Carlton Edelin met his second wife, Barbara Evans Edelin, at a Super Bowl party in the midst of his trial. The couple have two children, Joseph and Corrine Edelin. Both were born at Boston City Hospital out of Edelin's conviction that the hospital's standards must match the expectations of the wealthy in order to meet the needs of the poor. In addition to his medical practice, Edelin was elected chairman of the board for Planned Parenthood, helping to establish its action fund so the organization can endorse political candidates. One of the organization's awards was named in his honor. As a result of his trial, Edelin also joined the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, serving as president of the New England Committee and as a national board member. Edelin has delivered two speeches on women's healthcare rights on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Edelin reflects on his life, how he would like to be remembered, his future plans and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth Carlton Edelin, Section A2005_104_001_006, TRT: 0:07:59 2005/04/21

Kenneth Carlton Edelin narrates his photographs.