

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Littleton Mitchell

PERSON

Mitchell, Littleton Purnell,  
1918-2009

**Alternative Names:** Littleton Mitchell;

**Life Dates:** November 27, 1918-July 6, 2009

**Place of Birth:** Milford, Delaware, USA

**Residence:** Delaware City, Delaware

**Occupations:** Tuskegee Airman; Civil Rights Activist;  
Association Branch Executive

## Biographical Note

Association branch executive, civil rights activist, and Tuskegee Airman Littleton Purnell Mitchell was born in the 1920s in Milford, Delaware, to Helen Ann Purnell and George Darnell Mitchell. His advocacy began at age thirteen, when he joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). During the late 1930s, he attended Howard

High School, the state's only high school for African Americans. Upon graduation, he spent two years at West Chester University of Pennsylvania on a track scholarship before joining the Tuskegee Airmen during War World II. While he was there, he witnessed the building of the airfield at Tuskegee in 1941. He taught future pilots the art of instrument flying. His duties sent him to the Link Trainer Facilities and Schools in New York, and Chanute Field in Chanute, Illinois, as well as the Base Instrument Command Flying School in Texas. In February 1946, he was discharged from the U.S. Army. Encouraged by his fellow Tuskegee Airmen, Mitchell returned to college, and earned his degree from West Chester University of Pennsylvania and began a career in the psychiatric treatment of children and civil rights advocacy.

Mitchell led the Delaware State Branches of the NAACP as president for over thirty years until 1991. During his years there, he led their efforts to secure fair housing, equal access to public accommodations, and equal education and employment opportunities for Delaware's African American community. He became the first African American teacher of white children at Governor Bacon Health Center in Delaware City. He retired from teaching in 1984. His wife, Jane Mitchell, now deceased, became one of Delaware's first African American nurses. For many years, she served as the director of nursing at the Delaware State Hospital and along with her husband led efforts to desegregate the state's hospitals.

Mitchell served on the Delaware Humanities Council from 1991 to 1997. In 1993, the University of Delaware awarded Mitchell its Medal of Merit for sustained community service. He was also awarded the Delaware Bar Association's 2004 Liberty Bell Award for community service. For the Brown v. Board of Education 50th Anniversary Commission, he served as a presidential appointee representing Delaware.

Mitchell resided in Delaware City, Delaware, with his

family until his death on July 6, 2009.

Littleton Purnell Mitchell was interview by the HistoryMakers on December 19, 2005.

## Related Entries

**Howard High School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Delaware State University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**West Chester University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

**United States Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

**Piloting Instructor**

**Governor Bacon Health Center** [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to 1984]

**Teacher**

**National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)** [MEMBEROF]

[from 2009 to 2011]

**Branch President**