

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with W. George Allen

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Allen, W. George, 1936-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with W. George Allen,
Dates:	February 17, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:23:11).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist and lawyer W. George Allen (1936 - 2019) has run his own law practice for over forty years. During the Civil Rights Movement, he organized lunch counter sit-ins and filed lawsuits for integration in Florida's Alachua and Broward counties. Allen was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 17, 2006, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_023
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights activist and lawyer W. George Allen was born on March 3, 1936 in Sanford, Florida to Lessie Mae Williams and Fletcher Allen. Allen was raised by his mother and stepfather, Bruce Brown. Allen grew up in a segregated community in Sanford, Florida; attended Midway Elementary and Junior High Schools; and graduated from Crooms High School in 1964. Allen went on to Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida where initially, he wanted to be a physician. He however played the role of a lawyer in a school play, which made his career plans change. In 1958, he earned his B.S. degree in political science and minored in economics. Then, in 1962, Allen earned his J.D. degree from the University of Florida Law School. He was the first African American to do so.

Between 1958 and 1960, Allen served in the U.S. Army as a special agent in the Counter Intelligence Corps. He attained the rank of first lieutenant when he was honorably discharged. While in law school, Allen got involved with social activism when he organized lunch counter sit-ins in and around Gainesville, Florida. After receiving his law degree, Allen filed a suit that led to the integration of Broward County's public accommodations and public school system. In 1963, Allen and his family moved to Fort Lauderdale after he passed the bar exam and was admitted to the Florida Bar Association. Allen was hired at the law firm of Orr & Kaplan. After six months there, Allen started his own law practice where he has practiced for forty-two years. Allen specializes in trial work, probate, personal injury, insurance defense and wrongful death.

Allen is a member of several organizations, boards and associations including the Urban League of Broward County, the NAACP, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the University of Florida Foundation, the Florida Bar Association, and serving as Broward County Bar Association's president. Allen has also received numerous awards for his achievements including the University of Florida Distinguished Alumnus Award in May, 2000 and the National Conference for Community and Justice Silver Medallion Award in 2001. In July of 2003, he was

inducted into the National Bar Association's Hall of Fame. In February of 2005, Allen was appointed by Governor Jeb Bush to the Florida A&M University's Board of Trustees.

Allen was married to Enid Allen, and they lived in Florida.

Allen passed away on November 8, 2019.

W. George Allen was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 17, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with W. George Allen was conducted by Tracey Lewis on February 17, 2006, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist and lawyer W. George Allen (1936 - 2019) has run his own law practice for over forty years. During the Civil Rights Movement, he organized lunch counter sit-ins and filed lawsuits for integration in Florida's Alachua and Broward counties.

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:

Allen, W. George, 1936-

Lewis, Tracey (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Allen, W. George, 1936- --Interviews

African American civil rights workers--Florida--Broward County--Interviews

African American lawyers--Florida--Broward County--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

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 W. George Allen, February 17, 2006. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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 W. George Allen, Section A2006_023_001_001, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

W. George Allen was born on March 3, 1936 in Sanford, Florida to Lessie Williams Brown and Fletcher Allen. A native of Sanford, Allen's mother was one of seven siblings raised by her father, Ben Williams, and his second wife, Mary Williams. Allen's maternal grandfather owned an orange orchard until it was seized by his bank during the Great Depression. Allen's biological father was from Pineview, Georgia. When Allen was four years old, his mother married Bruce Brown, a farmer and truck driver from Newnan, Georgia. Allen was a member of Baptist Young People's Union of America at Progress Missionary Baptist Church in Sanford. Allen grew up in Sanford's rural, all-black Midway community, where he attended Midway Elementary and Junior High Schools. He describes his grandmother's hog head cheese and recalls catching and selling fish to fund trips to the movie theater. Allen describes his childhood best friends and cousins, as well as the popularity of dry tobacco among Sanford's midwives.

African American civil rights workers--Florida--Broward County--Interviews.

African American lawyers--Florida--Broward County--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with W. George Allen, Section A2006_023_001_002, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

W. George Allen's childhood activities included playing marbles and hunting with his cousin, Willie Lee Allen, Jr. Allen's mother enrolled him early in school, but later asked that Allen repeat the third grade at Sanford's Midway Elementary School to give him time to mature. Allen recalls food and gas shortages during World War II. On the radio, Allen listened to Joe Louis' fights, Presidents Franklin Delano Roosevelt's and Harry S. Truman's political speeches, and George Smathers' and Florida Senator Claude Pepper's political debates. Allen notes the cultural differences between northern and southern Florida. Despite not getting along with Principal Roy A. Allen, Allen excelled at Crooms Academy in Sanford, Florida, becoming student government president and salutatorian. Allen's favorite teachers were Shellye L. Refoe and Herman L. Refoe, Jr. Neglected by the college counsellors at his high school, Allen struggled financially upon enrolling at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee.

Video Oral History Interview with W. George Allen, Section A2006_023_001_003, TRT: 0:29:47 ?

W. George Allen attended Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida in 1954. He recalls the reaction to the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka decision and Virgil Hawkins' subsequent discrimination suit against the University of Florida's College of Law. He recounts the history of Florida's law schools. Allen organized boycotts and sit-ins to protest segregation in Tallahassee. Inspired by professors William E. Howard and Emmett W. Bashful, Allen began studying political science, to his mother's dismay. Allen joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps and, upon graduating, was assigned to the U.S. Military Intelligence Corps. After Allen's training at Fort Holabird in Baltimore, Maryland, he became a special agent, spying on anti-Vietnam War protests in Oakland and Berkeley, California. After his military service, Allen enrolled in the University of Florida College of Law, hoping to integrate the school. He married his wife, Enid Meadows Allen, in 1958.

Video Oral History Interview with W. George Allen, Section A2006_023_001_004, TRT: 0:30:01 ?

W. George Allen worked as an orderly at Alachua General Hospital in Gainesville, Florida, where he befriended the University of Florida's dean of students, Lester Hale. Denied student housing, Allen purchased a house with Hale's assistance. Allen organized a sit-in at Gainesville's Primrose Inn and Grill, owned by Mayor Byron Winn, II. As one of few African American students at the University of Florida College of Law, and the first to graduate, Allen often encountered discrimination, including from future Florida Judge Ralph Paul Douglas. Allen recalls his enjoyment of practice court and learning about the Dred Scott v. Sanford decision. Allen was eventually honored alongside Hamilton E. Holmes and Charlyane Hunter-Gault for integrating southern higher education. Upon graduation, Allen worked at Orin Kaplan law firm in Miami, Florida. Denied a raise, Allen quit and became counsel to P.M. Construction, Inc. in Fort Lauderdale, where he fought to close a garbage dump in the city's black neighborhood.

Video Oral History Interview with W. George Allen, Section A2006_023_001_005, TRT: 0:23:53 ?

W. George Allen resigned from P.M. Construction, Inc. to establish a practice with his former classmate, Florida Congressman Alcee Hastings, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The firm specialized in civil rights, personal injury and property cases. Allen mentored attorney Willie E. Gary, and was instrumental in the desegregation of Broward County and Hendry County schools in Florida. He also advocated for affordable housing on behalf of his church, Fort Lauderdale's New Mount Olive Baptist Church. Allen emphasizes the importance of historically black colleges and universities and of African American lawyers. He reflects upon his legacy as a mentor and activist, as well as how he would like to be remembered.