Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles D. Churchwell

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616  
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Creator: Churchwell, Charles D.

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell,

Dates: October 16, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:56:50).

Abstract: Library administrator and library science professor Charles D. Churchwell (1926 - ) served as the Dean at the School of Library and Information Studies for Clark Atlanta University during the 1990s, was a tenured professor at Wayne State University, served as university librarian for Brown University for four years, and was the first African American faculty member at the University of Houston. Churchwell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 16, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2007_291

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Library administrator and library science professor Charles Darrett Churchwell was born on November 7, 1926 in Dunnellon, Florida to Leannah DeLaughter Churchwell and John Dozier Churchwell. After graduating from high school, Churchwell joined the United States Army, serving for two years in the U.S. and Philippine Islands. He obtained the rank of Sergeant 4th Grade while acting as his company's clerk. After returning from the armed forces in 1948, Churchwell attended Morehouse College and four years later, he received his B.S. degree in mathematics. Upon graduating, he became a reference assistant at the library of Alabama State College. In 1953, Churchwell graduated from Atlanta University with his M.L.S. degree with a focus on college and university library administration.

Churchwell became an instructor with Prairie View A&M College in Prairie View, Texas in 1954 where he met and married Yvonne Ransom. Two years later, he and Yvonne moved to New York City, New York so he could work as a reference librarian for the New York Public Library (NYPL). After only two years, Churchwell left New York for Illinois to study for his Ph.D. degree in library science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, becoming a librarian with the school in 1964. After publishing his thesis, entitled "Education for Librarianship in the United States: Some Factors which Influenced its Development between 1919 and 1939," Churchwell received his Ph.D. in 1966, the first African American male to earn a Ph.D. degree from the university. The next year, Churchwell became the associate director of the libraries at the University of Houston, becoming the first African American to work for the university during a time of intense segregation. Churchwell became heavily involved with the Black Student Union during this time, working as a liaison during a controversial campus visit by Black Panther Bobby Seale.
In 1970, Churchwell became a professor of library science and director of libraries for Miami University in Ohio, where he redesigned and renovated the library. He moved to Brown University in 1974, working as the university librarian while publishing his book "Shaping of American Library Education" with the American Library Association (ALA). In 1978, Churchwell began working for Washington University in St. Louis as dean of library services and created a unique endowment to fund the library’s technological services. After nearly a decade in St. Louis, Churchwell became a tenured professor with Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He spent the 1990s as dean of the School of Library and Information Studies for Clark Atlanta University, before retiring in 1999.

Charles D. Churchwell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 16, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles D. Churchwell was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 16, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Library administrator and library science professor Charles D. Churchwell (1926 - ) served as the Dean at the School of Library and Information Studies for Clark Atlanta University during the 1990s, was a tenured professor at Wayne State University, served as university librarian for Brown University for four years, and was the first African American faculty member at the University of Houston.

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:

Churchwell, Charles D., 1926-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)
Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles D. Churchwell

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Churchwell, Charles D., 1926---Interviews

African American librarians--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/8/2011 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, October 16, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007_291_001_001, TRT: 0:30:10 2007/10/16

Charles D. Churchwell slates the interview and gives his favorites. He was born November, 7, 1926, in Dunnellon, Florida, to Leeanah and John Churchwell. Churchwell recalls growing up poor, even though his parents worked hard. He grew up in a shotgun house and often did not have shoes to wear. The school bus was only for white students and Churchwell had to walk without shoes with frost on the ground. His father died of pneumonia in 1937, leaving his mother, Leeanah to raise nine children. Churchwell did not start school until he was eleven years old and when he turned eighteen he dropped out of high school to join the U.S. Army.

African American families--Florida.
African American parents--Florida.
African Americans--Economic conditions--Florida.
African Americans--Education--Florida.
Segregation in education--Florida.
United States. Army.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007_291_001_002, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/10/16

Charles D. Churchwell discusses his education and the importance of church in his life. Churchwell did not start attending school until he was a pre-teen. He would have to wake at four A.M. and work until eight A.M. and then attend school. Churchwell shares that church played a significant role in his upbringing. The family attended Second Bethel Baptist church and he was part of the Bethel Young program. Churchwell dropped out of high school to join the U.S. Army. After his service concluded, Churchwell returned to high school and graduated at the age of twenty one as class valedictorian. Churchwell describes when he returned the Army he visited Sacramento, California and experienced integration for the first time. The Army was segregated when Churchwell first joined and he left just as President Truman desegregated it. Churchwell credits the G.I. Bill for his enrollment at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Florida.
African Americans--Church--Florida.
United States. Army.
African American soldiers.
Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).
United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.
African Americans--Segregation.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007_291_001_003, TRT: 0:26:20 2007/10/16

Charles D. Churchwell describes his experience at Morehouse College from 1948 to 1952. One of his professors, Virginia Lacy Jones took him under her wing. Churchwell cites her with pushing him towards the library. The president...
of Morehouse, Benjamin Mays encouraged the students to work hard. Churchwell remembers that Mays told the students never to submit to indignities because one day segregation would end. Church then recalls that after his graduation in 1952, Jones suggested he attend the library science school at Atlanta University and, with her aid, received a Carnegie scholarship and earned his M.L.S. degree in 1953. Churchwell ends the tape discussing his first position as a librarian at Prairie View A&M College, where he met his wife, Yvonne Ransom.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).
Mays, Benjamin E. (Benjamin Elijah), 1894-1984.
African American students--Education (Higher)--Georgia--Atlanta.
African Americans--Segregation.
Atlanta University.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007_291_001_004, TRT: 0:30:30 2007/10/16

Charles D. Churchwell describes his career as a librarian. After he started working at Prairie View A&M College in Texas, he met and married Yvonne Ransom. They soon moved to New York City so that they could both work at the New York Public Library. Churchwell says to achieve his goal of being a university librarian he needed his Ph. D. degree. He enrolled at University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign's School of Library Science but had to ask for assistance to find housing because Urbana-Champaign was segregated. His first daughter, Linda, was born in 1964; the same year that he received his Ph.D. degree in library science. Churchwell recalls his employment at the University of Houston; he was the first black man to join the faculty. In 1974, Churchwell was offered Librarian of Congress but instead chose to take a position as an university librarian of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.

African American librarians.
African American families.
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Graduate School of Library Science.
University of Houston.
Faculty integration--Texas--Houston.
Brown University--Library.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007_291_001_005, TRT: 0:29:00 2007/10/16

Charles D. Churchwell discusses the difficulties of living in Providence, Rhode Island while he was working at Brown University. He decided to leave Providence because the tense race relations made it difficult for his family. He moved to St. Louis, Missouri to be dean of library services at Washington University in St. Louis where he stayed for nine years. Churchwell recalls how he encouraged a young clerical worker, William Randolph, to attend library school and now Randolph is the head of reference at Washington University. Churchwell left St. Louis, Missouri, to become a tenured professor at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. His wife, Yvonne, however, encouraged him to return to one of his alma maters, Atlanta University, which is now called Clark Atlanta University. Churchwell talks about how his wife convinced him he would raise the reputation of the university's library and information science school as dean.
Charles D. Churchwell discusses the changes that he made to the library at Washington University in St. Louis. Churchwell created a $4 million automation endowment to support the technical services of the library. Churchwell was the interim provost at the Clark Atlanta University from 1991 to 1995 until he had a stroke. After taking a year off to recover, Churchwell returned as dean of the School of Library and Information Studies. Churchwell explains the Atlanta University Center Consortium, a collaborative of six institutes of higher education that share resources including the Robert W. Woodruff Library. He says that the system fell apart and now only three of the original six schools, Spelman College, Morehouse College, and Clark Atlanta University, remain in the consortium.

Washington University (Saint Louis, Mo.).
Clark Atlanta University--Faculty.
Atlanta University Center (Ga.).
African American universities and colleges--Faculty--Georgia--Atlanta.
African American librarians.
Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.)
Spelman College.