

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gary Gayton

Overview of the Collection

- Repository:** The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
- Creator:** Gayton, Gary D., 1933-
- Title:** The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gary Gayton,
- Dates:** June 6, 2008 and October 26, 2007
- Bulk Dates:** 2007 and 2008
- Physical Description:** 8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:39:49).
- Abstract:** Civil rights lawyer Gary Gayton (1933 -) represented Black Panther Party members and other civil rights cases in Seattle, Washington. He also served as a high ranking official in the U.S. Department of Transportation under President Jimmy Carter. Gayton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 6, 2008 and October 26, 2007, in Seattle, Washington. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
- Identification:** A2007_307
- Language:** The interview and records are in English.
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Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights attorney Gary David Gayton was born on February 25, 1933 in Seattle, Washington to Virginia Clark and John Jacob Gayton, the fourth of eight children. When Gayton was five years old, his family moved to the all-white neighborhood of Madrona, and although they dealt with regular harassment, refused to leave. Gayton earned his diploma from Garfield High School in 1951 and attended the University of Washington where he was a four year varsity track man and became captain of the team.

In 1955, Gayton graduated with his B.A. degree in political science at the University of Washington. After serving honorably for two years in the United States Army, Gayton was admitted to Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. He earned his L.L.B. degree in 1962, and was immediately appointed by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to the post of Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Washington, the first African American to hold this position. Under the supervision of Assistant United States Attorney General Ramsey Clark, Gayton sued the State of Washington to allow Native Americans to sell fish caught on the reservations off the reservations.

Gayton left his position in the U.S. Attorney's Office under Brock Adams in 1965, and, along with three associates, formed the law firm of Stern, Gayton, Neubauer & Brucker, whose clients included anti-war activists and Black Panthers. In 1966, Gayton was one of five delegates invited from the State of Washington to attend "To Fulfill These Rights," President Johnson's first Civil Rights Conference. Gayton continued working as an attorney, filing a successful suit on behalf of female tennis player, Trish Bostrom, demanding a women's tennis program and the right to try out for the men's team until such a program existed. This suit anticipated 1972's Title IX, which prohibited sex discrimination against students and employees of educational institutions.

Gayton assisted in the organization of the black caucus at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968, where Channing Phillips was nominated as the first black Presidential contender. In 1969, Gayton represented several black football players who had been suspended for failing to take a loyalty oath for their coach, Jim Owens, at the University of Washington. Gayton was invited to become a part of Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox's staff in 1973, but he declined for personal reasons. Gayton also served as an arbiter for the City of Seattle during the construction of Interstate 90.

Gayton became the U.S. Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams' Special Assistant in 1977, in which he developed an affirmative action program for the U.S. Department of Transportation which was asked to be adopted by all departments by President Jimmy Carter in his 1978 domestic policy speech. In 1980, Gayton returned to Seattle as of counsel for the law firm, Diamond & Sylvester. In 1985, Gayton became an investment banker, working as Senior Vice President for Siebert, Brandford, Shank & Company, the largest minority and female bond-underwriting firm in the nation. Gayton continues in the private practice of law. He recently served as chairman of the senior advisory board of the ninth federal judicial circuit. Gayton has served on the boards of more than sixty cultural and professional organizations. He recently was named to the Hall of

Fame of Garfield High School. In 2006, the *Seattle Metropolitan* magazine named Gayton one of the 277 people who shaped Seattle since its founding. In 2005, Gayton received the Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Washington in political science.

Gayton was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 26, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gary Gayton was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 6, 2008 and October 26, 2007, in Seattle, Washington, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights lawyer Gary Gayton (1933 -) represented Black Panther Party members and other civil rights cases in Seattle, Washington. He also served as a high ranking official in the U.S. Department of Transportation under President Jimmy Carter.

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:

Gayton, Gary D., 1933-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gayton, Gary D., 1933---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights 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 Gary Gayton, June 6, 2008 and October 26, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Gary Gayton, Section
A2007_307_002_001, TRT: 0:28:32 2008/06/06

Gary Gayton was born on February 25, 1933 in Seattle, Washington to Virginia Clark Gayton and John J. Gayton. His maternal great-grandfather, Lewis Clarke, was a former slave and abolitionist in Kentucky. He published his slave narrative in 1846, and became the inspiration for a character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' Gayton's maternal grandfather, Cyrus Clark, was a teacher and politician in Nashville,

Tennessee, and later moved with his wife to Spokane, Washington. Gayton's maternal grandmother, Guela Johnson Clark, returned to Nashville to give birth to Gayton's mother, who was raised in Spokane from the age of two months old. His mother went on to study at Howard University. Gayton's paternal grandfather, J.T. Gayton, came from Mississippi, and was hired to drive a white family to Seattle during the 19th century. After settling in Seattle, he attended secretarial school and later raised Gayton's father.

Video Oral History Interview with Gary Gayton, Section
A2007_307_002_002, TRT: 0:30:02 2008/06/06

Gary Gayton's paternal grandfather, J.T. Gayton, was the chief steward of the Rainier Club in Seattle, Washington, and also served as the bailiff and librarian of the Ninth Circuit Courthouse. Gayton's father, John J. Gayton, was known for his singing in the Seattle community. He was encouraged to study music in England, but declined in order to marry Gayton's mother, Virginia Clark Gayton. He studied at the Cornish School of Music while raising eight children with Gayton's mother in Seattle's predominantly white Madrona neighborhood. There, the neighbors once tried to bribe them to leave the area. Gayton attended Madrona School, and began working at a local store when he was ten years old. His employer often gave him rationed items like nylons and chocolate. Gayton went on to attend Edmond S. Meany Junior High School and James A. Garfield High School, where he became an all-city miler. Upon graduating in 1951, he enrolled at the University of Washington, where he was the track team's only black member.

Video Oral History Interview with Gary Gayton, Section
A2007_307_002_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2008/06/06

Gary Gayton excelled on the track and cross country team at the University of Washington, and received an athletic scholarship during his senior year. Upon graduating in 1955, Gayton was drafted into the U.S. Army, where he competed on the U.S. Army track team with Roosevelt Grier. After two years in Special Services, Gayton returned to Seattle, Washington, and enrolled at the University of Washington School of Law. Despite his high

grades, he was discouraged by the dean, and decided to temporarily withdraw from the school in 1959. Shortly afterwards, Gayton met the dean of the Gonzaga University School of Law, which was a night school. Gayton worked during the day and took classes at night, completing his law degree in 1962. He was then contacted by Brock Adams, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy's state campaign manager, who offered Gayton the position of assistant U.S. attorney. Later in his career as a lawyer, Gayton became a founding member of the all-black Loren Miller Bar Association.

Video Oral History Interview with Gary Gayton, Section
A2007_307_002_004, TRT: 0:28:20 2008/06/06

Gary Gayton served as an assistant U.S. attorney for three years. During this time, he filed a successful case against the State of Washington to allow Native Americans to sell fish outside of the reservations. He also prosecuted the first federal case of fixed collegiate athletics. In 1965, Gayton left the U.S. attorney's office to cofound the law firm of Stern, Gayton, Neubauer and Brucker. There, he represented the African American football players at the University of Washington who filed discrimination charges against Coach Joe Owens. The case incited change at the university, which proceeded to hire more African American coaches and staff. Gayton also successfully defended a member of the University of Washington's Black Student Union who participated in the sit-in at Franklin High School. Gayton went on to represent members of the city's Black Panther Party. On one occasion, he was asked to represent a white supremacist group called the Minutemen, and charged the group twice his usual rate.

Video Oral History Interview with Gary Gayton, Section
A2007_307_002_005, TRT: 0:28:15 2008/06/06

Gary Gayton represented tennis star Trish Bostrom in her struggle to play for the University of Washington. The school did not have a women's team at the time, so Gayton convinced the athletic department to allow Bostrom to try out for the men's team. He also represented the Seattle SuperSonics, and later served on the team's board. Gayton was introduced to Georgia Governor

Jimmy Carter by attorney Woolvin Patten. He supported Carver's successful presidential run in 1976, and was offered a position in Carter's administration, which he initially turned down. Gayton eventually agreed to join the U.S. Department of Transportation upon the request of his former colleague, Brock Adams, who was named U.S. Secretary of Transportation. Gayton served as the department's special assistant, general counsel and White House liaison. During his tenure, he created an affirmative action policy for the department's contracts. He resigned in 1979, due to frustration with the administration's staff.

Video Oral History Interview with Gary Gayton, Section
A2007_307_002_006, TRT: 0:31:10 2008/06/06

Gary Gayton left the U.S. Department of Transportation in 1979, after becoming frustrated with the incompetence of President Jimmy Carter's staff. Gayton stayed in Washington, D.C. for a short time, during which he worked at the law firm of Lycette, Diamond and Sylvester. After a few months, Gayton decided to return to Seattle, Washington, where he worked at the law firm of Diamond and Sylvester from 1981 to 1993. Gayton began offering legal consulting services to corporate clients, and used his political connections to help them expand their businesses beyond Seattle. During this time, his clientele included the investment banking firm of Siebert Brandford Shank and Company, LLC, whom he helped secure bond deals in Louisiana and Palm Beach, Florida. Gayton later joined the firm as a senior vice president. At this point, Gayton reflects upon his life and career, his family and friends and his hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Gary Gayton, Section
A2007_307_002_007, TRT: 0:13:10 2008/06/06

Gary Gayton attended Garfield High School in Seattle, Washington, where his classmates included record producer Quincy Jones. They remained in contact after graduation, and Gayton later helped Jones raise money for the Institute for Black American Music. Gayton was also acquainted with Jones' brother, attorney Richard A. Jones, whom he helped secure a federal judicial appointment in Seattle. Gayton reflects upon his legacy, and describes

how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Gary Gayton, Section
B2007_307_001_001, TRT: 0:30:50 2007/10/26

Gary Gayton was a donor to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. In recognition of his contributions, the Gayton Family Meeting Room at the Douglass-Truth Branch was named in his family's honor. Gayton describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, and talks about his parents. He also reflects upon his life and legacy, and concludes this part of the interview by narrating his photographs.