

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Richard Clayter

PERSON

Clayter, Richard, 1922-2013

Alternative Names: Richard Clayter;

Life Dates: July 28, 1922-July 22, 2013

Place of Birth: Chicago, Illinois, USA

Residence: Chicago, IL

Occupations: Trial Lawyer

Biographical Note

Lawyer Richard L. Clayter, Jr. was born on July 28, 1922, in Chicago, Illinois to Richard Clayter, Sr. and Bella Warren. Similar to many African Americans at the time, Clayter's mother had taken part in the Great Migration of blacks out of the American South. During his childhood, Clayter still maintained ties to traditional African American communities in the South. His earliest memories are from his time in Wiggins, Mississippi. When he was only seven, Clayter experienced the Great Depression. Clayter attended William W. Carter Elementary located in the Washington Park neighborhood of Chicago's south side. Aside from one year in Tuskegee, Alabama, Clayter attended Englewood High School located on Chicago's south side. During this time he married his first wife, Mildred Warren, who was an orphan. Clayter graduated from high school in 1941 and soon after joined the U.S. military. His time fighting in World War II for the U.S. military would prove to be a transformative experience for Clayter.

After he returned from his service during the war, Clayter attended DePaul University. He earned his B.A. degree in sociology there in 1950. During this time Clayter married his second wife, Mary Lou Gullatt, and earned his M.A. degree in social work at Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work. At a meeting at his mother's home, one of the guests pointed at Clayter and said that he looked like a lawyer. The experience left him determined to earn a legal degree. Despite being rejected by the law programs at Northwestern University and DePaul University due to their quotas, Clayter was able to enroll at Loyola University Chicago School of Law after a personal discussion with Dean John C. Fitzgerald. In 1956, Clayter became the first African American to earn his J.D. in the part time program at Loyola University Chicago.

Even after he graduated, Clayter continued to press for African American rights. In

1958, he served as counsel for Charles S. Jackson Company, Inc. in their suit against the Oak Woods Cemetery Association. The funeral association had refused, on the basis of race, to cremate several bodies brought to them by the Jackson Company. Clayter won the suit and effectively integrated the cemetery association's crematorium. In 1959, he was the only African American in the Short Course for Prosecuting Attorneys at Northwestern University.

The recipient of many awards, Clayter was honored by two organizations with which he has a long history in 2005. He received the Outstanding Sole Practitioner Award from the Center for Disability and Elder Law with personal recognition by Attorney General Lisa Madigan. In March of the same year, Roland Burris presented Clayter with the Lifetime Achievement Award from The Original Forty Club of Chicago. A longtime member of the club of accomplished African American men, Clayter held every position in The Original Forty Club from Secretary to President.

Clayter passed away on July 22, 2013 at the age of 90.

Related Entries

William W. Carter Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Englewood High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

DePaul University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Sociology

Loyola University Chicago [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Master of Social Work

Stone Middle School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Loyola University Chicago School of Law [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

J.D.

[STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Illinois School for Boys [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Social Worker

Starke and Anglin [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Attorney

Frost, Clayter, Sherard and Howse [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from ? to ?]

Attorney

Gassaway, Crosson, Turner and Parsons [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from ? to ?]

Attorney

Rivers, Lockhart, Clayter & Lawrence [EMPLOYEEOf]

[from ? to ?]

Attorney

Original 40 Club [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Member

Cook County Bar Association [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Member

Big Buddies Youth Services, Inc. [MEMBEROf]

[from ? to ?]

Volunteer