

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Richard Clayter

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Clayter, Richard, 1922-2013
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Richard Clayter,
Dates:	October 11, 2010
Bulk Dates:	2010
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:14:00).
Abstract:	Trial lawyer Richard Clayter (1922 - 2013) was the first African American to complete the Loyola University Chicago School of Law's part-time program. He also argued successfully for the integration of Chicago's Oak Woods Cemetery. Clayter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 11, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2010_110
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Richard Clayter was conducted by Thomas Jefferson on October 11, 2010, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Trial lawyer Richard Clayter (1922 - 2013) was the first African American to complete the Loyola University Chicago School of Law's part-time program. He also argued successfully for the integration of Chicago's Oak Woods Cemetery.

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:

Clayter, Richard, 1922-2013

Jefferson, Thomas (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Clayter, Richard, 1922-2013 --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Trial 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 Richard Clayter, October 11, 2010. 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 Richard Clayter, Section A2010_110_001_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Richard Clayter was born on July 28, 1922 in Chicago, Illinois to Bella Warren Clayter and Richard Clayter, Sr. His father had Native American and Irish ancestry, and was born in Kansas City, Missouri. He grew up in Chicago, and went on to become a carpenter and railroad car repairman. Clayter's mother was born in Waynesboro, Mississippi, and worked as a domestic after moving to Chicago. Clayter's parents met in Chicago, and divorced when he was young. From that time, he lived with his mother in Chicago, where they rented apartments on Giles Avenue, Wentworth Avenue and South Lafayette Avenue. In one building, they lived next door to a group of communists, who predicted that Clayter would grow up to practice law. He often engaged in mischievous behavior, and was sent to live with his maternal aunt and uncle in the rural community of Wiggins, Mississippi, where he learned to farm, fish and hunt. He also attended the Stone County Training School, until it was destroyed by an arsonist.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Clayter, Section A2010_110_001_002, TRT: 0:27:17 ?

Richard Clayter attended the Stone County Training School in Wiggins, Mississippi. He completed his first year of high school in Tuskegee, Alabama, and then returned to live with his mother in Chicago, Illinois. He planned to continue his schooling at DuSable High School, but a family friend offered the use of his address, which enabled Clayter to attend the predominantly white Englewood High School. There, he played basketball and trained in automotive repair. He also worked briefly at Clark Maple Chevrolet, but disliked the work. Upon graduating, Clayter began his employment at the Rock Island Arsenal in Rock Island, Illinois; and then, in 1943, was drafted into the U.S. Army. After training at Fort Sheridan in Illinois, he was sent to Owensboro, Kentucky, and was then deployed with the 3249 Quartermaster Service Company to Belgium, where he served in the Battle of the Bulge. He was discharged in 1945, and returned to Chicago, where he experienced combat flashbacks. Clayter also recalls his first marriage.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Clayter, Section A2010_110_001_003, TRT: 0:29:52 ?

Richard Clayter served in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1945, during World War II. In 1950, he earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. He then obtained a master's degree in social work at Loyola University Chicago, and began his employment as social worker at the Illinois School for Boys in St. Charles, Illinois. Clayter went on to study at the Loyola University Chicago School of Law, where he was the only African American student in his class. During his early career as an attorney, he shared an office with the firm of Starke and Anglin, and focused on criminal and divorce cases. Through his association with Frank Anglin, Jr. and Marshall Bynum, who owned the Charles S. Jackson Funeral Home, Clayter litigated the desegregation of Chicago's Oak Woods Cemetery. He remembers his black colleagues in Chicago, including attorneys Wilson Frost, R. Eugene Pincham and Aaron H. Payne. Clayter also talks about his second marriage and four children.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Clayter, Section A2010_110_001_004, TRT: 0:29:31 ?

Richard Clayter began practicing law in the late 1950s in Chicago, Illinois. During his early career as an attorney, he shared office space at a number of Chicago based law firms, including Starke and Anglin; Frost, Clayter, Sherard and Howse at 134 North LaSalle Street; Gassaway, Crosson, Turner and Parsons

at 68 Garfield Boulevard; and Rivers, Lockhart, Clayter and Lawrence at 29 South LaSalle Street. From his association with Marshall Bynum, the owner of Chicago's Charles R. Smith Funeral Home, and lawyers Frank Anglin, Jr. and Cornell Davis, Clayter became the lead litigator on the Oak Woods Cemetery desegregation case, which concluded successfully in a settlement. At this point in the interview, Clayter talks about his frustrations with criminal law, and his experiences of racial discrimination in the judicial system of Cook County, Illinois. He also remembers Chicago's African American judges, including Henry C. Ferguson and Duke Slater; and attorneys George N. Leighton and R. Eugene Pincham.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Clayter, Section A2010_110_001_005, TRT: 0:28:33 ?

Richard Clayter met attorney Wilson Frost while they were both working as parole agents for the State of Illinois during the 1950s. They went on to share office space in the law firm of Frost, Clayter, Sherard and Howse at 134 North LaSalle Street in downtown Chicago, Illinois. Over the course of his law career, Clayter also worked at the Chicago based firms of Rivers, Lockhart, Clayter and Lawrence; Gassaway, Crosson, Turner and Parsons; and Clayter, Wood and Rhinehart. Through his friendship with Cook County circuit court judge James D. Crosson, Clayter joined the Original 40 Club, a social organization in Chicago that included members like state legislator Cecil A. Partee, U.S. Congressman William L. Dawson and James Weinstein, who was the founder and editor of the socialist magazine In These Times. At this point in the interview, Clayter describes the case of Friendship Medical Center v. Chicago Board of Health, which he argued in 1973. He also remembers Mayor Harold Washington and John H. Stroger, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Clayter, Section A2010_110_001_006, TRT: 0:31:22 ?

Richard Clayter had a long career as an attorney in Chicago, Illinois, where he practiced criminal and civil law. At this point in the interview, he talks about his memorable cases, including a lawsuit that challenged the requirements for free children's entrance to Chicago's Woods Theatre. He also remembers a case in which he argued successfully for a reduced sentence for his client. Prior to his career as an attorney, Clayter served as a social worker for the State of Illinois at the Illinois School for Boys in St. Charles, and then as a federal parole officer. At this point in the interview, Clayter reflects upon his life and legacy, and describes his advice to aspiring lawyers and his hopes for the world. He also shares a message to his children.

Video Oral History Interview with Richard Clayter, Section A2010_110_001_007, TRT: 0:17:40 ?

Richard Clayter narrates his photographs.