

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Gregory Sleet

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Sleet, Gregory Moneta, 1951-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 25, 2012
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2012
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:43:17).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Federal district court judge and united states attorney The Honorable Gregory Sleet (1951 - ) was the first African American U.S. Attorney in Delaware, and the first African American to be appointed to the federal bench in Delaware. Sleet was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 25, 2012, in Wilmington, Delaware. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2012_127
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Judge Gregory M. Sleet was born on March 8, 1951 in New York, New York. He is the son of Moneta Sleet Jr., the first African American journalist to win a Pulitzer Prize. Sleet obtained his B.A. degree from Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia. He completed his J.D. degree from Rutgers University School of Law at Camden, New Jersey where he was an Earl Warren Scholar. Sleet began his career as an assistant public defender for the Defender Association of Philadelphia. He later left the Defender Association to join a private practice, later to serve as the Deputy Attorney General for the State of Delaware.

In 1992, Sleet worked as General Counsel for Hercules, Inc., a chemical and munitions company based in Wilmington, Delaware. In 1994, at the recommendation of Delaware United States Senator Joe Biden, Sleet was selected by President Bill Clinton to serve as the United States Attorney for the District of Delaware. A year later, he was appointed by United States Attorney General Janet Reno to the Attorney General's Advisory Committee. He was further honored by being named the Vice Chairman of the committees' 1995-96 session. On January 27, 1998, Sleet was nominated to the United States District Court for the District of Delaware and was sworn in as judge of that court on September 28, 1998. In 2007, Sleet became Chief Judge. He is responsible for representing the Delaware district at judicial policy-making bodies in the 3rd United States Circuit Court of Appeals, overseeing the general business and operation of the Delaware court. He is the first African American to be appointed United States Attorney in Delaware and the first to be appointed to the federal bench in Delaware.

Sleet is the recipient of the 1994 Distinguished Service Award from the NAACP. He has been named one of "Fifty of the Finest" graduates in the first fifty years of Rutgers University – Camden Division. In 1998, *Delaware Today* magazine selected him as Delawarean of the year. Sleet currently holds an adjunct teaching position at Widener University School of Law, where he teaches a course in patent litigation. Sleet is also a member of the Third Circuit Committee on Criminal Pattern Jury Instructions, the Third Circuit Judicial Council Automation & Technology Committee, the Third Circuit Judicial Council Facilities and Security Committee and Member of the Third Circuit Judicial Council Case Management Committee.

Judge Gregory Sleet was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 24, 2012.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 25, 2012, in Wilmington, Delaware, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Federal district court judge and United States Attorney The Honorable Gregory Sleet (1951 - ) was the first African American U.S. Attorney in Delaware, and the first African American to be appointed to the federal bench in Delaware.

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## 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®.

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## **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.

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## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Sleet, Gregory Moneta, 1951-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Sleet, Gregory Moneta, 1951---Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Federal District Court Judge

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United States Attorney

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

LawMakers|LawMakers

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## **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 The Honorable Gregory Sleet, May 25, 2012. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet,  
Section A2012\_127\_001\_001, TRT: 1:30:34 2012/05/25

The Honorable Gregory Sleet was born on March 8, 1951 in New York City to Juanita Harris Sleet and Moneta Sleet, Jr. His maternal grandfather, William Harris, was rumored to be Native American. Sleet's maternal uncle, William Harris, built many of the churches in Lynchburg, Virginia, including some that were still in use at the time of the interview. Another maternal uncle, James Harris, owned seven hundred acres of farmland near Lynchburg. Sleet's mother earned a degree in physical education from a normal school, and worked as a teacher. Sleet's paternal grandparents, Ozetta Allensworth Sleet and Moneta Sleet, Sr., lived in Kentucky, where his grandfather earned a bachelor's degree and then taught college courses in business administration. During World War II, Sleet's father served in the U.S. military as a supply officer on the Burma Road. He then attended Kentucky State College in Frankfort, Kentucky, and later became the first African American recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for his photography.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet,  
Section A2012\_127\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:37 2012/05/25

The Honorable Gregory Sleet's father, Moneta Sleet, Jr., attended Kentucky State College in Frankfort, Kentucky after returning from World War II. He earned a business degree, but decided to pursue a career in photography after receiving encouragement from Professor John T. Williams

of Maryland State College. Sleet's father moved to New York City, where he completed a master's degree at New York University. He began his journalism career at Our World magazine, and then secured a position at the Johnson Publishing Company. He worked as a journalist for Ebony, and won a Pulitzer Prize for his photographs of the Civil Rights Movement. After accepting this honor, Sleet's father received numerous job offers from majority periodicals, but chose to remain with the black-owned Johnson Publishing Company. Sleet's family eventually moved to Roosevelt, New York, where he attended the Underhill Avenue School. Due to his poor behavior there, his parents enrolled him at a Lutheran school in Hempstead, New York.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet,  
Section A2012\_127\_001\_003, TRT: 3:30:25 2012/05/25

The Honorable Gregory Sleet transferred to a Lutheran school in Hempstead, New York after an altercation with another student at the Underhill Avenue School in Roosevelt, New York. He began the seventh grade at the Long Island Lutheran Middle and High School in Brookville, New York; and, due to further behavioral issues there, Sleet's mother, teacher Juanita Harris Sleet, transferred him to her school system in Hempstead, where he attended Lawrence Road Junior High School. Sleet later moved with his family to Baldwin, New York, and enrolled at Uniondale High School in the neighboring town of Uniondale. There, he joined the football and track teams, as well as the choir, newspaper staff and debate team. He led a student walkout during his senior year. Throughout Sleet's childhood, his father travelled frequently for his work as a photojournalist at Ebony magazine. He covered high profile events like the March on Washington in 1963, and the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela in South Africa in 1994.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet,  
Section A2012\_127\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:55 2012/05/25

The Honorable Gregory Sleet was considered a leader of the student body at Uniondale High School in Uniondale, New York. During his senior year, he led a protest against the exclusion of black history from the school's

curriculum. The demonstration included a walkout and meetings to discuss the black students' grievances with teachers and administrators. Hoping to attend a college where activism was encouraged, Sleet applied to Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. After being placed on the waitlist, he accepted admission to the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, and briefly transferred to Connecticut College before deciding to return to the Hampton Institute. There, Sleet majored in political science, and was elected president of the student government. He also helped occupy the administration building. After graduating in 1973, Sleet enrolled at the Rutgers School of Law in Camden, New Jersey, where he continued his student activism as a member of the Black Law Students Association.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet,  
Section A2012\_127\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:25 2012/05/25

The Honorable Gregory Sleet received an Earl Warren Scholarship from the NAACP to attend the Rutgers School of Law in Camden, New Jersey. He worked as a summer associate at the law firm of Kairys, Rudovsky and McQuiggan in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he was introduced to the field of public defense. After graduating in 1976, Sleet joined the Defender Association of Philadelphia. As a public defender, Sleet mostly represented African American men, who often received harsher penalties than white defendants with private attorneys. In 1983, Sleet transitioned to private practice. He was initially recruited by Daniel-Paul Alva to join the law firm of LaCheen and Alva in Philadelphia, and then partnered with Romaine Phillips to found the firm of Sleet and Phillips. He disliked private practice and considered leaving the law profession, but decided to return to public law after being offered a position at the state attorney general's office in Wilmington, Delaware.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet,  
Section A2012\_127\_001\_006, TRT: 6:31:40 2012/05/25

The Honorable Gregory Sleet served in the office of the Attorney General of Delaware in Wilmington, Delaware from 1990 to 1992. Following the births of his children, Moneta Sleet III and Kelsi Sleet, he transitioned to

corporate law to support his family. He secured a position as counsel at Hercules, Inc., where he worked until 1994. At that time, Sleet was offered the nomination for U.S. Attorney for the District of Delaware. Despite his reservations, he met with U.S. Senator Joe Biden at the Hotel du Pont in Wilmington to discuss the position. Sleet agreed to be nominated, and was confirmed by the U.S. Senate. He served under U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno, and became the vice chairman of the Attorney General's Advisory Committee of U.S. Attorneys. In 1998, Sleet was asked to accept a nomination to the U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware. Recognizing its importance to the black community, he agreed to be nominated and was appointed by President William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet,  
Section A2012\_127\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:04 2012/05/25

The Honorable Gregory Sleet served as the chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Delaware from 2007. In this position, he acted as the court's manager and public representative. In 2009, Sleet ruled on a case concerning sports betting in Delaware. The National Football League appealed his decision, and it was overturned by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. Sleet also oversaw the case of United States vs. Thomas S. Pendleton, who was accused of child sexual abuse. Because Pendleton had no mitigating circumstance and multiple prior convictions for similar crimes, Sleet decided for the first time in his career to apply a statutory maximum sentence. In 2012, Sleet attempted to stay the execution of Shannon Johnson on the basis of a next friend petition, but was overruled by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit. At this point in the interview, Sleet talks about his plans for a writing project on the death penalty. He also reflects upon his life, legacy and family.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Gregory Sleet,  
Section A2012\_127\_001\_008, TRT: 8:12:37 2012/05/25

The Honorable Gregory Sleet talks about his hopes and concerns for the African American community. He also describes how he would like to be remembered, and



concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.