

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Joseph Roulhac

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Roulhac, Joseph, 1916-2008
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Joseph Roulhac,
Dates:	August 2, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:39:07).
Abstract:	Civil rights lawyer and municipal court judge The Honorable Joseph Roulhac (1916 - 2008) was a former assistant county prosecutor and served thirty years as a municipal judge in Akron, Ohio. Roulhac was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 2, 2002, in Akron, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_125
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Joseph Daniel Roulhac was born on August 18, 1916, in Selma, Alabama. His father, Robert, was a Presbyterian minister and his mother, Minerva, was a teacher. Roulhac earned a reputation in Akron, Ohio, as a humane and fair judge who gave his personal attention to every individual who came into his courtroom.

Roulhac's family moved to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, when he was ten, and to Titusville, Georgia, four years later. He attended religious schools and received his high school diploma from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa in 1934. In 1938, Roulhac graduated with his B.A. degree in sociology from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. He worked there after graduation as a sociology instructor for a year while earning his M.A. degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1940. He taught at Fort Valley State College in Georgia until 1941. The U.S. Army drafted him in 1942, and Roulhac attained the rank of master sergeant within months. Everything went well until he refused to justify the Army's segregation to his black subordinates. Weeks later, Roulhac was shipped to the Philippine Islands. When he returned to the United States in 1946, he used the G.I. Bill to attend the University of Pennsylvania, earning his J.D. degree. In 1948, Roulhac moved to Akron and went into private practice as an attorney. He became an assistant county prosecutor in 1957. In 1967, Roulhac was elected as a municipal judge, serving thirty years before retiring in 1987.

Roulhac was a member of the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity and has served in the NAACP, the Urban League, the Methodist Church and the American Legion. He was honored with the Thomas More Award in 1979. He and his wife, Frances Phoenix, have one child, Delores.

Roulhac passed away on March 5, 2008 at the age of 91.

Roulhac was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 2, 2002.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Joseph Roulhac was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 2, 2002, in Akron, Ohio, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights lawyer and municipal court judge The Honorable Joseph Roulhac (1916 - 2008) was a former assistant county prosecutor and served thirty years as a municipal judge in Akron, Ohio.

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:

Roulhac, Joseph, 1916-2008

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Roulhac, Joseph, 1916-2008--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Akron (Ohio)

Occupations:

Civil Rights Lawyer

Municipal Court Judge

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 The Honorable Joseph Roulhac, August 2, 2002. 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 The Honorable Joseph Roulhac, Section A2002_125_001_001, TRT: 0:29:55 ?

Joseph Roulhac describes his family background and childhood. He was born on August 18, 1916, in Selma, Alabama to Minerva Rhodes Roulhac and Robert

Roulhac. His maternal grandmother died when his mother was young. His father's family can be traced back to the Roulhacs' slave-owner in Jackson County, Florida. Roulhac's father was a Presbyterian minister and his mother was a teacher prior to raising her eight children. Roulhac lived in Selma, Alabama until his family moved to Columbus, Georgia when he was eight years old. Roulhac remembers flying kites, climbing trees, and helping neighbors. He attended his father's school at Sylvan Street Presbyterian Church in Selma, Alabama and then went to a public school in Columbus, Georgia. For high school, Roulhac attended Allen Normal School in Thomasville, Georgia until the school was shut down, and he graduated from the Stillman Institute [now Stillman College] in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1934.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Joseph Roulhac, Section A2002_125_001_002, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Joseph Roulhac describes his education. After spending two years in junior college at the Stillman Institute in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Roulhac worked in a factory to make enough money to attend Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. He describes being given an advance by his employer for his college tuition but the money was never taken out of his paycheck. His fellow students came from all over the United States and the world. One classmate, Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah, went on to become the first President of Ghana. In 1938, Roulhac graduated with his B.A. degree in sociology from Lincoln University. He then earned his M.A. degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1940. Roulhac was recruited by Horace Mann Bond, the father of HM Julian Bond and the first African American president of Lincoln University, to teach at Fort Valley State College in Georgia in 1941. However, after one year, he was asked not to return due to speaking out against segregation. Roulhac shares his views on the racial and economic politics of the 1940s.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Joseph Roulhac, Section A2002_125_001_003, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Joseph Roulhac talks about the influential black leaders he met as a young man. While attending Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, Roulhac met Dr. Alain Locke, Howard Thurman, Benjamin Elijah Mays, and James A. 'Billboard' Jackson through his involvement with the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity. Roulhac escorted Alain Locke from Washington, D.C. to Lincoln University for a fraternity function. Roulhac traveled to Miami University of Ohio to see Howard Thurman speak and met Benjamin Elijah Mays at Claflin State College in Orangeburg, South Carolina. In 1942, Roulhac was drafted by the U.S. Army, and he attained the rank of master sergeant within months. Working with other highly educated enlisted men, Roulhac revised training manuals and taught recruits. However, he was asked to leave when he refused to reinforce the U.S. Army's segregationist policies. Roulhac was then shipped to the Philippine Islands. When he returned to the United States in 1946, he earned his J.D. degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Joseph Roulhac, Section A2002_125_001_004, TRT: 0:30:50 ?

Joseph Roulhac describes famous legal cases from his career. Using the G.I. Bill, Roulhac attended law school at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where he was one of only three African Americans out of a class of 300. Roulhac decided to take the Ohio Bar Exam after hearing rumors that non-whites were discriminated against when taking the Pennsylvania Bar Exam. In 1948, he moved to Akron, Ohio where he began practicing law and winning notable cases such as Douglas v. Hubbard which set

a precedent on law and equity. He became an assistant county prosecutor in 1957 and was elected as a municipal judge in 1967. As a judge, Roulhac was attentive to how racial discrimination shaped the justice system and wrote an eloquent opinion in the State v. Norwood case which argued that the judge has the duty to prevent injustice to anyone who comes before the court.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Joseph Roulhac, Section A2002_125_001_005, TRT: 0:31:06 ?

Joseph Roulhac talks about being elected the first black municipal judge in Akron, Ohio. While there are only a few African Americans to hold positions as judges in Akron, Ohio, Roulhac wanted to ensure that a black judge would be appointed when he retired before finishing his term in 1987. The respect and support that he received from the community in Akron, Ohio led to him receiving the Saint Thomas More Award in 1979, a housing development named Roulhac Circle in his honor, and Walsh Jesuit High School in Cuyahoga, Ohio establishing the Judge Joseph D. Roulhac Justice Seminar which brought in renowned speakers such as Bishop Desmond Tutu, Maya Angelou, and Morris Dees. Roulhac reflects upon his legacy and concludes by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Joseph Roulhac, Section A2002_125_001_006, TRT: 0:08:11 ?

Joseph Roulhac narrates his photographs.