

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Charles Freeman

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Freeman, Charles, 1933-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Charles Freeman,
Dates:	March 28, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:08:00).
Abstract:	State supreme court judge The Honorable Charles Freeman (1933 - 2020) served as Chief Justice of the Illinois State Supreme Court. Freeman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 28, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_057
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Charles E. Freeman strove to make the state judicial system accountable and accessible to its citizens. Freeman, whose surname was probably adopted when Quakers freed his father's family before the Civil War, was born in Virginia in 1933. Freeman received his B.A. degree from Virginia Union University, and his J.D. degree from John Marshall Law School. In 1997; from there, he went on to become the first African American to be elected chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court.

Governor Otto Kerner appointed Freeman arbitrator of the Illinois Industrial Commission in 1965; in this position, he heard and wrote decisions on more than 2,000 work-related injury cases. Eight years later, Governor Dan Walker appointed Freeman to the Illinois Commerce Commission, where he monitored businesses to ensure they maintained proper conduct and safe practices. Having practiced law from 1962 to 1977, Freeman was elected to the Circuit Court of Cook County. In 1982, Freeman swore in Harold Washington, a personal friend, as the first African American mayor of Chicago; he inducted Washington for a second term in 1987.

Freeman became the first African American elected to the Illinois Supreme Court in 1990, and in 1997 he was elected chief justice. Fulfilling his pledge to polish the Court's administrative projects for the next century, Freeman took the questionable marriage fund to task; stressed the need for mentoring programs and high standards for public servants; and tackled prosecutorial misconduct. Freeman elucidated the court's responsibilities and capabilities in a 1996 article in the *Chicago Defender*.

On November 5, 2002, Freeman became the Illinois Supreme Court's senior member when he was retained for another ten-year term. Freeman received dozens of prestigious awards for his professional and volunteer work. Freeman and his wife, Marylee, raised a son, Kevin, who went on to become a partner in the firm Gardner Carton & Douglas.

Freeman passed away on March 2, 2020.

The Honorable Charles Freeman was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 28, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Charles Freeman was conducted by Adele Hodge on March 28, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. State supreme court judge The Honorable Charles Freeman (1933 - 2020) served as Chief Justice of the Illinois State Supreme Court.

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:

Freeman, Charles, 1933-

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Freeman, Charles, 1933---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Illinois

Occupations:

State Supreme 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 Charles Freeman, March 28, 2003. 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 Charles Freeman, Section A2003_057_001_001, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

Charles E. Freeman details his family background on the paternal and maternal

sides. Freeman shares stories of his youth in Richmond, Virginia, from delivering newspapers with his brother to overcoming his stuttering problem. Freeman remembers his schooling, describing himself as an excellent student who was active in many extracurricular activities. He remembers how his family's limited finances prevented the Freeman brothers from attending schools out of state, much to his father's sadness.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Charles Freeman, Section A2003_057_001_002, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Charles E. Freeman details his rise from an attorney with a private practice to an Illinois state Supreme Court justice. His ascent began with the support of Ralph Metcalfe, who guided Freeman through high-ranking positions within local and state government. Freeman fondly recalls his long professional/political association and friendship with late Chicago mayor, Harold Washington. Freeman describes Washington's ambitions to become mayor, and discusses his time in that office. Freeman then talks about his relationship with his wife, and shares how his life changed when his son was born. Freeman then discusses his role as the first African American on the Illinois Supreme Court.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Charles Freeman, Section A2003_057_001_003, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Justice Freeman expounds upon his life as a justice on the Illinois state Supreme Court. He details his life on the bench and how justices live when court is in session. He also describes the deliberative process and his thoughts on prosecutorial misconduct.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Charles Freeman, Section A2003_057_001_004, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Justice Charles E. Freeman describes how judicial opinions are shaped and reflects upon some of the more difficult decisions he's rendered. He also expounds upon the effect of the Patriot Act legislation and its influence over state court decisions. Freeman closes this segment with his opinion on the changing nature of the law and names some up-and-coming Illinois judges.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Charles Freeman, Section A2003_057_001_005, TRT: 0:11:55 ?

Charles E. Freeman recalls the sights and sounds of his childhood in Richmond, Virginia and closes the interview portion of the tape with how he wishes to be remembered. He wishes to be remembered as a man with an "open mind, an open ear, ability to get along with everyone, talk with everyone." Freeman then describes photos that depict his family and childhood home in Richmond.