

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George Russell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Russell, George L., 1929-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George Russell,
Dates:	August 19, 2004 and July 13, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	15 Betacame SP videocassettes (6:15:24).
Abstract:	Lawyer and political campaign manager George Russell (1929 -) is the first African American to sit on the Circuit Court in Maryland as well as the first to sit on Maryland's Appellate Court. He was also the first African American City Solicitor for Baltimore City. Russell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 19, 2004 and July 13, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_094
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

George Levi Russell, Jr. was born on March 19, 1929 in Baltimore, Maryland. His mother was a homemaker and his father worked as a postal worker. He attended Baltimore City public schools and earned his high school diploma from Frederick Douglass high school in 1946. While in high school, he was sports editor of the school newspaper and a member of the debate team.

He earned his A.B. degree in economics from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, where he pledged Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity and was a member of the debate team. He earned his law degree from the University of Maryland in 1954. After earning his law degree, he was drafted into the army in 1954, where he practiced law and was in charge of Courts, Boards and Special Court-martials.

From 1956 to 1966, Russell was an associate at Brown, Allen, Watts, and Murphy and was later named as a partner in the firm. In 1967, Russell became the first African American to sit on the Circuit Court in Maryland as well as becoming the first Black to sit on an Appellate Court in the state. From 1968 to 1974, Russell worked as the first African American City Solicitor for Baltimore City. Continuing to break barriers, Russell served as the first African American President of the Maryland Bar Association from 1973 to 1974. Leaving the Maryland Bar Association, he was a partner at Russell & Thompson from 1974 to 1986, and then worked as a partner for Josey, Gibson, Allen and Mitchell. In 1982, he established Harbor Bank, one of the largest minority owned banks in the country. In 1986, Russell merged his all black firm with a predominately white firm, Piper and Marbury, one of the top 100 law firms in the country – the merger was a historic first in the nation.

In 2002, Russell was appointed chairperson of a commission that would be responsible for building the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, the largest museum on the East Coast dedicated to African American history and culture. The museum is scheduled open in January of 2005.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with George Russell was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on August 19, 2004 and July 13, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland, and was recorded on 15 Betacame SP videocassettes. Lawyer and political campaign manager George Russell (1929 -) is the first African American to sit on the Circuit Court in Maryland as well as the first to sit on Maryland's Appellate Court. He was also the first African American City Solicitor for Baltimore City.

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:

Russell, George L., 1929-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Russell, George L., 1929---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Lawyer

Political Campaign Manager

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|PoliticalMakers

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 George Russell, August 19, 2004 and July 13, 2004. 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 George Russell, Section A2004_094_002_001, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

George Russell was born on March 19, 1929 in Baltimore, Maryland. Russell's mother, Anna Marie Short Russell, was from La Plata, Maryland. Her mother was Piscataway Native American and her father was a farmer and sexton. A

caring and religious woman, Russell's mother worked alongside her aunt for the Finneys, a well-known Baltimore family. Russell's father, George L. Russell, Sr. was born in Baltimore to a long line of Baltimore residents. He finished high school and attended Fanny Jackson Coppin Normal School in Baltimore before becoming a U.S. postal employee, a position he held for fifty-five years. He was a parishioner of Allen A.M.E. Church in Baltimore, although Russell's maternal family was Catholic. Russell's parents met in Baltimore. One of eight children, Russell remembers going to Sunday school, his mother's cooking, selling ice in his neighborhood and the city's territorial divisions. He attended P.S. 103 in Baltimore, and in third grade he knew he wanted to be a lawyer.

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section A2004_094_002_002, TRT: 0:29:44 ?

George Russell attended Booker T. Washington Junior High School in Baltimore, Maryland where he enjoyed English and competed with his friends. Russell also sold papers and worked as a soda jerk. He worked on the Atlantic City boardwalk during a summer break from college but was fired when his employer discovered he could not cook. Russell attended Frederick Douglass High School in Baltimore where he joined the debating society and was sports editor for the school newspaper. He matriculated at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania where he took courses in public utility economics and German and pledged Kappa Alpha Psi. After graduating in 1950 Russell spent a year working for the U.S. Census Bureau before attending the University of Maryland School of Law in Baltimore. In 1954 Russell was drafted; since he had passed the bar examination, he became a non-commissioned judge advocate for the U.S. Army in Germany until 1956 when he returned to Baltimore to practice law at Brown, Allen, Watts, Murphy & Russell.

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section A2004_094_002_003, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

George Russell became the first African American judge to serve on Baltimore, Maryland's circuit court in 1967. While there, he discovered his opposition to the death penalty, tried a childhood friend and was criticized by a journalist who threatened his career. The city's use of religious quotas helped Russell become the first African American president of the Baltimore City Bar Association. He was appointed to the appellate court of Maryland by Chief Judge Robert C. Murphy. In 1968 he became city solicitor for Baltimore and tried several controversial cases, including the Ku Klux Klan's request to use the city convention center. He began a private practice, Russell & Thompson, in 1974, which merged with a majority-white firm, Piper & Marbury, in 1986. In 1982 Russell helped establish Harbor Bank of Maryland, one of the nation's preeminent minority-owned banks. Russell also represented William Lloyd "Little Willie" Adams in a case presided by HistoryMaker The Honorable Robert Mack Bell.

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section A2004_094_002_004, TRT: 0:26:32 ?

George Russell decided to merge his law firm Russell & Thompson with the renowned Piper & Marbury firm of Baltimore in 1986. He considers the merger a success, particularly in expanding opportunities for African American lawyers. Russell, after initial reluctance, joined Maryland Governor William D. Schaefer and HistoryMaker Howard "Pete" Rawlings in establishing the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture. In partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education, the museum focuses on African American history in Maryland specifically and features success stories to help educate and uplift children. Russell explains how the museum preserves Lewis's legacy and distinguishes the museum from other African American history museums in the country. He reflects upon his

aspirations for the museum, his life and legacy and describes how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section A2004_094_002_005, TRT: 0:04:42 ?

George Russell narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_001, TRT: 0:29:18 ?

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_001E, TRT: 0:29:18 ?

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_002, TRT: 0:30:04 ?

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_002E, TRT: 0:30:04 ?

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_003, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_003E, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_004, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_004E, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_005, TRT: 0:07:23 ?

Video Oral History Interview with George Russell, Section B2004_094_001_005E, TRT: 0:07:23 ?