

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Julius Chambers

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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>	Chambers, Julius L. (Julius LeVonne), 1936-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Julius Chambers,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 6, 2002
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2002
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:50:51).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights lawyer Julius Chambers (1936 - 2013 ) worked on the benchmark Supreme Court case, Swann vs. Charlotte Board of Education. Chambers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 6, 2002, in Charlotte, North Carolina. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2002_220
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born in Mount Gilead, North Carolina, in 1936, veteran civil rights lawyer, activist and educator Julius L. Chambers was influenced by the racial intolerance he saw growing up in a rural community east of Charlotte. After graduating from high school in 1954, he entered North Carolina Central University, where he graduated summa cum laude with a B.A. in history and was president of the student body. He then attended the University of Michigan, earning an M.A. in history. Chambers began law school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1959, where he became the first African American editor-in-chief of the school's law review. Upon graduating in 1962, Chambers ranked first in his class of 100 students. He went on to earn his LL.M. from Columbia University Law School in 1964.

Chambers became the first intern with the new NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (LDF) in 1963. Subsequently, in June 1964, he opened his own practice in Charlotte, which eventually became the first integrated law firm in North Carolina. Together with his founding partners, James E. Ferguson II and Adam Stein, this firm is credited with influencing more landmark state and federal legislation in school desegregation, employment and voting rights than any other in the United States. Together with lawyers of the LDF, they helped shape civil rights law by winning benchmark United States Supreme Court rulings such as the famous decision of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971), which led to federally mandated busing, helping integrate public schools across the country. Chambers and his team also won in two of the Supreme Court's most monumental Title VII employment discrimination decisions, *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971) and *Albemarle Paper Co. v. Moody* (1974).

In 1984, Chambers left his firm to become director-counsel of the LDF. Under Chambers' leadership, the organization fought for civil rights legislation and affirmative action programs that began in the 1970s and 1980s. Remaining devoted to education, however, he returned to his alma mater, North Carolina Central University, where he served as chancellor for eight years. Chambers published numerous books, teaches at various law schools, and was a member of many boards and organizations.

Chambers passed away on August 2, 2013 at age 76.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Julius Chambers was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 6, 2002, in Charlotte, North Carolina, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights lawyer Julius Chambers (1936 - 2013 ) worked on the benchmark Supreme Court case, Swann vs. Charlotte Board of Education.

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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:

Chambers, Julius L. (Julius LeVonne), 1936-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Chambers, Julius L. (Julius LeVonne), 1936---Interviews

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African American lawyers--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:

Civil Rights Lawyer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Julius Chambers, December 6, 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).

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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 Julius Chambers, Section A2002\_220\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?  
Julius Chambers describes his family background. His father, William Lee Chambers, was born in 1903 in North Carolina. His mother, Matilda Bruton Chambers, was born in 1903 in Wadeville, North Carolina. The couple met at a

baseball game in Montgomery County, North Carolina, and married in the mid-1900s. They gave birth to Julius Chambers on October 6, 1936 in Mt. Gilead, Montgomery County, North Carolina. William Lee Chambers was an auto mechanic, and the first African American in Montgomery County to strike a deal with an oil distributor, enabling him to sell gasoline at his garage, Chambers Garage. Matilda Bruton Chambers did accounting work for Chambers Garage and maintained the family's household. As a student at Mt. Gilead Elementary School for Negroes, Chambers developed a love for reading. In 1950, he enrolled at Peabody High School, where he was influenced by his biology teacher. He was also a member of the New Farmers of America, where he participated in public speaking and debate competitions.

Automobile repair shops--North Carolina.

African American fathers and sons.

Amoco Oil Company.

Segregation--North Carolina.

Mount Gilead (Montgomery County, N.C.)

African American youth.

Video Oral History Interview with Julius Chambers, Section A2002\_220\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Julius Chambers graduated from Peabody High School in Montgomery County, North Carolina, in 1954. He then enrolled at North Carolina Central University, a Historically Black University founded by Dr. James E. Shepard in Durham, North Carolina. Chambers majored in history, and was influenced by his history professor, Dr. Helen Edmonds, as well as his African history professor, Dr. Caulbert Jones. He graduated in 1958, and received a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to pursue an M.A. degree in history at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Chambers graduated with his M.A. degree in history in 1959. He then enrolled at the University of North Carolina School of Law in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, graduating with his J.D. degree in 1962. Chambers managed to waive his obligation to the U.S. selective service board, and enrolled at Columbia University School of Law. He graduated with his L.L.M. degree in 1964, and accepted an internship with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in New York City, New York.

North Carolina Central University.

History--Study and teaching (Higher)--United States.

College teachers--North Carolina.

University of Michigan.

Integration.

Shepard, James E.

Video Oral History Interview with Julius Chambers, Section A2002\_220\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Julius Chambers was elected as the first African American editor-in-chief of the North Carolina Law Review at the University of North Carolina School of Law in 1961. He met Jack Greenberg, Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and Thurgood Marshall later that year, which led to an internship with the Legal Defense Fund in 1963 in New York City, New York. 1964, Chambers opened a private practice in Charlotte, North Carolina. Later that year, Chambers' car was bombed due to his involvement in a lawsuit against Moore's Barbecue in New Bern, North Carolina. Chambers worked with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to force Durham County and Durham City Schools to merge in the late 1960s, albeit unsuccessfully. In 1971, Chambers worked with the Legal Defense Fund to try Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of

Education, which imposed a busing requirement on Charlotte-Mecklenburg County in North Carolina. He also tried *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, a landmark employment discrimination case, in 1970.

Marshall, Thurgood, 1908-1993.

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

Greenberg, Jack, 1924-

Constitutional law--United States--Cases.

School integration--United States.

Race discrimination--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Julius Chambers, Section A2002\_220\_001\_004, TRT: 0:22:26 ?

In 1964, Julius Chambers founded Ferguson, Stein, and Chambers with James E. Ferguson II and Adam Stein. Chambers' firm worked with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to try cases like *Coppedge v. Franklin County Board of Education* in 1967, *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* in 1970, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* in 1971, and *Albemarle Paper Co. v. Moody* in 1974. In 1984, Chambers succeeded Jack Greenberg as Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Chambers worked to maintain civil rights legislation that had been compromised by the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush presidential administrations. Chambers left the Legal Defense Fund in 1992 to serve as Chancellor of North Carolina Central University. He left in 2001 to found and direct the University of North Carolina School of Law Center for Civil Rights in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Chambers talks about contemporary civil rights issues and civil rights law. He also reflects upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered.

Civil rights Law and legislation.

Supreme Court decisions—United States.

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

North Carolina Central University.

Reagan, Ronald.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Center for Civil Rights.

Social change--United States--History--20th century.