

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable William Cousins, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cousins, William, Jr., 1927-2018
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Cousins, Jr.,
Dates:	January 16, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:15:00).
Abstract:	Circuit court judge The Honorable William Cousins, Jr. (1927 - 2018) was elected as Circuit Court Judge of Cook County, and presided as a judge on the Illinois Appellate Court. He was also appointed chairman of the Illinois Judicial Conference and as a member of the Special Supreme Court Committee on Capital Cases. Cousins was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 16, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_009
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Like many Chicagoans, William Cousins, Jr., had his roots in the South. Cousins was born in 1927, in Swiftown, Mississippi. His family moved to Memphis, Tennessee and then to Chicago. Cousins graduated from DuSable High School on the city's South Side in 1945. He received his B. A. degree in political science from the University of Illinois, where he graduated with honors in 1948. Cousins then went on to Harvard Law School, receiving his LL.B. in 1951.

Cousins served his country as an infantry lieutenant in the U.S. Army from 1951 to 1953. He continued as an active army reservist for twenty years and retired as a lieutenant colonel. Cousins began practicing law in 1953 as an attorney with the Chicago Title & Trust Company. From 1957 to 1961, he served as a Republican Assistant State's Attorney. Cousins entered private practice with the law firm of Turner, Cousins, Gavin and Watt. In 1967, Cousins was elected as a "Free Democratic" alderman from Chicago's Eighth Ward.

As an alderman, Cousins worked outside of Chicago's powerful political machine and was reelected as an independent until 1976, when he ran for Circuit Court Judge of Cook County and won. Over the next twenty-six years, Cousins presided as a judge on the Illinois Appellate Court and the Cook County Circuit Court. He was also appointed to various positions, including chairman of the Illinois Judicial Conference and as a member of the Special Supreme Court Committee on Capital Cases. While working as a judge, Cousins also served as Chairman of the Illinois Judicial Council, Chairman of the Judicial Council of the National Bar Association and as a Board member of the National Center for State Courts.

Before election to the judiciary, Cousins dedicated his time and talents to an array of organizations and causes, including Chicago Area Planned Parenthood Association and Operation PUSH.

Cousins was a member of Kappa Alpha Psi and Sigma Pi Phi Fraternities, and Trinity United Church of Christ. He was also a member of the halls of fame of the National Bar Association, the Cook County Bar Association, and DuSable High School.

In 2005, Hiroko, Cousins' wife for fifty-two years, made her transition to eternal life. He had four adult children: Cheryl, Noel, Yul and Gail and four grandchildren.

Cousins passed away on January 20, 2018 at age 90.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable William Cousins, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 16, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Circuit court judge The Honorable William Cousins, Jr. (1927 - 2018) was elected as Circuit Court Judge of Cook County, and presided as a judge on the Illinois Appellate Court. He was also appointed chairman of the Illinois Judicial Conference and as a member of the Special Supreme Court Committee on Capital Cases.

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:

Cousins, William, Jr., 1927-2018

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Cousins, William, Jr., 1927-2018--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Circuit 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 William Cousins, Jr., January 16, 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 William Cousins, Jr., Section
A2003_009_001_001, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Appellate court judge William Cousins begins by recalling his family background, describing his parents and discussing the impact of his sister's death while he was a child. Cousins details his early childhood in Swiftown, Mississippi, and Memphis, Tennessee, sharing vivid memories of segregation. He also remembers his high school years in Chicago, Illinois, focusing on jobs he held while in school.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Cousins, Jr., Section
A2003_009_001_002, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Appellate court judge William Cousins discusses entrepreneurship in Chicago's African American community. He then describes his high school years, recalling his favorite subjects and activities and explaining his motivation to attend college. Cousins describes his undergraduate experience at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, focusing on the teachers and mentors who influenced him, and his own drive to work hard towards success.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Cousins, Jr., Section
A2003_009_001_003, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Appellate court judge William Cousins continues to recount his undergraduate studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and then explains why he chose to attend Harvard Law School. After detailing his successful years at Harvard, he discusses his military service in Korea, providing examples of race discrimination. Cousins also discusses his marriage to his wife, who is of Japanese descent.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Cousins, Jr., Section
A2003_009_001_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Appellate court judge William Cousins details his career path, describing his work with the Chicago Title and Trust Company as an attorney. He then details his work as a state's attorney fighting corruption in the civil division, and explains why he set up his own private law practice. Cousins then talks about his involvement in Chicago politics, describing 1967 election as alderman for Chicago's 8th Ward, and his election as circuit court judge in 1976.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Cousins, Jr., Section
A2003_009_001_005, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Appellate court judge William Cousins discusses his affiliation with the Republican Party during the Richard J. Daley Democratic Machine era, and explains why he eventually left the Republican Party to become an independent. He also details his career as a judge for the Cook County Circuit Court and Illinois Appellate Court. He remembers his many successes and explains what made him well-suited for the job. He also discusses an unsuccessful bid to run for the Illinois Supreme Court.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Cousins, Jr., Section
A2003_009_001_006, TRT: 0:30:45 ?

Appellate court judge William Cousins reflects on his life and career, and shares his hopes and concerns for the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable William Cousins, Jr., Section
A2003_009_001_007, TRT: 0:14:30 ?

William Cousins narrates his photographs.