

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Mary Mitchell

PERSON

Mitchell, Mary, 1949-

Alternative Names: Mary Mitchell; Mary A. Duncan

Life Dates: May 23, 1949-

Place of Birth: Clarksdale, Mississippi, USA

Residence: Chicago, IL

Work: Chicago, IL

Occupations: Newspaper Columnist

Biographical Note

Chicago Sun-Times columnist Mary A. Mitchell was born Mary A. Duncan on May 23, 1949, in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Mitchell's mother, Carrie Williams Duncan, and father, Joseph Duncan, struggled to raise ten children in Chicago Public Housing's Dearborn Homes and Clarence Darrow Homes. Mitchell, the eldest and a twin loved to read as she helped raise her siblings. Mitchell attended Einstein Elementary School and Wendell Phillips Upper Grade Center. At Dunbar Vocational High School, Mitchell joined a girls group called the Exquisite Ladies Club, which put emphasis on good grades, not having babies and service. Graduating from Dunbar in 1967, Mitchell was hired by Peoples Gas as a mailroom clerk. Starting at Wilson Junior College in 1968, Mitchell transferred to Chicago Teacher's College (Chicago State University) that same year.

Mitchell became the first African American legal secretary at a major Chicago law firm, Seyfarth Shaw, LLP; she eventually quit her job as a secretary after twenty years of service. Taking writing courses at Columbia College and encouraged by Carol Holtz and P.J. Bednarski, Mitchell landed a successful internship with the Chicago Sun-Times in 1990. Graduating with her B.A. degree in journalism from Columbia College in 1991, Mitchell was hired full time by the Chicago Sun-Times. Covering educational issues, Mitchell's five part series on Chicago Vocational High School earned her an award from the National Association of Black Journalists. From 1993 to 1995, Mitchell covered City Hall reporting on Operation Silver Shovel. Since the start of her column in 1996, Mitchell, like Carl Rowan and Vernon Jarrett before her, has attracted a large and diverse readership. Mitchell also cultivated a substantial national following via the Internet, receiving an average of 900 e-mails per week from readers.

Mitchell was the recipient of numerous journalism awards, including the Award of Excellence from the National Association of Black Journalists, the Studs Terkel Award from the Chicago Media Workshop, and the Peter Lisagor Award from the Chicago Headliner Club. Mitchell was a frequent guest panelist on television and radio programs; a president of the Chicago Association of Black Journalists; and a member of the Association of Women Journalists.

Related Entries

Dunbar Vocational Career Academy High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Albert Einstein Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Wendell Phillips Academy High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Wilson Junior College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Chicago State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Columbia College Chicago [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Seyfarth Shaw, LLP [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Secretary

Chicago Sun-Times [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Columnist

Chicago Association of Black Journalists [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

President