

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Charles D. Churchwell

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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>	Churchwell, Charles D. (Charles Darrett), 1926-2018
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell,
<b>Dates:</b>	October 16, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:56:48).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Library administrator and library science professor Charles D. Churchwell (1926 - 2018) served as the dean at the School of Library and Information Studies for Clark Atlanta University during the 1990s, was a tenured professor at Wayne State University, served as university librarian for Brown University for four years, and was the first African American faculty member at the University of Houston. Churchwell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 16, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_291
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Library administrator and library science professor Charles Darrett Churchwell was born on November 7, 1926 in Dunnellon, Florida to Leeannah DeLaughter Churchwell and John Dozier Churchwell. After graduating from high school, Churchwell joined the United States Army, serving for two years in the U.S. and Philippine Islands. He obtained the rank of Sergeant 4th Grade while acting as his company's clerk. After returning from the armed forces in 1948, Churchwell attended Morehouse College and four years later, he received his B.S. degree in mathematics. Upon graduating, he became a reference assistant at the library of Alabama State College. In 1953, Churchwell graduated from Atlanta University with his M.L.S. degree with a focus on college and university library administration.

Churchwell became an instructor with Prairie View A&M College in Prairie View, Texas in 1954 where he met and married Yvonne Ransom. Two years later, he and Yvonne moved to New York City, New York so he could work as a reference librarian for the New York Public Library (NYPL). After only two years, Churchwell left New York for Illinois to study for his Ph.D. degree in library science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, becoming a librarian with the school in 1964. After publishing his thesis, entitled *Education for Librarianship in the United States: Some Factors which Influenced its Development between 1919 and 1939*, Churchwell received his Ph.D. in 1966, the first African American male to earn a Ph.D. degree from the university. The next year, Churchwell became the associate director of the libraries at the University of Houston, becoming the first African American to work for the university during a time of intense segregation. Churchwell became heavily involved with the Black Student Union during this time, working as a liaison during a controversial campus visit by Black Panther Bobby Seale.

In 1970, Churchwell became a professor of library science and director of libraries for Miami University in Ohio,

where he redesigned and renovated the library. He moved to Brown University in 1974, working as the university librarian while publishing his book *Shaping of American Library Education* with the American Library Association (ALA). In 1978, Churchwell began working for Washington University in St. Louis as dean of library services and created a unique endowment to fund the library's technological services. After nearly a decade in St. Louis, Churchwell became a tenured professor with Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. He spent the 1990s as dean of the School of Library and Information Studies for Clark Atlanta University, before retiring in 1999.

Churchwell passed away on September 19, 2018.

Charles D. Churchwell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 16, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Charles D. Churchwell was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 16, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Library administrator and library science professor Charles D. Churchwell (1926 - 2018) served as the dean at the School of Library and Information Studies for Clark Atlanta University during the 1990s, was a tenured professor at Wayne State University, served as university librarian for Brown University for four years, and was the first African American faculty member at the University of Houston.

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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:

Churchwell, Charles D. (Charles Darrett), 1926-2018

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Churchwell, Charles D. (Charles Darrett), 1926-2018 --Interviews

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African American librarians--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:

Library Administrator

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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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 Charles D. Churchwell, October 16, 2007. 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 Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007\_291\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Charles D. Churchwell was born on November 7, 1926 in Dunnellon, Florida to Leeannah Delaughter Churchwell and John Churchwell, Sr. His mother was raised in Madison, Florida, and had one sister. She left school at an early age to work as a cotton picker, and later became a domestic. Churchwell's father was born in Dothan, Alabama, which was located near the border with Florida. He met and married Churchwell's mother in Madison, and they raised nine children in Dunnellon, where his father worked at a turpentine still. Churchwell's family was forced into debt by the still's owner, who also owned the general store and the workers' homes. After Churchwell's father died of pneumonia in 1937, his mother and older siblings took on several jobs to pay the debt. Churchwell stopped attending the Dunnellon School to work as a milkman, until the principal, Mr. Simpson, persuaded Churchwell's mother to continue his education. Even so, she eventually saved enough money to purchase a shotgun house.

African American families--Florida.

African American parents--Florida.

African Americans--Economic conditions--Florida.

African Americans--Education--Florida.

Segregation in education--Florida.

United States. Army.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007\_291\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Charles D. Churchwell was taught to read by his older sister, Juanita Churchwell Hunter, before beginning his education at the all-black Dunnellon School in Dunnellon, Florida. There, Churchwell developed his interest in history. The school convened at the Second Bethel Baptist Church, where his family belonged to the congregation. At fifteen years old, Churchwell left school to join the U.S. Army. He travelled outside of Florida for the first time in 1945, when he was sent to Texas and Georgia to train on military bases that were strictly segregated. Churchwell was initially assigned as security on a base in Edward, Washington, where he taught himself to type, and was then deployed to the Philippines as a company clerk. Upon returning to the United States, Churchwell enrolled in high school, graduating as valedictorian at the age of twenty-one years old. He then matriculated at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Florida.

African American churches--Florida.

United States. Army.

African American soldiers.

United States. Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

United States. Army.

African Americans--Segregation.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007\_291\_001\_003, TRT: 0:26:18 ?

Charles D. Churchwell matriculated in 1948 at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. There, he struggled academically due to his limited education, but was encouraged by English professor Juanita Toomer. Churchwell admired Morehouse College President Benjamin Mays, and was influenced by his emphasis on education and resistance to southern segregation. Churchwell's classmates included surgeon Henry Foster, Jr.; scientist James King, Jr.; and Howard University's chief of surgery, Charles Meredith. Churchwell majored in math, and worked in a chemistry laboratory. He often conducted research at the library, where he became acquainted with its director, Virginia Lacy Jones. She helped Churchwell obtain a summer internship as a reference assistant, and encouraged him to attend library school. Upon earning his bachelor's degree, Churchwell received a scholarship to attend Atlanta University, graduating with an M.L.S. degree in 1953. He was then hired at the Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

Jones, Virginia Lacy, 1912-1984.

Mays, Benjamin E. (Benjamin Elijah), 1894-1984.

African American students--Education (Higher)--Georgia--Atlanta.

African Americans--Segregation.

Atlanta University.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007\_291\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Charles D. Churchwell met his wife, Yvonne Ransom Churchwell, while teaching library science at the Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. After they married, Churchwell studied for one year at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, but left due to housing discrimination. He secured a position at the New York Public Library; and, after one year, received funding from New York State's board of higher education to complete a Ph.D. degree at the University of Illinois. While there, his wife gave birth to their first daughter, Linda Churchwell Varga. Churchwell aspired to direct a research library; and, after graduating in 1967, was advised by Dean Robert M. Downs to join the library faculty of the majority-white University of Houston in Houston, Texas. From there, Churchwell went on to serve as the head librarian at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. In 1974, he moved to Providence, Rhode Island to direct the library at Brown University.

African American librarians.

African American families.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Graduate School of Library Science.

University of Houston.

Faculty integration--Texas--Houston.

Brown University--Library.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007\_291\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Charles D. Churchwell directed the library at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island from 1974. While there, his wife, Yvonne Ransom Churchwell, and daughters, Linda Churchwell Varga and Cynthia Churchwell, came to dislike the culture of New England, and urged him to seek another position. In 1978, Churchwell was named the director of the library at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and received financial assistance to relocate. During his tenure at Washington University in St. Louis, Churchwell promoted several longtime African American employees to supervisory roles that had never previously been held by black library staff. He also mentored employees like Rudolph Clay and Cheryl Holland, both of whom he helped obtain funding to attend library school. When the provost demanded that Churchwell lay off developmentally disabled library staff members, he quit his directorship in protest, and accepted a position as library director at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan.

Providence (R.I.)--Race relations.

Brown University.

African American librarians--Missouri--Saint Louis.

Washington University (Saint Louis, Mo.).

Clark Atlanta Univeristy.

African American college teachers.

African American universities and colleges--Georgia--Atlanta.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007\_291\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:40 ?

Charles D. Churchwell created an endowment for digital library projects at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. Churchwell went on to direct the library at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, where his daughter, Linda Churchwell Varga, enrolled to study education. In 1990, Churchwell moved to Atlanta, Georgia in order to serve as the dean of Clark Atlanta University's Trevor Arnett Library. During his tenure there, Churchwell facilitated the library's acquisition of historian John Henrik Clarke's papers, and met African American scholars Henry Louis "Skip" Gates and Cornel West. After the departure of Clark Atlanta University's provost in 1991, Churchwell served as interim provost in addition to his library duties, until suffering a stress-related stroke in 1994. After a year of rehabilitation, he resumed his library deanship. Churchwell was retired at the time of the interview. He reflects upon his legacy, and concludes the interview by narrating his photos.

Washington University (Saint Louis, Mo.).

Clark Atlanta University--Faculty.

Atlanta University Center (Ga.).

African American universities and colleges--Georgia--Atlanta.

African American librarians.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

Spelman College.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section A2007\_291\_Churchwell\_Charles\_06\_MED\_AUDIO\_001, TRT: 1:00:00 ?

University of Illinois Interview with Charles Churchwell, Part 1. Larry Besant interviews Charles Churchwell about his 50-year career in academic librarianship. Churchwell was the first african-american man to receive a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, in 1966 (in Library and Information Science). He later became the first african-american director of an ARL library (at Brown),

and he spent nearly a decade as dean of the library school at Clark Atlanta. This audio is publicly available through the University of Illinois who also holds copyright of this interview.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section

A2007\_291\_Churchwell\_Charles\_06\_MED\_AUDIO\_002, TRT: 1:00:00 ?

University of Illinois Interview with Charles Churchwell, Part 2. Larry Besant interviews Charles Churchwell about his 50-year career in academic librarianship. Churchwell was the first african-american man to receive a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, in 1966 (in Library and Information Science). He later became the first african-american director of an ARL library (at Brown), and he spent nearly a decade as dean of the library school at Clark Atlanta. This audio is publicly available through the University of Illinois who also holds copyright of this interview.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section

A2007\_291\_Churchwell\_Charles\_06\_MED\_AUDIO\_003, TRT: 1:00:00 ?

University of Illinois Interview with Charles Churchwell, Part 3. Larry Besant interviews Charles Churchwell about his 50-year career in academic librarianship. Churchwell was the first african-american man to receive a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, in 1966 (in Library and Information Science). He later became the first african-american director of an ARL library (at Brown), and he spent nearly a decade as dean of the library school at Clark Atlanta. This audio is publicly available through the University of Illinois who also holds copyright of this interview.

Video Oral History Interview with Charles D. Churchwell, Section

A2007\_291\_Churchwell\_Charles\_06\_MED\_AUDIO\_004, TRT: 1:00:00 ?

University of Illinois Interview with Charles Churchwell, Part 4. Larry Besant interviews Charles Churchwell about his 50-year career in academic librarianship. Churchwell was the first african-american man to receive a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, in 1966 (in Library and Information Science). He later became the first african-american director of an ARL library (at Brown), and he spent nearly a decade as dean of the library school at Clark Atlanta. This audio is publicly available through the University of Illinois who also holds copyright of this interview.