

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Myron Thompson

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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>	Thompson, Myron H., 1947-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Myron Thompson,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 20, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:33:00).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Federal district court judge The Honorable Myron Thompson (1947 - ) became the first African American Assistant Attorney General for the State of Alabama. President Jimmy Carter nominated Thompson to the bench of the United States District Court, Middle District of Alabama; he served as Chief Justice from 1991 to 1998. Thompson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 20, 2007, in Montgomery, Alabama. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_100
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Federal District Court Judge Myron Herbert Thompson was born on January 7, 1947 in Tuskegee, Alabama to Lawrence and Lillian Thompson. At age two, Thompson contracted polio and spent much of his time alone, finding solace in jazz and classical music. He attended Tuskegee Institute High School where he was named class salutatorian in 1965. Thompson received his B.A. degree in political science from Yale University in 1969 and his J.D. degree from Yale Law School in 1972.

After graduation, Thompson became the first African American Assistant Attorney General for the State of Alabama. He served in this position for two years before going into private practice in Dothan, Alabama. Thompson's firm handled labor law, civil rights, school desegregation, sex discrimination and First Amendment cases.

President Jimmy Carter nominated Thompson to the bench of the United States District Court, Middle District of Alabama. He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate and received his appointment in September of 1980. At age thirty-three, he was the youngest member of the bench. Thompson served as Chief Justice from 1991 to 1998.

Thompson presides over the same court room where many landmark civil rights cases were argued and decided. He had the court restored to stand as a testament to history. Thompson also made national headlines when he ordered Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from the rotunda of the State of Alabama's courthouse. He remains as much of an active legal scholar as his position permits, often calling for the executive and legislative branches to accept more responsibility for constitutional oversight that too often is left as the responsibility of judges. Thompson has served on the bench for twenty-seven years.

Myron Thompson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 20, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Myron Thompson was conducted by Denise Gines on March 20, 2007, in Montgomery, Alabama, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Federal district court judge The Honorable Myron Thompson (1947 - ) became the first African American Assistant Attorney General for the State of Alabama. President Jimmy Carter nominated Thompson to the bench of the United States District Court, Middle District of Alabama; he served as Chief Justice from 1991 to 1998.

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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:

Thompson, Myron H., 1947-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Thompson, Myron H., 1947- --Interviews

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## Organizations:

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## HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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## The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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### Occupations:

Federal District Court Judge

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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 The Honorable Myron Thompson, March 20, 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 The Honorable Myron Thompson, Section  
A2007\_100\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Myron Thompson was born on January 7, 1947 in Tuskegee, Alabama. His father, Lawrence Thompson, Sr., was born in Birmingham, Alabama to Lawrence Thompson and his wife, both of whom died when Thompson's father

was young. Thompson knew his step-grandmother, Myrtis (ph.) Thompson, a teacher. Thompson's father worked as a shoe repair man, waiter, stock broker, and salesman after separating from his wife and moving to New York City when Thompson was five. Thompson's mother, Lillian Glanton Thompson Buford, was born to John Henry Glanton and his wife. Glanton was a farmer with a black mother and white father, who sent all of his daughters away to high school because there were no black high schools in the area. He later moved to Dothan, Alabama, where he started a school and a real estate business. Thompson's mother attended the Tuskegee Institute for high school and college, and later became a secretary and a registrar for the Institute. In 1949, when Thompson was two years old, he contracted polio.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Myron Thompson, Section  
A2007\_100\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Myron Thompson grew up around the campus of the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, where he was treated for his polio by Dr. John Chenault. Thompson reflects on the impact that polio had on his childhood, including how it affected others' views of him and encouraged his enjoyment of reading, music, and ballet. He also reflects on the lessons he learned from his mother about class, gender equality, and his responsibility to give back to the African American community. When Thompson was in fifth grade, his mother married Kenneth Buford, a minister at Butler Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. Thompson remembers the church as a center for Civil Rights activities in Tuskegee, particularly those concerning voting rights and school desegregation. Thompson attended the Children's House on the Tuskegee Institute campus for elementary school, and Tuskegee Institute High School. Around seventh grade, he and his family moved across town to be closer to his step-father's church, forcing Thompson to take the bus to school.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Myron Thompson, Section  
A2007\_100\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Myron Thompson grew up in Tuskegee, Alabama with his mother, step-father, and an older brother named Lawrence Thompson, Jr. As a child, he was active in Jack and Jill. He was also a voracious reader. In 1961, his mother insisted that Thompson attend public school and he enrolled at Tuskegee Institute High School, where he excelled. He remembers his high school English teacher as well as his third grade teacher, Mrs. Perry, at the Children's House. While he was aware of President Kennedy's assassination and the March on Washington, Thompson was not politically active in high school. Thompson graduated in 1965 and enrolled at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. During a summer trip to Martha's Vineyard with a friend, Thompson describes the comment made by his Yale classmate's mother about his being different since he was African American. Thompson reflects on his lack of political involvement also as an undergraduate student at Yale University.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Myron Thompson, Section  
A2007\_100\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Myron Thompson remembers his exposure to film, classical music, and ballet at the Tuskegee Institute. He later received his B.A. degree from Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut in 1969 and then enrolled at Yale Law School, where his classmates included Hillary Clinton, Bill Clinton, and Clarence Thomas. After Black Panther Bobby Seale was arrested in New Haven, Thompson wrote a letter questioning whether he could receive a fair trial. During his summers at Yale Law School, Thompson worked as a legal intern on Wall Street. After receiving his J.D. degree in 1972, Thompson became the first

black assistant attorney general in Alabama's history under Bill Baxley and remained in this office until 1974, when he started his own private practice in Dothan, Alabama. As a lawyer, he became adept at arguing cases in front of the renowned Federal District Court Judge Frank Johnson; and, in 1980, Thompson was appointed to replace Johnson as Judge of the United States District Court of the Middle District of Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Myron Thompson, Section A2007\_100\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Myron Thompson married Ann Oldham in 1979. In 1980, he replaced Frank Johnson as Judge of the United States District Court of the Middle District of Alabama after the first candidate, noted Civil Rights lawyer Fred Gray, was unable to pass the U.S. Senate confirmation hearing. Thompson was appointed by President Jimmy Carter, and confirmed by the Senate within the span of four months at the age of thirty-three. Thompson reflects on the major cases he has ruled on throughout his career as a judge, including those concerning the use of deadly force by police officers, the special education system in Alabama, discrimination by gender and sexual orientation, voting rights, and cruel and unusual punishments in Alabama prisons. In 2001, Thompson gained national attention when he ordered Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore to remove a monument of the Ten Commandments from the Alabama Judicial Building. Thompson talks about his family and shares a message for future generations.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Myron Thompson, Section A2007\_100\_001\_006, TRT: 0:08:40 ?

Myron Thompson expresses his lack of regrets and his desire to become a Senior Judge of the United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama. He also reflects on his work with the other judges, balancing his work and his home life, and how he would like to be remembered.