

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with James A. Lewis

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library *African American Chronicles* –
Civil Rights Stories Oral History project

Interview # AAC-A-L-2021-035

James A. (Jim) Lewis, former U S Attorney and Civil Rights Activist was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *African American Chronicles* – *Civil Rights Stories* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Recording Studio

Date: June 6, June 13, June 20, and June 27. 2021

Location: ALPL recording studio

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Carole Strick, ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:58 + 2:55 + 2:14 + 2:49 / 1.97 + 2.92 + 2.23 + 2.82
= 9.94 hrs.

Session 1: Early life through September 1966

Session 2: September 1966 through December 1973

Session 3: January 1974 through December November 2008

Session 4: December 2008 through May 2021

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on November 9, 2021.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

James A (Jim) Lewis, *Civil Rights Stories*, AAC-A-L-2021-035

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: James A Lewis was born July 28, 1940, and he grew up in Scarsdale, New York in a Jewish family. After high school, he attended Yale University, then the University of Chicago Law School, where he obtained a law degree, and finally Duke University. In the sixties, he spent time helping African Americans obtain their civil rights in the state of Mississippi. Despite his coming from an affluent background, James early on recognized that he wanted to be a part of the Civil Rights movement. He recounts many instances where he was arrested during marches, and where he defended people who had been wrongly arrested.

After his years in Mississippi, he moved to North Carolina in 1974 where he attended Duke University to obtain a master's degree and worked to improve income maintenance programs and welfare inequities at the federal level. He also taught for a while at North Carolina Central Law School.

In 1977, Jim moved to Washington, D.C. to work for the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Division, Maritime Law. He came to Springfield, Illinois on August 18, 1983, as a civil attorney in the U.S. Attorney's office. He served as Civil Chief for twenty-five years. In 2009, under Barack Obama, he was chosen to be United States Attorney for the forty-six county Central District of Illinois. He retired from this position in December 2016. He and his wife, Arden, have three children, David, Heather and Kate. They remain active in many community civil rights causes.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Civil rights; civil rights movement in Macomb, Mississippi; Springfield, Illinois; U S Attorney; John Lewis; Eric Holder; University of Illinois; Duke University; Washington D.C.; Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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