

Elvin Davenport Papers
1.25 linear feet (1 SB, 1MB), 2 OS
1942-1991, bulk 1942-1977

Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI

Finding aid written by Leslie Van Veen on January 16, 2013

Accession Number: UP002362

Creator: Elvin L. Davenport

Acquisition: The Elvin L. Davenport Papers were donated to the Walter P. Reuther Library Damon J. Keith Law Collection of African American Legal History by Mildred Davenport Wilson in September and October 2012.

Language: Material entirely in English.

Access: Collection is open for research.

Use: Refer to the Walter P. Reuther Library *Rules for Use of Archival Materials*. **Restrictions: Researchers may encounter records of a sensitive nature – personnel files, case records and those involving investigations, legal and other private matters. Privacy laws and restrictions imposed by the Library prohibit the use of names and other personal information that might identify an individual, except with written permission from the Director and/or the donor.**

Notes: Citation style: “Elvin Davenport Papers, Box [#], Folder [#], Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University”

Related Material: Damon J. Keith Papers

Oversized items and audiovisual materials (see inventory at end of guide) have been transferred to the Reuther Library’s Audiovisual Department.

Originals of signed correspondence from Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, Senator Edward Kennedy, and Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court Thurgood Marshall, were placed in the vault.

PLEASE NOTE: Folders in this collection are not necessarily arranged in any particular order. The box folder listing provides an inventory based on their original order. Subjects may be dispersed throughout the collection.

Abstract

Elvin Lamoine Davenport (1899-1988) was the first African-American judge elected to the Recorder's Court for the City of Detroit; he served on the bench for over 20 years. Davenport was born in Folly, Virginia, attended local schools, and received his undergraduate degree from Temple University and his law degree from Howard University Law School in 1929. After graduation he worked as a Pullman porter for the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and completed further graduate studies at McGill University. Davenport moved to Detroit, Michigan where he was appointed to the State Bar in 1931. He became associated with the law firm of Stowers, Bledsoe & Dent, later forming his own practice with Garvin, Osborne, Smith, and Fuller (1931-1945). Like many African-American lawyers practicing at the time, Davenport had difficulty attracting clients; to make a decent living he also sold life insurance. He became heavily involved in civil rights cases, serving as counsel for the NAACP in the Sojourner Truth housing project riots; the 1943 Detroit race riot inquest in police shootings; and the general court martial charges against Lt. Milton R. Henry. He was appointed as the Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor in 1945-1946 and 1948-1956. In 1956, Governor G. Mennen Williams appointed him to the Common Pleas Court for the City of Detroit, making Davenport again the first African-American to be appointed to the position. By 1957, he was elevated to the Recorder's Court for the City of Detroit. Davenport sat on the bench until his retirement in 1977. Throughout his life, Elvin Davenport was a member of many professional and service organizations. Elvin Davenport died in June of 1988.

The papers of Elvin Davenport primarily document his practice as an attorney and judge in the city of Detroit, from 1942-1977. Of particular note are correspondence files that demonstrate the integral role Mr. Davenport played in both the judicial profession and local community service organizations, as well as the relationships he cultivated as a result of his involvement.

Important Subjects:

African American judges
African American judges--Michigan--Biography.
African American lawyers--History.
African Americans.
Civil rights
Courts--Michigan.
Courts--Michigan--Detroit.
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Detroit Branch

Important Names:

George Crockett
Wynn C. Garvin
Damon Keith
Wade H. McCree
G. Mennen Williams

Arrangement

Folders are listed by their location within each box. They are not necessarily arranged, so any given subject may be dispersed throughout the entire collection.

Box 1

1. National Bar Association Membership
2. Cook County Bar Association News Clippings, 1961-1962
3. Detroit Bar Association Membership, 1966-1976
4. Michigan Bar Association Membership
5. Detroit Lawyers Guild Membership
6. National Lawyers Guild Membership, 1942-1949
7. Association of Black Judges of Michigan Membership, 1980-1992
8. Wolverine Bar Association Membership, 1943-1982
9. Colleague, Dennis Archer
10. Colleague, Geraldine Bledsoe Ford
11. Colleague, George Crockett, Jr.
12. Colleague, Charles C. Diggs, Jr.
13. Colleague, William Hastie, Jr.
14. Colleague, Damon Keith
15. Colleague, Thurgood Marshall
16. Colleague, Wade McCree, Jr.
17. Colleague, Frank Murphy
18. Colleagues, Frederick Patmon, Hallison Young, & Stanley Kirk
19. Colleague, Alfred M. Pelham
20. Colleague, Otis Smith
21. Colleague, Governor G. Mennen Williams
22. Community Service Tributes, 1943-1982
23. Community Service Tributes and Resolutions, 1943-1989
24. Sentencing the Narcotic Offender, 1959 September 23
25. Speech of Gerald K. O'Brien, Prosecuting Attorney, WJLB Radio Station, 1950
November 4
26. Suggested Material for Speakers, Judge Davenport
27. Speech Given at Joyce Elementary School, 1975
28. Michigan's Good Time Law, 1968
29. Correspondence, Guilty Plea Rule, 1973 March 21
30. Case, People vs. Cornelius Myrick, Recorder's Court No. A-8192, 1955 November 23
31. Case, People of Michigan vs. Louis Roberts, Recorder's Court No. A-98862, 1966 June 28
32. Case, Schemanski & Davenport vs. City of Detroit, 1973
33. Jury Charges, Index to Crime, A-L, 1948
34. Jury Charges, Index to Crime, M-Z, 1948
35. News Clippings, Davenport Retires, 1976-1977
36. News Clippings, Davenport Obituary, 1988
37. Correspondence, Davenport Memorial Committee, 1990-1991
38. News Clippings, 1933-1945
39. News Clippings, 1945-1956
40. Correspondence to and from E. Davenport, 1942-1949

- 41-42. Correspondence to and from E. Davenport, 1950-1959
43. Correspondence to and from E. Davenport, 1960-1969
44. Correspondence to and from E. Davenport, 1970-1977
45. Correspondence to and from E. Davenport, 1981-1987
46. Paper, The Recorder's Court of the City of Detroit, 1967-1968

Box 2

1. Photographs, 1932-1977
2. CD-ROM, Damon Keith Civic-Humanitarian Award, Presented to Elvin Davenport, 1985

Oversized Materials

1. Photograph, Crisis Club Party Honoring Judge Ira W. Jayne, 1956 December 11
2. Photograph, Win-the-War Convention of the National Lawyers Guild, 1943