

The Clerk's Black History Series



Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



E. Frederic Morrow

(April 9, 1909 - July 20, 1994)

First African-American to Hold White House Executive Position

Everett Frederic Morrow was born on April 9, 1909 in Hackensack, New Jersey to John Morrow, an Ordained Minister and Mary Ann Hayes, a former farm worker and maid. In high school, he served on the debate team for three years and was senior class president, graduating from high school in 1925. Morrow attended Bowdoin College from 1926 to 1930 as one of only two African-American students enrolled and although he was a good student, he was forced to withdraw from Bowdoin College during his senior year to help his family. In 1935, Morrow joined the National Urban League as a business manager of Opportunity Magazine, and two years later became field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), traveling across the nation to promote membership and fundraising.

Morrow joined the United States Army during World War II, and served in with the Field Artillery Unit. Within one month he was promoted to Sergeant and a year later, he graduated from Officer Candidate School. He was discharged in 1946 as Major of Artillery. Morrow went on to graduate from Rutgers Law School in 1948 and was called back into the military during the Korean War, briefly, before becoming a public affairs writer with Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS).

During his time at CBS, Morrow worked on Dwight Eisenhower's campaign during the 1952 presidential elections. At the end of the campaign, Morrow resigned from CBS and accepted an offer from Sherman Adams, Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, for a job in the administration. In July 1953 he was hired as Advisor on Business Affairs in the Department of Commerce. It would be two years later that his next appointment would change history.

On July 9, 1955, Morrow was sworn in as Eisenhower's Administrative Officer for Special Projects, making him the first African-American to serve as a Presidential Executive Assistant. His swearing in ceremony was held behind closed-doors to attract little attention. His duties included support services for two special assistants to the President in the areas of nuclear disarmament and psychological warfare. Part of his administrative responsibility was to accompany President Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon on diplomatic trips abroad, especially in Africa. Morrow was decorated and received presidential honors from several African countries.

As monumental as his appointment was, so were the challenges. As the first African-American in this position, Morrow faced daily indignities and frustrations. White House secretaries refused to work in the building with Morrow without having a security guard present at all times. His advice was sought only on questions of race relations and then his advice was often ignored. During his tenure, the country was undergoing racial challenges and changes. The 1954 ruling in the Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. the Board of Education*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott from 1955 to 1956, and the Little Rock Crisis in 1957 were the backdrop for Morrow's White House years. However, Morrow was able to use his position for improving the progress of racial equality by arranging an important meeting between Eisenhower and Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders.

After his service in the White House, Morrow became Vice President of the African-American Institute in New York. In 1967, after working with The Bank of America for three years, E. Frederic Morrow was the first African-American to be promoted to Vice President of its New York based international subsidiary, specializing in foreign loans and business development. He retired as a senior Vice President in 1975, and later worked as an executive for the Education Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey. E. Frederick Morrow died on July 20, 1994, at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York at the age of 88. His extraordinary story is told with candor in his three books, *Black Man in the White House*, *Way down South up North* (about racial discrimination in the Hackensack of his youth), and *Forty Years a Guinea Pig*.

