

# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



## Maxie "Max" Cleveland Robinson, Jr.

(May 1, 1939– December 20, 1988)

"America's First African-American National Nightly News Anchor"

**Maxie "Max" C. Robinson, Jr.** was born May 1, 1939 in Richmond, Virginia. Growing up, he attended segregated schools and spent only one year at Oberlin College, in Ohio, where he served as freshman class president. He joined the United States Air Force and left shortly thereafter with a medical discharge. Later he began working with a radio station in Petersburg, VA where he was known as "Max The Player."

Max began his career in television in 1959 when he applied for a previously "whites only" position for a local news station in Portsmouth, VA. He was hired and became the first black man to work at the station, but his employment came with one restriction; while he read the news on air, his face would be concealed behind the station's logo. Frustrated with the policy, Max ordered the logo removed one night during the evening news, revealing his true identity. He was fired the next day.

Discrimination continued to pervade Max's career when in his next job as a cameraman/reporter trainee at a news station in Washington, DC, he was paid \$25 a week less than his white counterparts. Undeterred, Max continued working for three years, earning a promotion to full-time reporter. During this time he won six journalism awards covering civil-rights events, such as the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and two Emmy Awards for a documentary on black life in the Anacostia area of DC. In 1975, Max, along with 43 other black journalists, founded The National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ), an organization of African American journalists, students, and media professionals, in Washington, D.C.

In 1978, Max Robinson was hired as one of three prime-time news broadcasters, alongside Peter Jennings and Frank Reynolds, anchoring and reporting for ABC's World News Tonight. On July 10, 1978 Max Robinson made history when he reported live from Chicago, making him the first black man to anchor a national nightly news broadcast. His on-camera presence was confident, unforced, and authoritative. He was a natural communicator and had a promising career ahead.



Max's new celebrity status gave him a platform to speak out against racial injustices often creating conflict in his work environment. In 1981, he spoke to a Smith College audience about racial prejudice at his workplace. Two years later, he left the ABC network after being demoted. His next job at Chicago's WMAQ lasted only two years before he left to be a free-lance writer, disappearing from public view.

Throughout his life, Max Robinson faced constant obstruction and prejudice which reportedly led to erratic behavior; missed assignments, alcoholism and three failed marriages. Even though he made a historic mark on our National Nightly News broadcasting, he left the world in quiet solitude carrying a secret that he would reveal only after his death.

On December 20, 1988, Maxie "Max" Robinson, Jr. succumbed to AIDS. Max requested that his family reveal his cause of death, only after he died, so that others in the black community would be alerted to the dangers of the disease and the need for prevention, treatment, and education.

