



Student Name:

Class Period:

Date:

Meet the Originals

Texas Originals is a radio series about people who made an impact on Texas. You can hear it online and on radio stations around the state. Read or listen to the episode on William J. Durham. Then, answer questions about it.

William J. Durham 1896–1970

William J. Durham was born to a family of sharecroppers near Sulphur Springs in 1896. When his father took young Willie to see a trial at the local courthouse, an attorney so impressed the boy that he decided he would someday be a lawyer. He ultimately became Texas's leading civil rights attorney for more than three decades.

After serving in World War I, Durham got married and moved to Sherman, where he established his legal practice. In 1930, a lynch mob burned the courthouse and the Black business district, including Durham's office, but Durham confronted the mob and saved his house.

Durham moved to Dallas in 1943, where his lucrative corporate practice enabled him to take on pro bono civil rights cases. As the resident counsel for the Texas NAACP, he filed scores of lawsuits to secure voting rights, the equalization of teachers' salaries, and the desegregation of schools, swimming pools, railroads, and golf courses.

Durham worked on a number of cases with Thurgood Marshall, who relied on Durham's thorough knowledge of Texas procedure. One of their landmark Supreme Court victories, *Smith v. Allwright*, outlawed the exclusion of African Americans from primary elections, while another, *Sweatt v. Painter*, desegregated The University of Texas Law School.

Durham fought tirelessly for equal rights throughout his career and served as a mentor to younger Black lawyers until his death in 1970.

Check for Understanding: Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on William J. Durham. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. What event in his childhood inspired William J. Durham to become a lawyer?
2. Name two Supreme Court cases that Durham worked on related to civil rights.

Going Further: Write or discuss your answer to the question below, supporting your answer with evidence from the episode or additional information you have learned in class.

3. **Creating Connections.** *Sweatt v. Painter* was argued in front of the Supreme Court in 1950. What later legal case also argued for desegregation of schools, and in what year was it decided?