

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McKee, Theodore A. (Theodore Alexander), 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee,
Dates:	February 10, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:40:13).
Abstract:	Appellate court judge The Honorable Theodore A. McKee (1947 -) served as judge of the Court of Common Pleas, First Judicial District, Pennsylvania, and was nominated to the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit by President Clinton in 1994. McKee was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 10, 2005, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_045
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Judge Theodore A. McKee was born June 5, 1947, in a farming community near Rochester, New York; his mother, Etta V. Payne, was from Culpepper, Virginia, and his father, Clarence V. McKee, was the first black high school basketball player in the state of Indiana. McKee attended Chili Central School in Wheatland, New York, and graduated from Chili Central High School in 1965. McKee attended State University of New York (SUNY) at Cortland, where he played football, graduating in 1969.

McKee worked as director of minority recruitment at SUNY Binghamton and recruited students for Jackson State University in Mississippi before enrolling in Syracuse University College of Law. McKee graduated from law school magna cum laude and Order of the Coif; he began his legal career at the firm of Wolf, Block, Schorr and Solis-Cohen in 1975. From 1977 to 1980, McKee served as assistant United States attorney for the eastern district of Pennsylvania. McKee was appointed deputy city solicitor for the city of Philadelphia and then was hired in 1983 as general counsel for the Philadelphia Parking Authority. In 1984, McKee was elected judge of the Court of Common Pleas, First Judicial District, Pennsylvania, where he presided over bench trials. McKee was nominated to the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit by President Clinton in 1994, occupying the seat vacated by Judge A. Leon Higginbotham.

McKee’s community activities include service on the board of the Crime Prevention Association; the Diagnostic and Rehabilitation Center of Philadelphia; and New Directions for Women, Inc. McKee is also is a member of the World Affairs Council and the Urban League of Philadelphia. McKee serves as a trustee of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and of Temple University. Father of two daughters, McKee is a volunteer at Germantown Friends School in Germantown, Pennsylvania.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 10, 2005, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Appellate court judge The Honorable Theodore A. McKee (1947 -) served as judge of the Court of Common Pleas, First Judicial District, Pennsylvania, and was nominated to the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit by President Clinton in 1994.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

McKee, Theodore A. (Theodore Alexander), 1947-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McKee, Theodore A. (Theodore Alexander), 1947---Interviews

African American judges--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Court of Appeals (3rd Circuit)

Occupations:

Appellate Court Judge

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee, February 10, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee, Section A2005_045_001_001, TRT: 0:28:48 ?

The Honorable Theodore A. McKee was born on June 5, 1947 in Rochester, New York to Etta Payne McKee and Clarence V. McKee. His mother was born in 1919 in Scottsville, New York. Her grandmother was born into slavery in Culpeper County, Virginia. After emancipation, a former slave owner burned down her family's house out of spite. McKee's maternal grandmother settled in Scottsville, purchasing land from her employers, the Whaleys, owners of Genesee Brewery. McKee's mother left high school to work on the family farm. She also worked at Curtiss-Wright Airline Factory in Buffalo during World War II. McKee's father joined the basketball team at Bloomington High School. As the first African American high school basketball player in Indiana, he endured threats from the Ku Klux Klan and other community members. McKee's father worked for the Penn Central Transportation Company. McKee remembers helping his grandfather put on his boots in the kitchen of his grandmother's home in Scottsville, where he grew up.

African American judges--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee, Section A2005_045_001_002, TRT: 0:30:52 ?

The Honorable Theodore A. McKee recalls the smell of his mother's cooking, traffic sounds, and playing in a creek near his home in Scottsville. Most people in the community were farmers or worked for Eastman Kodak Company or Haloid Xerox in Rochester, New York. McKee recalls his father's love of fishing. Since his grandmother was religious, McKee was raised Episcopalian and attended early morning church services. As a Cleveland Browns fan, he admired Jim Brown and his support for Muhammad Ali's protest against the draft. McKee attended elementary and high school in the Wheatland-Chili Central School District, where he was student body president, played soccer and basketball, and enjoyed English and biology. Growing up in a majority-white area, McKee encountered a barber who refused to cut his hair until McKee's father confronted him, and a high school counselor who discouraged him from applying to four-year colleges. McKee enrolled at the State University College of Cortland in New York to play football.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee, Section A2005_045_001_003, TRT: 0:28:32 ?

The Honorable Theodore A. McKee formed a black student union at the State University College at Cortland called Uhuru. As head of the speaker's bureau, McKee brought Muhammad Ali and HistoryMaker Dick Gregory to campus. His favorite professor was an African American anthropologist, John Langston Gwaltney, who had studied under Margaret Mead. After graduating in 1969, McKee worked for the State University of New York at Binghamton as director of minority recruitment. While there, he studied karate and developed a successful prisoner rehabilitation program that enrolled ex-offenders at the school. One of the program's most successful participants was New York attorney Ronald R. Benjamin. McKee attended Syracuse University College of Law to remain close to home. He ranked seventh in his law school class. McKee married his wife, Ana Pujols-McKee, in 1972. With his wife applying to medical schools in Pennsylvania, McKee joined the Philadelphia firm of Wolf, Block, Schorr & Solis-Cohen after finishing law school.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee, Section A2005_045_001_004, TRT: 0:28:56 ?

The Honorable Theodore A. McKee initially specialized in real estate law while working for Wolf, Block, Schorr & Solis-Cohen in Philadelphia. He later changed his focus to litigation. Hoping to gain trial experience, McKee left in

1977 to work as assistant United States attorney for the eastern district of Pennsylvania in David W. Marston, Sr.'s office. After winning several bank robbery cases, McKee prosecuted the Philadelphia police department, led by Frank Rizzo, for brutality. McKee was appointed deputy city solicitor under the William J. Green III mayoral administration and as general counsel for the Philadelphia Parking Authority. In 1984, McKee was elected to serve on the Court of Common Pleas, where he remained on the bench until appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit by President Bill Clinton in 1994. McKee recalls cases he presided over. He shares his thoughts on drug legalization, his approach to sentencing and his legal philosophy, which involves being tough but fair.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee, Section A2005_045_001_005, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

The Honorable Theodore A. McKee encountered the challenge of applying the law fairly, despite personal bias. As a judge, he wrote an opinion in favor of reinstating the death penalty, even though he was against it. McKee describes the most violent defendant he encountered. He explains what insanity means in a criminal context, distinguishing between the guilty by reason of insanity and not guilty but insane defenses. In reflecting upon the increase in juvenile violence and incarceration, McKee notes that trying young people as adults may not be the best solution, but he understands community exasperation over the violence. He shares his thoughts on Ruben "Hurricane" Carter, who was released from prison after maintaining his innocence, and the international support for Mumia Abu-Jamal. McKee also shares his opinion of television judges. McKee describes his hopes for better access to education in the African American community and his concerns about the increased focus on standardized tests and school rankings.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Theodore A. McKee, Section A2005_045_001_006, TRT: 0:13:38 ?

The Honorable Theodore A. McKee's father, Clarence V. McKee, was often busy traveling for work, but he made sure to attend McKee's graduation from the State University of New York at Cortland. McKee's brother, Clarence McKee, was the legal assistant to HistoryMaker Benjamin Hooks at the Federal Communications Commission and co-owned Tampa's NBC affiliate. While vacationing in Ghana with his family, McKee volunteered at the Court of Ethics and was also able to witness the proceedings of a traditional court presided over by a village chief in concert with a council of elders. McKee later returned to Ghana to develop workshops with HistoryMaker The Honorable Ann Claire Williams and Judge Vicki Miles-LaGrange to train local judges in judicial ethics, mediation arbitration, and automation. McKee describes his two daughters. He concludes the interview by reflecting upon his life, legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.