

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	West, Togo D., 1942-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr.,
Dates:	February 8, 2007 and July 24, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2007 and 2008
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:26:25).
Abstract:	Government lawyer and presidential appointee The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. (1942 - 2018) was the Secretary of the U.S. Army, and also held positions as associate deputy attorney general and general counsel to the Navy. West served as the deputy secretary of defense, general counsel to the United States Department of Defense and became President and CEO of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in 2004. West was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 8, 2007 and July 24, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_054
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former United States Secretary of the Army and former United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs Togo Dennis West, Jr. was born on June 21, 1942 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina to Togo D. West, Sr. and Evelyn E. Carter West. His grandmother named him after Japanese Admiral Heihachiro Togo, hero of 1905's Russo-Japanese War. West grew up in East Winston, North Carolina where his mother was a teacher and his father was the principal of Atkins High School. West attended Atkins High School, graduating in 1959 as a member of the National Honor Society, valedictorian and an Eagle Scout with Bronze Palm. In 1965, he earned his B.S. degree from Howard University and worked briefly as an electrical engineer. West entered Howard University Law School and in 1967 worked as a legal intern for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. West became managing editor of the *Howard Law Journal* and graduated first in his class with his J.D. degree in 1968.

After clerking for Harold R. Tyler, Jr., a federal district court judge, West was commissioned a second lieutenant in the United States Army. West served in the Judge Advocate General's Corps where he was recognized with the Legion of Merit and the Meritorious Service Medal. He subsequently practiced law with Covington & Burling in Washington, D.C. before being appointed associate deputy attorney general by President Gerald Ford in 1975. West served in several capacities in President Jimmy Carter's administration including general counsel to the Navy from 1977 to 1979; special assistant to the secretary and to the deputy secretary of defense in 1979; and general counsel to the United States Department of Defense from 1980 to 1981. He returned to private practice as managing partner at Patterson, Belknap, Webb and Tyler and later served as senior vice president for government relations with Northrop Corporation. In 1993, West was appointed United States Secretary of the Army by President Bill Clinton. In 1998, President Clinton appointed West as United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

West succeeded Eddie Williams as president and CEO of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in 2004. In 2006, he founded TLI Leadership Group and served as its Chairman.

West was the recipient of numerous honors including being named Distinguished Eagle Scout in 1995. He later received scouting's coveted Silver Buffalo Award and the Silver Beaver Award for his work with youth. West was married to the former Gail Berry.

West passed away on March 8, 2018 at age 75.

West was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 8, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 8, 2007 and July 24, 2008, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Government lawyer and presidential appointee The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. (1942 - 2018) was the Secretary of the U.S. Army, and also held positions as associate deputy attorney general and general counsel to the Navy. West served as the deputy secretary of defense, general counsel to the United States Department of Defense and became President and CEO of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in 2004.

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:

West, Togo D., 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
West, Togo D., 1942---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

United States. Army.

United States. Dept. of Veterans Affairs.

Occupations:

Government Lawyer

Presidential Appointee

HistoryMakers® Category:

LawMakers|PoliticalMakers

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 Togo D. West, Jr., February 8, 2007 and July 24, 2008. 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 Togo D. West, Jr., Section A2007_054_001_001, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. was born on June 21, 1942 at the Kate Bitting Reynolds Memorial Hospital in Winston-Salem, North Carolina to Evelyn Carter West and Togo D. West, Sr. West's mother was born in 1912 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama to Mary L. Carter and Louis J. Carter, who worked on the railroad. Due to her Native American and white ancestry, his mother was fair skinned, and her brother passed for white. West's mother attended the Stillman Institute in Tuscaloosa, and then the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. Upon graduating, she taught music in Winston-Salem. West's paternal grandfather was the son of a white construction company owner, and managed an apartment building near his family's home in Washington D.C., where West's father was born in 1905. West's paternal grandmother, Mary Chinn West, named his father for Japanese Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō. Her family founded the Chinntown settlement in Northern Virginia. West also remembers his paternal uncles, Douglas B. West and Carlton S. West.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr., Section A2007_054_001_002, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr.'s father, Togo D. West, Sr., attended Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. with physician Charles R. Drew and lawyer William H. Hastie, and went on to study at Howard University. West's father later earned a master's degree at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and taught at Atkins High School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. There, he met West's mother, Evelyn Carter West, who received a master's degree from Columbia University's Teachers College in New York City. West's father taught at Atkins High School for thirty-two years, and served as both the principal and the head of the math department. West grew up in the East Winston neighborhood of Winston-Salem, where he attended St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. He was a fan of football and basketball, and saw Cleo Hill and Earl Monroe play at the local colleges. During the summers, he visited his paternal grandmother, Mary Chinn West, in Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr., Section A2007_054_001_003, TRT: 0:29:18 ?

The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. attended the St. Benedict the Moor School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina alongside Joan Adams Bahner, who later became the director of alumni affairs at Fisk University. As a child, West's favorite cowboy characters were Roy Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy, and he enjoyed watching 'The Mickey Mouse Club' and 'The Howdy Doody Show.' At

night, he listened to radio programs like ‘The Lone Ranger,’ ‘The Fat Man,’ and ‘The Shadow’ with his parents. He became a Cub Scout in Boy Scout Troop 868, which met at all-black First Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, and belonged to the segregated Old Hickory Council. His troop took a seven-day cruise on the USS Tutuila, and travelled to the Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico on a segregated Trailways bus. Eventually, West achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. He also remembers Winston-Salem’s black-owned businesses, including the Safe Bus Company, Winston Mutual Life Insurance Company, the Lincoln Theatre and the Lafayette Theatre.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr., Section A2007_054_001_004, TRT: 0:30:23 ?

The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. excelled in his classes at Atkins High School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He aspired to become an aeronautical engineer, although English literature was his best subject. He also took a course in black history, and studied under Latin teacher Clara Berry Gaines, and French teacher Velma Friende. To cope with being an only child, West read often. He enjoyed books like The Saint series by Leslie Charteris, and frequented the East Winston Branch Library. His mother encouraged him to take private piano lessons, but he switched to the clarinet in high school, and became the student band director. He was also the president of the engineers club and the National Honor Society, in addition to playing junior varsity basketball and running track. West’s principal at Atkins High School was Albert H. Anderson, Sr., whose son, Albert H. Anderson, Jr., was promoted to Eagle Scout alongside West, and later became the owner of a marketing firm.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr., Section A2007_054_002_005, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. attended segregated schools in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, including the all-black Atkins High School. While there, he studied Latin under Clara Berry Gaines and French under Velma Friende, and enrolled in an advanced chemistry course at Winston-Salem’s all-white Wake Forest College. He also befriended Carl Eller, who went on to play football for the Minnesota Vikings; and Happy Hairston, who joined the Los Angeles Lakers. West became an Eagle Scout at fifteen years old, and was also the chairman of the Forsyth Youth Commission, and an associate editor of his high school newspaper. West talks about the Civil Rights Movement in Winston-Salem, which subsided as the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina became increasingly intense. The R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company employed many of Winston-Salem’s black residents, and African American soldiers faced discrimination at the nearby Fort Bragg. West also describes his father’s, Togo D. West, Sr.’s interest in the U.S. military.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr., Section A2007_054_002_006, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

The Togo D. West, Jr. was the valedictorian of his class at Atkins High School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He was accepted to Duke University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but decided to attend Howard University, where he majored in electrical engineering. West was active with the Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity, as well as the army swim team and drill team. He roomed with Taft H. Broome, Jr., who became a professor at Howard University; and met activist Stokely Carmichael, as well as H. Patrick Swygert, who later served as Howard University’s president. West decided not to participate in civil rights protests on campus or in the South; and, instead, joined the Undergraduate Student Assembly, where he was elected president. After

graduation, he worked briefly for the Duquesne Light and Power Company in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. West also recalls visiting his paternal grandmother, Mary Chinn West, and reading the detective novels of attorney Erle Stanley Gardner as a child.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr., Section A2007_054_002_007, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. was a member of the Undergraduate Student Assembly at Howard University in Washington, D.C. He was also acquainted with Michael R. Winston, who became the school's vice president for academic affairs and director of the Moorland-Spingarn Collection. Upon graduating in 1965, West matriculated at the Howard University School of Law, where he met Sharon Pratt, who was later elected as the mayor of Washington, D.C. West's instructors included Clarence Clyde Ferguson, Jr., Julian R. Dugas and Patricia Roberts Harris. Another professor, Jeanus B. Parks, Jr., became his mentor, and helped him obtain employment at the law firm of Covington and Burling LLP. West describes the notable alumni and faculty of the Howard University School of Law, including Thurgood Marshall, James M. Nabrit, Jr., Charles Hamilton Houston and John Mercer Langston. He also recalls working at a F.W. Woolworth store as a teenager in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and being fired for refusing to work extra hours.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr., Section A2007_054_002_008, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr. worked with student affairs administrator Carl Edwin Anderson during his first year at the Howard University School of Law in Washington, D.C. During his third year, he joined the Howard Law Journal, and worked at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission alongside Clifford L. Alexander, Jr., who later became the first U.S. secretary of the army. In 1967, West was selected as the Howard Law Journal's managing editor; and his friend, Kellis E. Parker, became its editor in chief. During this time, West also worked as a law clerk at Covington and Burling LLP, and then joined Harold R. Tyler, Jr.'s administration at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. West graduated cum laude from the Howard University School of Law alongside Fred L. Banks, Jr., who later presided over the Mississippi Supreme Court. He also recalls the uprisings after the assassinations of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Togo D. West, Jr., Section A2007_054_002_009, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

The Honorable Togo D. West, Sr. attended the Howard University School of Law, where he studied under Frank D. Reeves and Herbert O. Reid, Sr., and met international arbitrator Gabrielle Kirk McDonald and city councilman JeRoyd W. Greene, Jr. After graduating, West was deferred from active duty in the U.S. Army to clerk for Harold R. Tyler, Jr. at the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. In 1969, he trained at The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School in Charlottesville, Virginia, and became an officer in the Judge Advocate General's Corps. Once his duty was complete in 1973, West returned to the law firm of Covington and Burling LLP in Washington, D.C. When Judge Tyler was appointed as a deputy attorney general in 1975, West served as his associate deputy. In 1979, West became the special assistant to Stanley R. Resor, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. He specialized in civil rights matters, and became acquainted with NAACP counsel Nathaniel R. Jones.